



# WWEC Guideline - Conflict Management

Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church (WWEC) wants to be a church where every member enjoys close fellowship with one another. However, we recognise that when broken sinners gather, closeness breeds conflict which is a sad reality of life together. We shouldn't be surprised when conflict happens.

As a church, we want to foster a culture that commits to repentance, pursues reconciliation and longs for restoration wherever possible.

In Matthew 18:15-20, our Lord Jesus provides a means by which repentance, reconciliation and restoration should be pursued.

This Conflict Management Guideline (CMG) seeks to express that process in our church life.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 1. Purpose

This CMG sets out the process by which conflicts between church members can be resolved with godliness and grace. It is designed to equip every member of our church to find the most appropriate pathway to address our interpersonal grievances. As a general rule, conflicts should be resolved at the level they occur.

Once you initiate this process, you should follow it with great care and a concern to resolve the conflict quickly so that the situation does not escalate or affect others in our church family.

This guideline does not cover leaders' misconduct or safe ministry concerns which are addressed in our Safe Ministry Policy and relevant guidelines/guidelines. If you are alleging any criminal conduct, we strongly encourage you to report the matter to the relevant law enforcement agency. WWEC will at all times comply with our mandatory reporting requirements under law.

## 2. Scope

This CMG applies to all members of WWEC.

We ask that everyone in our church use this guideline in your own conflict situations and also encourage others to use it in their conflicts as well. At WWEC we wish to foster a culture of repentance and reconciliation, and the hope is that the CMG will assist church members in this pursuit.

## 3. Principles

The following principles should guide the manner in which all members address conflicts with one another:

- a. **Accept conflict:** conflict itself is nothing bad or unusual; it's a normal part of church life that arises from different expectations, values and perspectives. Our goal isn't to eliminate conflict but to resolve it in a healthy way.
- b. **Pursue reconciliation:** we commit ourselves to a life of daily repentance, we pursue reconciliation as the goal, and we seek restoration wherever possible while acknowledging that our actions have this-worldly consequences.

- c. **Apply grace:** in every conflict, we seek to apply gospel grace in a way that does not compromise what is true, right and good, but that also extends forgiveness, mercy and love.
- d. **Pray humbly:** as we seek to resolve any conflict, we need the Holy Spirit's power to heal deep wounds and mend broken relationships. We need to pray for humility for ourselves and pray for the other person in love.

#### 4. Commitments

In seeking to resolve any conflict, every member of WWEC should:

- a. **Going directly to the other person**, not airing grievances anonymously or working through third-parties.
- b. **Demonstrating humility, grace and patience**, and being prepared to own our part in a conflict instead of pointing out the other person's faults.
- c. **Seeking and offering forgiveness**, being prepared to apologise for any hurt that we have caused, and being ready to forgive as it is asked of us.
- d. **Being quick to listen and slow to speak**, making real efforts to understand the other person's perspective, suspending judgment, and not imputing motives.
- e. **Guarding our tongues**, avoiding sharp or hurtful comments, and refraining from gossip, slander or breaching confidence.

#### 5. Conflict Management Guideline

You should engage all your conflicts according to the following process:

##### a. Step 1: Prayerfully reflect on the conflict

Take time to prayerfully bring this conflict before the Lord, and ask yourself the following questions:

- How serious is the offence?
- What is the harm that you have suffered?
- Was the offence intentionally or unintentionally caused?
- Is it a repeated series of offences or a single instance occurrence?
- What biblical principles are relevant to this situation?
- What is the nature of my relationship with this person?

Importantly, you should ask yourself: Is this a situation where it's more appropriate to overlook the offence? (Prov 19:11)

If it is, the most loving course of action may be to forgive the other person and not hold the offence against them. However, if a biblical principle is at stake or if you have suffered real harm, you may want to take the next step towards reconciliation.

Whichever step you take, you should not fail to resolve the matter either in your heart or with the other person, and you should never engage in gossip or slander.

