

# BUILDING BRIDGES

## Conflict Resolution Protocols for Sexual Assault Response Teams

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## CONFLICT AND SARTS

Conflict is inevitable. In fact, conflict is natural and necessary for effective collaboration! Due to the nature of multi-disciplinary teams, there will inevitably be moments of tension so it's important to have a plan in place for how your team will work through that tension and conflict.

One strategy that sexual assault response teams (SARTs) can implement is to develop a formal process for how to handle conflict and disagreements through the development of a conflict resolution protocol. A conflict resolution protocol is a plan for how your SART can address conflicts constructively while prioritizing the well-being of victims/survivors and the effectiveness of the team.



## CREATE EFFECTIVE PATHWAYS OF COMMUNICATION

- Define the process for open and respectful communication within the team.
  - For example, use language that is victim/survivor-centered, non-blaming, and respectful that aligns with your SART team values, mission, and vision.
- Outline the preferred channels of communication to be used within the team by designating a neutral mediator or facilitator.
  - For example, the designated neutral mediator or facilitator could be the SART coordinator but could also be a different team member. Assigning specific individuals as points of contact for the team when conflict occurs can be extremely helpful in moving forward so everyone knows who they need to address concerns with.



## CONFLICT RECOGNITION AND REPORTING

- Encourage team members to promptly report conflicts or concerns to designated team members.
  - This timeframe may depend on the nature of the conflict or concern, urgency, and the expectations set by the SART team. However, as a general guideline, reporting conflicts or concerns within 24-48 hours (about 2 days) is often considered reasonable and prompt.
- Develop a confidential reporting system to protect privacy and encourage transparency.
  - For example, this could be a confidential email address or online form specifically dedicated to reporting conflict. This reporting system may be managed by the designated team members assigned to handle conflict resolution within the team.

## CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

- Conduct neutral assessments to understand the underlying issue and facilitate a collaborative resolution process that addresses the needs and concerns of all parties involved.
  - The National Sexual Violence Resource Center has a helpful [chart](#) that can help evaluate the cause of conflict SART Toolkit Section 4.2 | [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\)](#).
- Gather input from all involved parties to ensure a comprehensive and objective understanding. It will be important to identify how input will be gathered.
  - For example, the designated team member may decide to schedule individual meetings with each party involved in the conflict to allow them to express their perspectives and feelings in a confidential environment.
  - Another strategy could be that the designated team member holds a group discussion where all parties involved come together to address the conflict openly and collaboratively.

## RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

- Encourage active listening, empathy, and compromise to reach mutually acceptable solutions.
- Document agreements and action plans to ensure accountability and follow-through.
  - For example, some teams may decide to utilize a conflict resolution item tracker form which lists the issue/conflict, action items, along with the responsible team member, due dates, and status updates. This can be shared with the individuals involved in the conflict to ensure transparency and accountability.
  - Other teams may decide to create an individualized work plan for team members outlining their specific responsibilities and tasks related to the agreed upon resolutions. Review and update the work plans regularly to track implementation.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

- Provide training on conflict resolution techniques, cultural humility, and trauma-informed practices to enhance team cohesion, collaboration, and effectiveness.
- Offer ongoing support and resources for team members to improve communication and interpersonal skills.
  - For example, SARTs can build team building activities into their meeting agendas to encourage and foster a culture of trust and openness within the team.



## REVIEW, EVALUATION, FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes and adjust as needed. One way is to assess the outcomes of the conflict resolutions over a course of time.
  - For example, SARTs can monitor whether conflicts are being resolved in a timely manner, whether recurring conflicts are being effectively addressed, and whether relationships are improving because of the resolution process.
- Encourage feedback from individuals who reported conflict to assess their satisfaction with the conflict resolution process and any suggestions they have for improvement.
  - For example, SARTs can follow up with reporting individuals after the resolution to ensure that their concerns have been addressed adequately.
  - Much like the confidential email address or online form specifically dedicated to reporting conflict, you can create an anonymous feedback mechanism to encourage feedback if individuals would prefer anonymity.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the team. Clearly communicate the importance of continuous learning and improvement to the team, and establish clear expectations for participation in training, skill development, and knowledge sharing activities.
  - For example, SARTs can create opportunities for team members to share their expertise, skills, and promising practices with each other through peer learning sessions, brown bag lunches, or knowledge-sharing platforms.
- Include the team conflict resolution protocol within the team's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a clear and structured approach to handling conflicts, ensuring that issues are resolved effectively while maintaining team cohesion and focus on their mission.

