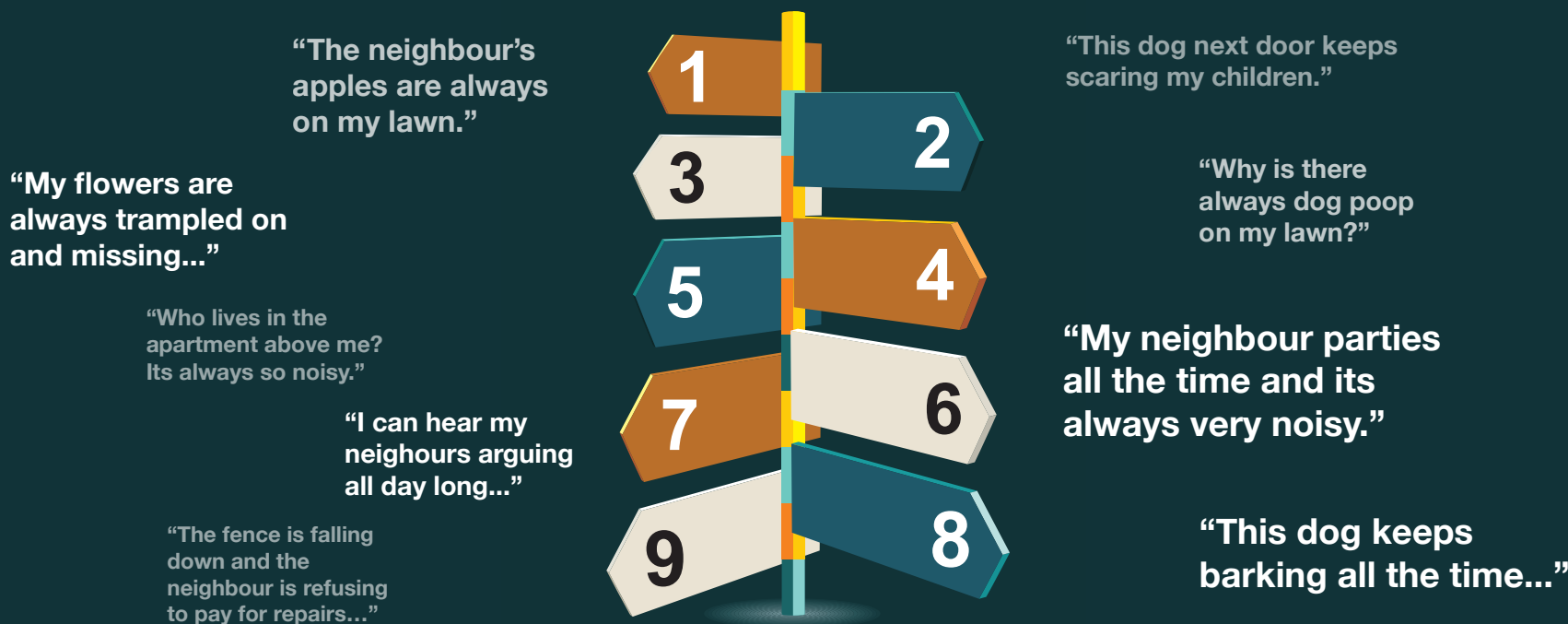


# MEDIATION & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CENTRE

## Neighbourhood Handbook

“A do it yourself guide to resolving conflicts with your neighbour”



# NEIGHBOURHOOD HANDBOOK

“A Do It Yourself Guide to Resolving Conflicts With Your Neighbour”

At the Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre (MRJC) we get calls from people who are having trouble sorting something out with their neighbour or from people whose neighbour has filed a formal by-law complaint against them.

## HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?

Here are a few of the situations that we hear about. Do any of them sound familiar?

- There is dog poop on your lawn and you don't have a dog.
- The tenant in the apartment above you must stomp around in lead boots.
- Your flowers are trampled and 'missing' and your children are grown up.
- You can hear every argument at your neighbours' condo at all hours.
- A barking dog keeps you up all night and on edge all day.
- Your neighbour has his stereo turned up so loud that your windows rattle.
- You have tree droppings destroying your garden or your deck or your lawn.
- The fence is falling down and your neighbour refuses to help pay for repairs.
- Your neighbour's dog is scaring your children.
- Your neighbour's fence is on your property.
- Your neighbour's parties are driving you crazy.
- Your neighbour's renovations are not up to code.
- Fill in this blank with your own situation\_\_\_\_\_

These scenarios show the reality of living in a community among neighbours with different priorities, attitudes, and values. These differences can lead to occasions when you will become upset, annoyed, afraid, or disturbed. “*No man is an island...*”

If any of these situations sound familiar, this handbook is for you!

It will provide you with constructive ideas for discussing these situations with your neighbour in a way that is easy for them to hear and will ensure a positive result.

