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# VDC Protocols for Client Complaints & Team or Practice Group Conflict Management

Collaboratively-trained Professionals are, by definition, passionate about our work. Just as this passion enhances our work with clients, it can also influence how we struggle together over how we do our work, or how we engage one another on teams or in our practice group. We expect that we will, at times, need skilled support from within our membership to guide us through such times. While we all do the best we can, we can also *all* do better. Top relationship researchers, John and Julie Gottman, assert that 69% of partners' conflicts cannot be "resolved." Instead, couples that sustain their relationships "manage" these inevitable conflicts effectively.

Because our work is interdisciplinary, we bring the richness of varied perspectives to our teamwork with families – this is one of the special benefits of Collaboratively-trained Teams. The interdisciplinary nature of our work also means that we embrace the additional challenge to understand and respect the differences between each other, our professions, including differences in our legal and ethical obligations.

At times, our differing professional requirements, as well as our natural differences in perspectives, can make it challenging to understand one another's needs, requests and reactions. Conflicts may arise out of our passion for our work, our different professional perspectives or license requirements, and/or from ineffective behavior among us, e.g. inflexible, judgmental, emotionally reactive, unresponsive, non-collaborative, and/or failures to communicate effectively or to manage expectations. These protocols are designed to help us through such situations.

We maintain as a very high priority the respectful management of any concern or conflict between clients and teams, or amongst team and/or practice group members. As collaboratively-trained professionals, we agree to value the time invested and efforts needed to resolve any discord between us. We consider that such investment is part of our professional commitment to foster respect and good will, to live into the collaborative "paradigm shift" expected of us, and to engage whatever learning is needed, individually, as a team or as a practice group. The spirit and tone of our dynamics, who and how we are with each other, filters down to who and how we are as a team with our clients - And vice versa. Who and how our clients are, can impact team and practice group dynamics.

We recognize that a failure to invest this time and effort risks jeopardizing the wellbeing of a mediation team, collaborative team or practice group, as well as the effectiveness of any divorce process. We work diligently to prevent any interpersonal conflicts from restricting the effectiveness of our professional relationships and casework together, currently or in the future. We acknowledge that conflicts left unattended and/or unaddressed risk coloring the context for any future work together as team and as practice group members. We also agree that ***clients will not be billed for time spent re-establishing or building trust and goodwill among professionals as we work through any discord***. At the same time, when client dynamics adversely impact the team, the team's cohesiveness and communication are prioritized and clients *are* billed, depending on the circumstances.

Consequently, each VDC professional keeps a copy of these protocols handy for times when we may benefit from guidance in handling challenges effectively. Issues will *inevitably* arise for us with one another and with

clients. We affirm the shared value of committing time to other team and group members, whether in individual meetings, social events, trainings, retreats and monthly meetings, in order to further and ensure understanding, respect and trust among us.

Note: Many sections may repeat aspects in other sections as it is our intention to prevent readers from having to flip forward or backwards to find the information relevant to whatever challenge they wish to address.

## PURPOSE: MANAGEMENT OR RESOLUTION OF CONCERN or CONFLICT

**I.** When a Client Complains or has a Conflict with a Team Member
   A. When Client(s) Complain About a Team Member
   B. When Professionals are Tempted to Align with a Client Against Another Client or Professional Team Member

**II.** When there is Conflict Between Two Individual Team or Practice Group Members, and/or When One Individual is Perceived by one or more Team Member(s) as Out Of Alignment with the Team's or Practice Group's Goals.

Relevant Client-Sections (e.g. This entire introduction and the section entitled "When a Client Complains or has a Conflict with a Team Member") are reviewed and agreed-to by clients, especially regarding the hiring/firing of professionals, as well as the requirement that *clients dismissing professional(s) will pay the other client's professionals to update hired replacement professionals*. Professionals clarify that all team professionals must be fully trained, members of a collaborative practice group per IACP Standards & Ethics, agree to the Streamlined Protocols Roadmap (as clients have), VDC Guidelines, as well as these Conflict Management Protocols. The professional team - not clients - will ultimately decide which professionals are needed (e.g. child specialist or adult-child specialist), and whether a replacement professional will be required when another is terminated.

The conflict or perceived challenge and discussion regarding issues of concern shall be kept strictly private and confidential among team/practice group professionals attempting to address the challenge. One exception is when clients have a complaint about a professional team member, as professionals still have a duty to keep communication transparent, respectful and direct. Another exception occurs when professionals have legal or ethical duties to report potentially dangerous behavior (e.g. child abuse, suicidal threats).

