

# Quick Overview of the Six Core Principles of Working Through Conflict

Learning how to work through conflict starts with understanding six core principles. The full description of these principles is on pages 78-80.

## **Conflict Is Natural, Normal, and Deeply Human**

This principle, in a calm moment of reading, may appear completely obvious: conflict is a natural part of life, a normal component of social interaction that activates our deepest humanity. Of course, we don't feel that way when we are in conflict. Instead, we feel misunderstood. Everything is off kilter; our usual selves and skills have vanished, replaced by a clunky, demanding set of thoughts and feelings that do not reflect who we really are. But those feelings are precisely what connect us to the rest of humanity.

## **Conflict Is the Work, Not a Distraction from the Work**

Nearly everyone who has attended our workshops over the years describes conflict as the thing that prevents them from doing their real work. We believe conflict is the work. But, as far as we are aware, few if any higher education programs, early childhood agencies, and professional development systems teach adult conflict as a core component of that work. So, instead of seeing conflict as an impediment or distraction, we place it front and center as the work itself—and, we're convinced, usually the most important work.

## **Conflict Is Almost Always Reciprocal**

Conflicts typically drive us into a defensive posture. That's how the blame game begins: as we experience the problems created in the conflict, we extend our index finger to point out that their source exists elsewhere. Unfortunately for our egos, it's rarely that simple! In our experience, the majority of conflicts are reciprocal, which means that we've everyone contributed their fair share—even though they're usually well-meaning individuals trying to do what's right in tricky situations. To help you see your part of conflict, there are sections of the book where we prompt you to fess up to your role in the mess. And it turns out this is a very effective conflict resolution strategy all by itself!

## **Conflict Exists If Someone Says It Does**

Routinely, the conflicts that have been brought to our attention seem one-sided, at least to one of the parties. In those situations, while the aggrieved person is feeling troubled, offended, disrespected, or worse, the other person doesn't even see the problem. We assert that, if one person declares a given situation is a conflict, then there's a conflict! The collaborative relationships between adults that drive most early childhood workplaces simply cannot function properly if one person is ignoring another person's concerns. So, if someone calls foul, it's time for both parties to make a good-faith effort to work it out.

## **Conflict Is Sustained by Win/Lose, Right/Wrong Thinking**

Skillfully negotiating conflict is never just yes or no, easy or hard. In fact, conflict feeds off of that sort of either/or thinking; it's the gasoline that makes the engine run—and often splashes out of the tank, where a spark can set the car on fire! So to learn how best to negotiate conflict, you'll need to learn how to live in the middle—in the ambiguous zone—and that is a real challenge for most of us. Our families, our cultures, our educations, even our neurology: they all drive us into this sort of either/or thinking, so we teach you in the book how to resist it by developing a thorough understanding of how to avoid either/or perspectives as often as possible.

## **Conflict Never Stops Teaching Us**

We learn from our experiences and will continue to learn about conflict since it's part of life.