- To set new team members up for success, it's important to include this conflict resolution protocol in onboarding processes.
  - Refer to SVJI's [Developing an Effective Onboarding Process: Promising Practices for Onboarding New Sexual Assault Response Team Members](#) for more information on onboarding processes.
- Encourage reflection on past conflicts to identify lessons learned and prevent future conflicts. There is always room to grow. Together team members can empower each other to adapt to change, innovate, and achieve full potential collectively and individually.
- As part of a continuous improvement model, it is important to revisit and update the conflict resolution protocol as needed.

## RELATED RESOURCES

- Building Trust and Managing Conflict Within SARTs [Conflict-Resolution-for-SARTS-5.3.22.pdf](#) (taasa.org)
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center-Conflict Resolution [SART Toolkit Section 4.2](#) | National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)
- Moylan, Carrie, A. & Lindhorst, Taryn. ["Catching Flies with Honey": The Management of Conflict in Sexual Assault Response Teams - PMC](#) (nih.gov)

# SAMPLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROTOCOL FOR SARTS

## PURPOSE:

The Conflict Resolution Protocol aims to provide a structured approach for addressing conflict within the [Name of SART Team], to maintain team cohesion, uphold team mission, vision, values, and ensure effective support for victims/survivors of sexual violence.

### I. Communication Channels

- a. All team members are encouraged to communicate openly and respectfully during team meetings and discussions.
- b. Any conflicts or concerns should be promptly reported to the team leader or designated authorities.

### II. Conflict Recognition and Reporting

- a. Team members are responsible for identifying and reporting conflicts or concerns related to team dynamics, roles, responsibilities, or procedures.
- b. Reports of conflict should be submitted through the designated reporting system, ensuring confidentiality and privacy for all involved parties.
- c. Reports of conflict should be submitted within 48 hours (about 2 days).

### III. Conflict Assessment

- a. Upon receiving a report of conflict, the team leader or designated mediator will conduct an assessment to understand the nature and root causes of the conflict.
- b. Input from all parties involved will be required to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

### IV. Resolution Strategies

- a. A neutral mediator will be appointed to facilitate a constructive dialogue between conflicting parties.
- b. Mediation sessions will focus on active listening, empathy, and compromise to reach mutually acceptable solutions.
- c. Agreements and action plans will be documented, outlining specific steps and timelines for resolutions.

## V. Professional Development and Training

- a. Team members will receive training on conflict resolution techniques, cultural humility, and trauma-informed promising practices.
- b. Ongoing support and resources will be provided to enhance communication and interpersonal skills.

## VI. Review, Evaluation, Feedback Mechanisms

- a. The conflict resolution process will be periodically reviewed and evaluated to assess its effectiveness and identify areas of improvement.
- b. Feedback from team members and stakeholders will be requested through an anonymous survey to inform adjustments to the protocol.

## VII. Continuous Improvement

- a. The [Name of SART Team], commits to fostering a culture of continuous improvement, where lessons learned from past conflicts are applied to future situations to enhance team cohesion and effectiveness.
- b. The [Name of SART Team] commits to revisiting this protocol on an annual basis to update any necessary components and renew team member signatures.

## APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION:

This Conflict Resolution Protocol is approved by [Name of SART Team] and shall be implemented immediately. Any revisions or updates to the protocol shall be approved by [Name of SART Team] and communicated to all team members.

This document serves as a comprehensive guide for addressing conflicts within the [Name of SART Team], outlining clear expectations, responsibilities, and expectations for all team members.

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Team Member Signatures

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Date Effective

[Include SART Mission Statement]



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