It is critical that the professional team, not the clients, remains in control of any dispute resolution *process* at all times, and that power be shared among team professionals when making any decisions regarding the handling of client complaints about a team member. As mediating and/or collaborative professionals, we have a duty to model what we expect from our clients. *The professional team in a mediation or collaborative case will cease work on a client case until all team members are hired and/or paid, including dismissed professionals.*

### Negative Judgments

There is ample cognitive behavioral research supporting that resorting to negative judgments (even in our private thoughts) strongly influences how we feel and behave. When we judge, we dispense with the other person and dispense with engaging thoughtfully. Judging alienates us from others. It is less obvious and equally true that we (and our clients) also alienate ourselves *from ourselves* when we judge negatively. Once we cognitively slam the door on the other (e.g. "He's an idiot," "She's unprofessional"), we also stop self-

reflecting or considering how we may be contributing to the ineffective dynamic at hand. The remedy for negative judgments is to *observe and describe as a video-camera would* – without judgment.

VDC has outlined the following protocols for collaboratively-trained team professionals to use when there are client complaints about a given team member, or when there is a conflict between team or practice group members. There are several steps to take, starting with the first and proceeding as necessary.

## I. When a Client Complains About or has a Conflict with a Team Member:

Polarizing dynamics serve no one, *especially* our clients, because the win-win perspective is lost. For well-documented clinical reasons, at no time is it advisable to allow the team to be divided or "split" based on client complaints. For an effective collaborative divorce, co-mediation or team mediation, the professional team must do whatever is required to remain cohesive and in control of the process, while clients make all the decisions about their lives.

Our passion for our clients' wellbeing can risk diverting us into adversarial positioning within our teams, and leave us identified with clients' perspectives in ways that discard the "Paradigm Shift" required of collaborative professionals. At the same time, the team is also at risk for acting out a couples' polarizing dynamics. Team members are especially at risk for being polarized or "split" into adversarial stances when clients hold polarized views and exhibit primitive defenses, as many divorcing couples do. These client tendencies pull on team members to advocate or become adversarial, and to align with the client's view, "against" the other client or another team member. It's incumbent on professionals to recognize that a split in the team may be diagnostic of client dynamics, and implement remedies when team members become polarized. Rely on experienced MHPs for help with this as needed.

Professional teams work together to avoid/block any client behaviors that: silo professionals, disrupt team cohesion, and hijack or undermine the process to control or serve their own ends, without due consideration for their impact on the process, or the wellbeing of *all* family members, including, for example, adult children.

When a team member starts to feel attacked, disrespected, dismissed, misunderstood and/or isolated by a fellow colleague(s), this often indicates that the team has already been caught in a polarizing dynamic that needs *immediate* attention to reestablish effective professional partnerships, while containing any client behaviors that may be driving this.

## I. A. When Client(s) Complains About a Team Member:

1. Remember, clients going through a separation, divorce and/or custody dispute are almost never functioning at their best. They are often scared, threatened, angry and/or overwhelmed. Be careful not to align yourself, even indirectly, in an adversarial way with clients' negative judgments and assumptions about their spouse, and especially about a colleague or fellow team member. Alignment with negative assumptions and judgments risks dismantling team coherence and effectiveness and may completely undermine the mediation/collaborative process. Be aware too that client complaints about a team member may also arise or increase after billings are received. When there's an increase in professional activity, help prepare and manage client and team member expectations about upcoming bills. Consider planning to stagger team bills among professionals.

2. Direct clients back to the team member with whom the client has a problem. Do not channel or absorb a client's complaints/judgments about a team member as if these were "facts," or make

decisions based on these. When client complaints raise concerns for you about a colleague and/or his/her/their behavior, respectfully ask and check out your concerns directly with that team member (e.g. "Client X seems to think it looks/sounds like you may be thinking/doing X – Can you shed some light on this and help me understand? How can I support you?").

3. In addition, ask clients to *check out their own negative assumptions* with the person in question, by asking respectful, clarifying questions e.g. Client to professional with whom s/he has an issue: "It looks/sounds like you may be thinking/doing X – can you help me understand and shed some light on this?" Coach the client to ask and check things out with your colleague directly, *before* acting on any negative assumptions.