**WHEN YOU THINK OF CONFLICT WHAT WORDS COME TO MIND?**

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**Conflict is normal. It happens when people have a real or perceived difference of opinion, which results in stress or tension for either or both people.**

## WHAT ARE YOU THINKING AND FEELING?

What you are thinking when these situations happen, your self-talk, will influence how you are affected by the events.

What are you thinking?

- They are doing this just to annoy me.
- They probably don't know how much this bugs me.
- The neighbours are just like animals.
- Why does this always happen to me?
- I can't handle this.
- They probably don't know how far you can hear that stereo.
- They have no right to do this to me.
- I have to do something or I'll never hear the end of it.
- I'll make it so miserable they'll want to move.
- I'll get even.
- \_\_\_\_\_

Feelings are not right or wrong, they just are. It's what you choose to do as a result of these feelings that matters.

How are you feeling about the situation?

- Sick and tired
- Mad
- Hopeful
- Furious
- Frightened
- Whatever
- Amused
- Helpless
- \_\_\_\_\_

Depending on your past experiences, dealing with neighbours, your comfort level with confronting people, your style of resolving conflict and how you are feeling about this incident, your options may seem very limited.

When your options are limited your first impulse may be to do any of the following:

What do you see as your choices to resolve this?

- Spray the dog with the water hose.
- Yell at them
- Invite the neighbour over for coffee to talk calmly
- Threaten them: "I'll call bylaw enforcement."
- Make their life miserable; let them see how it feels.
- Turn your stereo up.
- Ask them how much longer the party will continue and share your reasons for asking.
- Tell them they HAVE TO change
- Put your house up for sale
- Grin and bear it
- Sincerely offer your help with yard work
- Make friends with the children
- Win them over with baking
- Use humour
- \_\_\_\_\_

If you chose any of the above options, what might happen? Would you get the result you hope for? Would it resolve the problem?

In any situation you have two choices. One is to confront, the other to avoid. Based on your response, are you likely to confront or avoid?

### **WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF YOU AVOID THE SITUATION?**

- The situation will get worse
- The stress will continue
- It will clear up on its own.
- I will hate coming home
- I won't enjoy sitting outside in my own yard
- I will get sick
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **WHEN SHOULDN'T YOU TRY TO TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBOUR?**

- When you are too emotional to talk. Take as long as you need to calm yourself. Try Step 1.
- When one of you is "under the influence" (of anything)
- When you might not be safe.
- If your neighbour has a history of violence; if your do.
  
- If you decide it is worth your time and energy to confront, you have a further choice to do so destructively or constructively

### **WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF YOU DO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION CONSTRUCTIVELY?**

- We will have peace of mind

- I will feel safe
- We will all feel respected
- I will be able to sleep through the night
- We will have a friendly relationship
- Home will be my sanctuary
- I would be a good role model
- Our community will be more peaceful
- My family, myself, the neighbour, and the community will benefit
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **WHY DON'T NEIGHBOURS JUST TALK THINGS OVER?**

Many neighbours are willing to listen. Mediators at the Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre frequently hear:

*"Why didn't my neighbour just come and talk to me?"*

So why wouldn't you just go over and talk to your neighbour?

- I hate that kind of stuff
- I might get slugged
- Things might get worse if my neighbour gets mad.
- I won't be able to control my temper
- I might get embarrassed
- I don't know how

## CONSIDER THIS...

### THERE IS A WAY TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION!

Not only can most neighbourhood conflicts be resolved without the help of a third party (such as the police or a mediator), most can be resolved in a way that will strengthen relationships and contribute towards building a strong, safe, supportive and friendly community!

- I am willing to take the risk to work this out positively.
- I can do this!
- I can talk to my neighbour calmly!
- It's worth the risk so I can enjoy coming home again.
- 
- The best that could happen is that the problem will be solved and we can get back to enjoying a stress free life.

## PLANNING FOR THE CONVERSATION:

**Follow the ABC's:**      **Always**  
   **Be**  
   **Curious**

**Step 1:** Preparing yourself to talk with an open mind.

Our assumptions about our neighbours and their motivations colour the way we see things. We need to challenge our assumptions.

Prepare yourself by thinking about the situation in a **new** way by asking yourself these questions:

- What are their reasons for doing this?
- Do they know the impact this is having on me?
- Do they realize how it is affecting the neighbourhood?
- Will they be open to listening to me?
- How can I talk to them so that they will listen and understand my experience?
- What questions do I want to ask them so I will understand their point of view?

## Step 2: Setting up a time to talk.

Invite your neighbour to talk with you about your concerns. Set up a time and place to meet that works for both of you.

Let them know that you want to work this out in a way that will benefit **both** of you. They need to know that you are willing to listen to them and that you are not just going to tell them what to do.