##### b. Optional Step: Seek wisdom and accountability

If you are unsure about the right step to take, it may be appropriate to seek wise counsel but only at a private one-to-one level. You can speak with your Bible Study leader or a godly mentor, friend or pastor. Be careful if consulting a friend to

approach someone who is mature and won't simply fan your feelings. Someone external to church can be helpful as they are removed from the conflict and there are fewer fellowship consequences of sharing with them.

The focus of this step is to gain clarity on the right path to take and to hold yourself accountable to a godly person to act with integrity, wisdom and grace.

*NB: Seeking wisdom must be distinguished from gossip or sharing the situation in order to gain sympathy – these are both inappropriate. If you are called upon to offer wisdom, ensure that the person is actually willing to speak with the other person, and offer to support them in this. Do not be party to spreading gossip.*

**c. Step 2: Initiate an informal one-to-one discussion**

At this step, you should go to the other person informally and in private, and share your concern. Before the meeting, read the principles and commitments in these steps. Don't speak out of anger or emotion but calmly share how the other person's actions made you feel. Seek to understand their perspective, and be willing to receive an apology or respond to a process of reconciliation if it is offered. If the conflict is resolved, no further action is needed.

If you are on the receiving end of this discussion, be quick to listen, slow to speak and make sure that you understand what the person is sharing. Guard against defending yourself. If you need time to reflect, ask for it. If you can see what you have done wrong and can accept responsibility, apologise and seek forgiveness.

**d. Step 3: Invite a witness to attend a further informal one-to-one discussion**

If Step 2 fails to reach a resolution, you may ask the other person if they will agree to have a third-party present in the next conversation – someone acceptable to both of you. The third-party is invited to attend as an impartial listener not an active participant.

At this level, the third-party should keep a confidential written record of what occurs and notify a WWEC Safe Ministry Contact that this discussion took place. If the conflict is resolved, no further action is required and the written record should be discarded after 12 months.

**e. Step 4: Request formal mediation**

If Step 3 fails to reach a resolution, a WWEC Safe Ministry Contact should be notified and with everyone's agreement, he/she will meet with both of you, facilitate a discussion, and seek to mediate a mutually-acceptable outcome.

Opportunities for reconciliation will be given, and points of agreement and disagreement will be documented along with the agreed outcome. A confidential report will be prepared by the Safe Ministry Contact and provided to both people. If an agreement is reached, no further action is required.

**f. Step 5: Submit for a final determination by the WWEC Safe Ministry Contacts**

If Step 4 fails to reach a resolution, the conflict should be referred for review by all Safe Ministry Contacts (SMCs will abstain from this review where there is a conflict of interest). Two SMCs will interview both people and may investigate the issue and

ask for further witnesses. The SMCs will prepare and provide a confidential report and make a final decision.

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If Step 5 fails to reach a resolution, the process under this guideline is exhausted and the conflict has moved beyond the church's ability to resolve it. If you are unable to accept the SMC's determination, you may seek recourse under civil law. However, please be conscious of the Apostle Paul's warning against taking other believers to court over civil matters (1 Cor 6:1-11).

At this point, one or both parties, who are unwilling to submit to the decision of the SMC may be required to stand down from any leadership position.

## **6. Non-Compliance**

If a member involved in a conflict with another person persistently refuses to follow the process set out in this guideline, you should not engage with or entertain his or her grievance.

Members involved in a conflict who persistently engage in gossip, slander, breach of confidence or other forms of divisive conduct may be subject to church discipline.

## **7. Review**

The WWEC Administration Committee, with input from WWEC SMCs and other relevant WWEC leaders, will monitor the effectiveness of this guideline and implement any appropriate amendments from time to time.

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[1] This guideline adapts the process set out by Tim Dyer in "Interpersonal Grievance guideline for the Local Church".

## Appendix: Conflict Management guideline