4. "Invite" clients to ***reframe all complaints/criticisms*** as respectful requests for the specific, effective behaviors they DO want, e.g. Client complains and you say: "Ok. That's what you don't want – let's think through which specific behavior(s) you *do* want that you're not getting." The skills required here are identical to what clients need to be effective in *any* Consensual Dispute Resolution (CDR) process.
   i. Maintain clear boundaries and avoid enabling or endorsing a client's entrenched adversarial positions, and aligning with negative narratives.
   ii. Help the client learn to state the perceived problem with your colleague *in a neutral, nonjudgmental way* as part of their learning to work effectively with their soon-to-be former spouse (e.g. "I noticed the Judgment is missing some things I thought we agreed to. Can you help shed some light on this?" vs "I'm paying you to be careful and you're not.")
   iii. Help the client learn to *check out any possible negative assumptions* and make sure s/he/they have understood correctly (e.g. "When you said X, it sounded like you meant Y – would you help shed some light on this?")
   iv. Encourage the client to *ask respectfully for the specific behavior s/he want*s from your colleague (e.g. "I feel very anxious when I find errors and have to triple check our agreements. Are you willing to take the care needed to attend to details reliably?"). In case your colleague cannot provide a given requested behavior for some reason, prepare your client to accept a respectful "no" from your colleague, and to respectfully ask for an alternative that may be more doable for your colleague.
   v. If the client refuses or has difficulty speaking up, let your colleague know what is happening in advance, and *help your client speak up and rehearse making a respectful request for specific behavior* (e.g. ask for more information or reassurance, timely communications) or help your client to check out his/her negative assumptions with your colleague (e.g. "I'm worried about X – can you shed some light on this? Can you help me understand Y?"). Do not "rescue" your client by speaking for them – support the client's speaking.
   vi. Invite the client to role-play and rehearse with you. Why? Because your client will need these same skills to deal with their soon-to-be ex in meetings and for all future co-parenting. These are the skills the Communication Coaches are teaching them.

5. Warn your professional colleague about the complaints the client(s) are going to direct his/her way, so your colleague is more equipped to respond effectively when the client "complains" (i.e. hopefully makes a respectful request for specific behavior). *Always give your colleague the benefit of the doubt*. Ask explicitly how you can support your colleague *and* the client.

6. Despite the team being charged with controlling the process, clients and not professionals select, hire and fire their own professionals, for better or worse.

i. When a client attempts the above steps and still wishes to terminate a professional team member, do not allow yourself to be pulled into firing your colleague *on the client's behalf*.
ii. Support clients' thinking through the pros and cons of potential emotional, relational and financial costs of altering the team - costs for them (e.g. team's distrust, financial) and the team's functioning.
iii. If the client still wishes to terminate a colleague, support the client's writing a respectful letter and warn/prepare your colleague.
iv. Consider a no-cost professional team meeting to support and offer your colleague some closure.
v. Remember that all work on a case stops *for all professionals* until all team members are hired, paid and retainers refreshed. Nonpayment is another way clients may attempt to "split" a mediation or collaborative team. Ensure this is clearly presented in multiple ways in all your agreements with clients.

I. B. When Professionals are Tempted to Align with a Client "Against" another client or professional team member, or are tempted to override a team member's professional assessments in *their* areas of expertise, the remedy includes but is not limited to:

1. Notice this impulse in yourself. Challenge and explore it rather than taking refuge in "being right" and "making others wrong." Zealous protectiveness of a client against a colleague may, for example, mask issues you've failed to address previously with a colleague. Zealous advocacy will polarize "against" our teammates and obstruct *any* CDR (Consensual Dispute Resolution) process.

2. First, attempt to go directly to the professional in question using the guidelines below.

3. If hesitant or feeling ill-equipped for some reason to go directly to your colleague, go to another trusted, collaboratively-trained colleague for help, maintaining the anonymity of the person with whom you are having difficulty. Get help to explicitly:
   i. Maintain professionalism.
   ii. Avoid simply seeking agreement from others for your criticisms/negative judgments of a team member.
   iii. Be as prepared to communicate clear understanding of views/experiences that differ from yours, as you are prepared to be heard.
   iv. Affirm the critical value of team cohesion for yourself and to others.
   v. Acknowledge losing sight momentarily of the Paradigm Shift required in collaborative work and the impact, as well as any professional boundary violation.
   vi. Apply the "6 Steps" below to work things through with your colleague. You don't have to "agree." You *do* need to re-establish shared, explicitly communicated understanding, respect and trust with your colleague(s) as part of performing your professional duty to your client(s).