- ❑ Would you like to come over for some iced tea? I've wanted to talk to you about the mountain ash tree along the side of the driveway.
- ❑ Hi! I not real comfortable telling you this. My garden has been dug up three times in the last two weeks and I think it was your dog. I am sure this is something we could work out together. Do you have time now to talk about it? If not now, when would work for you?
- ❑ Meet them in the driveway and say "I've had a problem with dog poop on the front lawn and was wondering if you are having a similar problem?"
- ❑ I like having you as a neighbour. Can we talk about the heavy metal music coming out of the house for the last couple of weeks? It is a new development and I'm sure we can work something out that meets the needs of both our families.
- ❑ Hey George! The fence isn't going to last the summer. Pretty soon our yards will be one. Last year you had said you couldn't afford to fix it. When can we talk to come up with a plan to take care of this situation?
- ❑ I see you're working hard on that vintage van. A couple of times this week I've had to move van parts out of the way to make room to park my car. What can we do so that we both can have use of our driveways?

## Step 3: Reaching understanding about the situation

Show up for the meeting. Thank them for showing up.

Let them know that you want to resolve the problem.

Express your concerns in a way that is easy to hear, by not blaming

Listen carefully to what they have to say.

Remember that understanding them does not mean you have to agree.

Ask Questions that help you to understand it from their point of view.

- ❑ I am curious about.....
- ❑ When \_\_\_\_\_ happened. I was thinking\_\_\_\_\_. What did you mean by it?
- ❑ When I did \_\_\_\_\_, my intention was\_\_\_\_\_. What did you think I meant by it?
- ❑ I am curious about how you handle your sons loud music because I've been noticing that it is really bothering me a lot more lately.

To be sure that you understand what the situation is like from their point of view, help them feel heard.

- ❑ So for you, it seems\_\_\_\_\_
- ❑ If I understand you correctly, you think that the reason the dog is getting into my yard is because my kids have been letting him in and you, too, wish they wouldn't do that. You don't think he'd leave your yard on his own. Did I hear you right?
- ❑ So you realise that your kids are a little rambunctious but you believe that boys will be boys and that kicking at the fence is just what boys do?

#### Step 4: Plan of Action

Work together to come up with a plan to solve the problem.

- ❑ Let's put our heads together and come up with a way to fix this fence so it doesn't cost 'an arm & a leg' but is still well built so we don't have to do this again for several years.
- ❑ Do we want a band-aid solution or something long term?
- ❑ So what ideas do you have to deal with this situation? I like you as a neighbour and I am hoping we can come up with something that keeps both of us happy.

#### WHAT CAN I DO IF TALKING TO MY NEIGHBOUR DOESN'T WORK?

- ❑ A Mediation Centre may be just a phone call away.

Mediation Centres are established in many cities and towns to serve you and your neighbour when you are unable to work out a situation yourself.

Their belief is "*when we assist individuals of a community to resolve their conflicts, the entire community is strengthened.*"

- ❑ What is mediation?

Mediation is a voluntary face-to-face meeting of the parties involved in a dispute, assisted by impartial volunteer mediators trained and experienced in conflict resolution.

At the Mediation & Restorative Justice Centre (MRJC) in Edmonton Alberta, this service is also **free!**

- ❑ How can mediation help me?

Mediators will help create a safe, supportive environment and assist the parties in clarifying the issues and understanding what's important to each other. The mediators will not take sides, give advice, or impose solutions.

With the mediator's guidance, the parties explore possible solutions and come to an agreement that is acceptable to them.

- ❑ Who do I call?

Check your local telephone directory for a Mediation Centre near you!



## Eight Conflict Resolution Tips

1. Cool down. Don't try to resolve a conflict or dispute when you or the other person is angry. Take some time out and agree to meet again to discuss the issue.
2. Describe the conflict. Give each other the opportunity to speak about what the conflict or dispute is about in your own words. Each of you will likely view the conflict differently and will use different words to describe it. Neither account is right or wrong.
3. Describe what has caused the conflict. Is there a specific incidence that has led up to the conflict or dispute? What happened first? Then what happened? Did things start from a minor disagreement or a difference in opinion? What turned things into conflict?
4. Describe each other's feelings regarding the conflict or dispute. Use your own words. Be honest. You may not have the same feelings, and will likely express them differently.
5. Listen carefully and respectfully while the person you are in conflict with is talking. Don't interrupt. It might help to reflect their perceptions and feelings, if you repeat them back to them. Even if you don't agree, try to at least understand the other point-of-view.
6. Brainstorm possible solutions to the conflict or dispute. Each of you should try to come up with ideas. Be creative and write down all of the ideas so you can both refer back to them. Then, choose a solution, and give it a try. Always be willing to negotiate and to compromise.
7. Give the solution that you both try your best effort. Be patient! If it doesn't work the first time, try it again...
8. If one of your solutions doesn't get results, then try another, and keep trying.

*Adapted from original work by Paula M. Drouin, C.Med. & Cecile M. Schultz, C.Med.*

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