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NEGOTIATION STYLES

General Principles

Two key principles of negotiating are:

- Entering into negotiation or mediation in good faith. That is, genuinely being prepared to listen and enter into the spirit of the “give and take” of the situation.
- Win-Win, which aims to find solutions that satisfy or are acceptable to both parties. In win-win negotiations both parties feel a balance of their needs has been achieved. In win-win, both parties are left with the feeling they can live with the outcome now and in the future.

The ways in which people manage situations of conflict can reflect how they negotiate. In general terms there are five different styles of managing conflict:

- avoidance
- competition
- accommodation
- compromise
- collaboration.

Most people use two different styles, but tend to favour one. Are you able to identify the style of negotiation you tend to use?

Avoidance

- Can be useful when there is an imbalance of power.
- Used by some people to provide time to consider their position.
- Others use it to defuse further conflict.
- In most situations little or nothing is achieved.

Competition

- Sometimes called ‘hard positional bargaining’ because one person takes a stand on the outcome.
- Can often result in one or both people focusing on what they want, rather than preserving a relationship or considering the needs of the other.
- If one person begins with an extreme position, it can result in only giving small concessions within the negotiation.

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Accommodation

- The opposite of the competitive style, sometimes called 'soft positional bargaining'.
- Main interest for this person is that they can see the other party finds a solution that is satisfactory.
- The negotiator using this style tends to hope their position will lead to a better relationship.
- Can reinforce the power imbalance in the relationship and means it is more difficult in the long term to change the status quo.

Compromise

- Often used to resolve a stalemate, so both people can move ahead.
- People using this style may say "Let's just split the difference".
- This style may still result in mistrust and doubt.
- Relies on both parties keeping their side of the bargain.
- In this style, somebody has to give up something of value in order to get something of value. Usually this means each side tries to get as much as possible while giving up as little as possible.

Collaboration

- Often thought of as 'the sum is greater than its parts' by people using a collaborative approach.
- Also called interest-based negotiation, resulting from human needs, and often based on values and beliefs.
- This approach allows each person to look for a solution which is the best for all concerned.
- Can only work if both parties are willing to examine each possible option and choose one that gives what they need rather than what they want.

Acknowledgement: Mediating with Families, L Fisher & M Brandon (2009)