



Resolve Conflict

Neighborhood and community conflict is part of life. We can choose to deal with that conflict constructively, ignore it, or even opt for making matters worse. Some problems are best left to proper authorities, such as instances where laws are broken or clear code violations exist. Others problems, like conflicts over a shared driveway or nuisances that are not breaking any laws, may be handled better by approaching that conflict yourself.

What can we do about issues of shared space, lack of cooperation, or lack of consideration? Well, one way to attempt this is to try putting oneself in the other person's shoes, to see through their eyes. Also, it is helpful to think about what you may want or need from this relationship, long term.

Let's look at the example of a shared driveway and think through a basic approach to addressing it without the addition of third parties.

Examples

You and your neighbor are constantly blocking each other in, sometimes even making it difficult to get places on time. Here is one way you might approach a conversation about it: "I would really like to be a responsible neighbor. And I know we have to share this driveway. I realize it's probably as difficult for you when I block you in as it is for me when you do it. So, I'm wondering if we can figure out some system so that we can both use our shared space without inconveniencing each other? Do you have any ideas?"

If the situation begins to get more difficult, you might try saying something like: "I would prefer to work this out between us. We both have to share this space. Can we talk about this?"

If you are not successful working the problem out together, you may want to consider mediation. Here are some further examples of basic non-confrontational approaches to problem solving:

"I'm having a hard time understanding why you did this (any behavior that is bothersome). Can you explain why this is important to you so that I have a better understanding?" This shows someone that you are really trying to see the world through their eyes.

"I need for you to listen to me right now. I feel strongly about this issue and I just need you to hear me out."



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Mediation

When negotiating with another party doesn't work out, you might try using a mediator, i.e. a NEUTRAL third party. The mediation process allows each party to tell their side and have a neutral TRAINED third person help reframe explosive issues and help the parties arrive at a mutually agreed upon solution to their problem. This usually results in the mediator writing up an agreement that can even become a legal document, if necessary. Most of the time, if neighborhood issues end up in court, it is a win/lose situation. If people have to continue to live together, problems can best be worked out through a process like mediation, where parties come up with their own solutions, with the assistance of a mediator.

Most communities in Michigan have community mediation centers, offering free or low cost mediation through trained volunteer mediators. Mediation Centers across the state can be reached by calling 1.800.873.7658. Many of these local mediation programs have people trained to handle policy issues that may crop up for certain municipalities, such as development controversies.

The local mediation center in Lansing is the:

Resolution Services Center of Central Michigan

516 S. Creyts Road, Suite A

Lansing, MI 48917

Phone: 517-485-2274

Fax: 517-485-1183

E-mail: gtrice@rsccm.org

Website: www.rsccm.org

Contact: Gretta McHaney-Trice

In addition, Lansing has a private mediation organization:

Mediation Management Services

423 W Grand River

Lansing, MI 48906

Phone number: (517) 316-7766

Fax number: (517) 316-7909

Email: smiley_aw@yahoo.com

You might also be able to obtain free mediation through the Lansing Department of Human Relations and Community Services, 483-4477.