

# CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

## *Students Helping Students Solve Conflicts*

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**Y**ou and your roommate have not spoken to each other in nearly a week. When you cross paths, you somehow find a way to avert your eyes. You grit your teeth when she's around, and you don't talk about your feelings because you fear that once you unleash your emotions, you'll turn into an angry monster. The tension you're experiencing is palpable—and completely normal. You are experiencing conflict.

Conflict often feels unbearable, miserable and impossible to approach. For some people, engaging in conflict is so undesirable that they would rather live with the uncomfortable situation than attempt to make a change. Dealing with conflict is then perceived as an extreme option only resorted to in dire situations, when the relationship breaks down. Rather than seeing conflict as the point of destruction for a relationship, we can seek out opportunities for growth. When conflict is addressed early, and in a way that affirms the relationship, conflict can be a positive experience and a way to develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspective. Conflict can be constructive.

### *A Transformative Approach*

Transforming conflict from a negative, uncomfortable situation, into a constructive opportunity for growth is the mission of the Conflict Resolution & Transformation Center (CRTC), a new student-led institution at U.C. Berkeley. Through mediation services, educational workshops, and group facilitations, CRTC works with students to alter the role conflict plays in our lives. Developed and run by students, CRTC seeks to work with students and student groups from all cultural backgrounds to create a space in which disputes can be resolved and relationships can be built, strengthened, or salvaged.

While it is certainly the case that CRTC seeks to help students find a resolution to conflicts, our approach goes deeper. We empower the parties to work together to reframe the conflict, understand the source, and engage in a collaborative dialogue to address

underlying relationship dynamics and cultural issues. This transformative approach can help people find new ways to empathize with each other as they overcome the emotional strains they experienced during the conflict.

### *Conflict: A Part of Daily Life*

Conflicts in our personal lives can take place in any relationship—with friends, former friends, housemates, or even mere acquaintances. Maybe a person living in the apartment next door frequently plays music too loud for your taste. Or, maybe your roommate's boyfriend is driving you

crazy, and he's over all the time. Perhaps there's a person living on your floor who makes comments that you experience as demeaning to your culture. These are just some examples of problems that can arise between people, escalate, and make life uncomfortable. In situations like these, sitting down with a mediator and the other person can help to ease tension, and provide a forum for expressing your needs. When students call the center, they will speak with one of our case managers, explain the situation, and get more information about mediation. The case manager will talk with the other party, and make arrangements for mediation if all people involved are willing to participate. From the beginning to the end, the mediation is completely confidential. Mediators guide the process of

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*CRTC facilitates workshops on general topics such as communication, or specific issues such as race and gender.*

the mediation, but the parties involved create the resolution.

Student groups such as clubs, co-ops, fraternities, and sororities encounter conflict all the time! It's only natural that when working or living together issues will arise, such as disputes about the group's goals, power dynamics, resentments, and feelings of under-appreciation. When a student group is in conflict, CRTC can assist in a number of ways, depending on the degree of the conflict's escalation. Even if your group is not experiencing conflict, we would love to work with you to explore your group's dynamics, and develop a greater understanding for how you interact. Workshops can be designed specifically to fit the needs of your group. Together, we can build a safe environment, in which group members can feel comfortable exploring some of the deeper issues that affect the relationships within the group, like gender, race, and communication styles. Also, CRTC can assist student groups by encouraging open dialogue and being attentive to the group's ways of interacting throughout the course of the discussion. Of course, personal conflicts also deeply affect the whole group. In such cases, mediation may be helpful in addition to the other, more group-oriented, services.

Academically, CRTC seeks to assist students in making group projects for classes a more positive experience. We offer workshops aimed at exploring the issues that arise during group projects, like time scarcity, differing levels of engagement, varying expectations, and working styles. Through participating in our workshops, groups talk about such issues and the ways they'd best like to approach them if they arise.

### *Building a Program*

Through participating in the PACS 154: Multicultural Conflict Resolution class taught by Edith Ng and Anita Madrid, several students developed a passion for conflict resolution and its community-building capacity. Starting in Fall 2004, Farhad Salehian encouraged other members of the class to work with him in developing a student conflict resolution center on campus. A year later, students trained in mediation, case management, and facilitation have begun offering their services to the campus community, and CRTC officially launched in Fall 2005.

We invite interested students to work with CRTC, learn more about conflict resolution, be trained as mediators and facilitators, build and lead workshops, and be a part of a practical peace movement on campus. Multi-culturalism is at the core of the CRTC philosophy, so we encourage students from all cultural backgrounds to join in our process of building relationships on campus.

Our goal to empower students to reframe the role conflict plays in our lives, to affirm relationships, and to improve dynamics. Ultimately, we want to be a resource for individuals to more deeply experience their own and others' humanity.

## *CRTC Services*

Our services are designed to be useful to students in all areas of life—personal, extracurricular, and academic.

- **Mediation:** During a mediation session, the parties in conflict sit down in a room with a panel of 2-3 trained, impartial mediators. Each party gets a chance to speak without interruption about their perspective on the situation, their concerns, and their needs. The mediators will ask additional questions that invite each party to help clarify. This creates an opportunity for the parties to hear and understand each other. Eventually, the mediators will facilitate a respectful dialogue between the parties and seek an outcome that both empowers the parties and, if desired, heals the relationship. The mediation session is confidential and is not legally binding in any way.

- **Facilitation & Collaborative Problem Solving:** Facilitations and collaborative problem solving can be like mediation, but with a larger group of people. We endeavor to understand divergent perspectives within the group and create a maximally safe and respectful environment. Our facilitation style can be fully customized to the needs of the group. In both mediations and facilitations, CRTC members are impartial and committed to promoting a healthy discussion between all the parties.

- **Workshops:** Through participation in workshops designed and led by the CRTC, students can learn new ways to approach relationships, group dynamics, communication, and much more. CRTC offers short (30 min) to long (full-day) workshops that can address very generalized issues, such as respectful communication methods, or very specific topics, such as race and gender dynamics in a student group.

- **CRTC Contact Info:**

<http://conflict.berkeley.edu>

For help with a conflict:

[mediation@crtc-berkeley.org](mailto:mediation@crtc-berkeley.org)

General email: [info@crtc-berkeley.org](mailto:info@crtc-berkeley.org)

To join our team: [volunteer@crtc-berkeley.org](mailto:volunteer@crtc-berkeley.org)

Or call: 510-643-1529