

## Stumbling Blocks

- Unproductive Group or Committee

Look for the following conditions:

- Fear of the possible results
- Conflicting loyalties of some members
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Poor leadership
- Rigid decision-making methods, not allowing open discussion

When such problems occur, encourage open, respectful discussion. Let the members try to identify the obstacles in their way.

- Understanding and Managing Conflict

One of the primary benefits of forming an Organized Citizen Group is the improvement in communication between neighbors. However, there will be times, in spite of our best efforts, when communication will break down and a conflict will develop. A simple unresolved conflict can escalate and cause serious damage to relationships and to the group as a whole, so it is very important that neighbors do their best to handle these situations constructively.

One of the biggest obstacles to managing conflict well is that most of us find conflict to be very uncomfortable. As a result, we either try to avoid dealing with it, or we approach the conflict as if we were going to battle, determined to "win." There is, however, another approach to this common dilemma, one that accepts conflict as a normal aspect of any relationship or organization. Seen in this light, one can approach conflict resolution as an opportunity for growth, change and new understandings.

- Neighborly Communication

Consider using the following tips the next time you are faced with the challenge of effectively resolving a conflict:

1. Choose a good time. Try to talk in a quiet place where all parties can be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes. Don't approach the other person as he or she is leaving for work or after you've had a bad day.
2. Plan ahead. Plan out what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.
3. Set ground rules. Explain the process and have all parties agree to follow these ground rules ahead of time.
4. Don't blame or name call. Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for her or him to hear you.
5. Give information. Don't judge or interpret the other person's behavior. Instead, give information about your own situation and feelings and how the person's behavior affects you.

6. Listen. Give the other person a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Relax and listen; try to learn how the other person feels.
7. Show that you are listening. Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear her or him and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.
8. Talk it all through. Get all the issues and feelings out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems too difficult to discuss.
9. Work on a joint solution. Two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. Be specific. "I will turn my music off at midnight," is better than "I won't play loud music any more."
10. Follow through. Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working.