

TIPS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

Group norms, stated or unstated, can be powerful, and when an individual acts outside of those norms, the group may experience conflict. Neurodivergent folks, people with mental health challenges, or individuals who have experienced trauma, can be at odds with the norms of structured choral organizations where we expect people to arrive on time, sit for long periods of time, stay on task, and navigate new anxiety-producing situations in crowded settings.

It is possible to problem-solve ways for both the chorus and individuals to adjust to make a more belonging space for all. Here are some suggestions for dealing with conflict.

- Take a deep breath, and invite the chorus to breathe.
- Ease tension and de-escalate anxieties by providing a stable and caring atmosphere. When leaders help the chorus stay calm, it allows for the community to adjust with much less conflict.
- Notice what is happening and try to see the situation from every possible angle.
- Speak directly with individuals involved and learn what has been the most helpful for them in the past. See “Sample Agreements” (p. 38).
- Take the perspective of a listener and learner. Listen to the various needs in your community and the ways that your group could anticipate these needs. Gather written resources and consult with

professionals as necessary.

- Address current issues/needs and also look ahead toward needs that may come up in the future. Be proactive in creating a welcoming atmosphere.
- Listen to the various needs of the group, learn about mental health and neurodiversity, and work together towards solutions.
- Do not make assumptions about the reasons people act the way they do.
- Recognize that whatever is happening may not be because of the person labeled as “the problem.” Instead, there may be an issue in the chorus structure or culture that needs to be addressed.
- Ensure that such a decision is based directly on policies and procedures, such as the organization’s Chorus Agreements as well as the organization’s mission and values.

With all the best planning and intentions, there may be situations where an individual’s mental health is so unstable that it is not possible for them to continue in the chorus, in spite of offered support, direct listening, and communication. In those cases it may be necessary to “bless and release” a chorus member. Ensure that such a decision is based directly on policies and procedures, such as the chorus’s Community Agreements, as well as the organization’s mission and values. 🌸