4. 6 Steps: (Participants expect themselves to plan and prepare in advance of any meeting.)
   i. First, ask your colleague if s/he'd be willing to have a conversation. NOTE: Values inferred from collaborative practice ethics require our investment in such a conversation. (e.g. "I'd like to talk and sort some things out - are you open to setting a time when we might do that?")
   ii. Use your best mediation and communication skills to *neutrally* describe the difficulty/challenge compassionately and respectfully, free of blame/negative judgments (e.g. "I noticed you seemed to feel protective of your client" vs "you're being adversarial and positional.").

iii. At the time you request the discussion, also clearly communicate and seek agreement with specific goals (e.g. "I'd like to propose some goals for our meeting [1-5 below]. Do you have any other thoughts? Are you willing to work towards these with me?").
The 5 Basic Goals of the discussion are:
1) Share *some* responsibility for any discord, honestly and sincerely.
2) Communicate mutual understanding and respect. Be sure to include communicating your understanding of your colleague's concerns as well as his/her *subjective* experience, e.g. "You're upset because you think I sidelined you. It's understandable and reasonable that you might think/feel/behave in X ways, given ABC."
3) Each makes and accepts respectful requests for clear, specific effective behaviors for each team member involved (rather than negative assumptions, judgments or complaints or describing what you don't like), e.g. "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to make sure I'm included before making a team decision?"
4) Each professional commits to taking specific steps towards the more effective behavior(s) requested by the other, *within a specific, reasonable time frame* (e.g. "So in our meeting next Tuesday, would you be willing to be mindful of checking in with me to ensure I'm on board?"). Reliability and follow-through build trust, so be sure to calendar a reminder to ensure you're prepared to follow through. And,
5) As needed, each identifies possible sources of support or requests resources to satisfy the specific time frame agreed upon.

iv. Offer possible win-win solutions (e.g. "What if we were to do XYZ . . . ?"). Then, solicit feedback (e.g. "What do you think?"). Seek confirmation of understanding (e.g. "Am I getting this/your dilemma/your experience?"). Consider summarizing and sharing written understandings/agreements to reduce the likelihood of continued or future misunderstanding.

v. Avoid negative assumptions, judgments, complaints and criticisms. These are inherently alienating and risk derailing any CDR process. Instead, make respectful requests for the specific effective behaviors you consider could be more effective *for both of you*. (e.g. Trust increases for both when one asks and receives an affirmative response to: "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to check with me before moving forward with your proposals, and first ensure I'm on board?" versus a negative judgment/accusation: "You're not a team player. You make unilateral decisions and go solo in disrespectful ways.")

vi. Check to ensure resolution is mutual. Both commit to seeking outside help jointly, if discussion results are unresolved for either of you (e.g. "So, is this resolved for you?" "Are you getting what you need from me?" "Is something left that feels unfinished or unaddressed?" "If you're not sure if there's anything lingering, will you initiate another conversation as soon as you're aware of it, so we're sure to get it sorted out?" "Would it help to have someone we both trust help facilitate our conversation?").

## II. Conflict Between Two Team Members or Practice Group Members and/or When One Individual is Perceived by one or more Team Member(s) as Out Of Alignment with the Team's Collaborative Goals.

*3 Options:*

A. Private Intervention with Colleague
B. Call in 1-2 Trusted Colleagues to help. The two individuals involved meet with one or more mutually agreed-upon team or practice group members (see "II B" below).
C. The entire working team requests help from other agreed-to, selected and skilled VDC members, or requests the formation of a Facilitation Committee (see "C" below).

II. A. Private Intervention with Colleague:

1. First, attempt to resolve the difference directly with your colleague using the guidelines provided.

2. If the results of the discussion in #1 are insufficient to re-establish mutual understanding, respect and trust, ask a colleague for help preparing to have the conversation again. The professional having difficulty with a colleague will discuss the situation (while maintaining the anonymity of the other professional), with a neutral, trusted collaboratively-trained colleague for feedback, guidance and support, as well as for ideas about structuring the method, content and language of a second, proposed discussion.

3. Then, the professional having the difficulty with a colleague addresses the issue directly with that colleague (outside the presence of the team, and without client involvement to avoid "group" negative judgments and any coercive or polarized dynamics that can "split" the team in an adversarial way). *NOTE: it is part of VDC's values for both professionals to attempt such a conversation until mutual understanding, respect and trust are established.*

4. 6 Steps: (Participants expect themselves to plan and prepare in advance of any meeting.)
   i. First, ask your colleague if s/he is willing to have a conversation. NOTE: Values inferred from collaborative practice ethics require our investment in such a conversation. (e.g. "I'd like to talk and sort some things out - are you open to setting a time when we might do that?")
   ii. Use your best mediation and communication skills to *neutrally* describe the difficulty/challenge compassionately and respectfully, free of blame/negative judgments (e.g. "I noticed you seemed to feel protective of your client" vs "you're being adversarial and positional.").
   iii. At the time you request the discussion, also clearly communicate and seek agreement regarding specific goals (e.g. "I'd like to propose some goals for our meeting [1-5 below]. Do you have any other thoughts? Are you willing to work towards these with me?"). The 5 Basic Goals for the discussion are:
      1) Share *some* responsibility for any discord, honestly and sincerely.
      2) Communicate mutual understanding and respect. Be sure to include communicating your understanding of your colleague's concerns as well as his/her *subjective* experience, e.g. "You're upset because you think I sidelined you. It's understandable and reasonable that you might think/feel/behave in X ways, given ABC."
      3) Each makes and accepts respectful requests for clear, specific effective behaviors for each team member involved (rather than negative assumptions, judgments or complaints or describing what you don't like), e.g. "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to make sure I'm included before making a team decision?"
      4) Each professional commits to taking specific steps towards the more effective behavior(s) requested by the other, within a specific, reasonable time frame (e.g. "So in our meeting next Tuesday, would you be willing to be mindful of checking in with me to ensure I'm on board?"). Reliability and follow-through build trust, so be sure to calendar a reminder to ensure you're prepared to follow through. And,
      5) As needed, each identifies possible sources of support or requests resources to satisfy the specific time frame agreed upon.
   iv. Offer possible win-win solutions (e.g. "What if we were to do XYZ . . . ?"). Then, solicit feedback (e.g. "What do you think?"). Seek confirmation of understanding (e.g. "Am I getting this/your

dilemma/your experience?"). Consider summarizing and sharing written understandings/agreements to reduce the likelihood of continued or future misunderstanding.

v. Avoid negative assumptions, judgments, complaints and criticisms. These are inherently alienating and risk derailing any CDR process. Instead, make respectful requests for the specific effective behaviors you consider could be more effective *for both of you*. (e.g. Trust increases for both when one asks and receives an affirmative response to: "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to check with me before moving forward with your proposals, and first ensure I'm on board?" versus a negative judgment/accusation: "You're not a team player. You make unilateral decisions and go solo in disrespectful ways.")

vi. Check to ensure resolution is mutual. Both commit to seeking outside help jointly, if discussion results are unresolved for either of you (e.g. "So, is this resolved for you?" "Are you getting what you need from me?" "Is something left that feels unfinished or unaddressed?" "If you're not sure if there's anything lingering, will you initiate another conversation as soon as you're aware of it, so we're sure to get it sorted out?" "Would it help to have someone we both trust help facilitate our conversation?").

## II. B. Call in 1-2 Trusted Colleague(s) to Help:

If you are unable to re-establish a shared understanding, respect and trust using the above methods and/or the challenge arises in a team context, ask one or two teammates or other VDC collaborative colleagues. To be effective, these colleagues need to be perceived as neutral and skilled by all involved professionals. Mutually trusted colleague(s) may then mediate the difficulty in an objective, compassionate and skilled way, redirecting and coaching participating professionals to be respectful and non-defensive, as they're walked through the guidelines below. Clients are not charged for said meetings.

The team's ability to fulfill its duties to clients depends on securing a shared understanding, respect and trust.

6 Steps: (Participants expect themselves to plan and prepare in advance of any meeting.)

i. Trusted colleagues affirm participants' engaging to resolve differences. NOTE: Values inferred from collaborative practice ethics require our investment in such a conversation. (e.g. "Your willingness to talk this through together serves us all, including our clients.")

ii. Trusted colleagues use their best mediation and communication skills to ask participants to *neutrally* describe the difficulty/challenge compassionately and respectfully, free of blame/negative judgments (e.g. "I noticed you seemed to feel protective of your client" vs "you're being adversarial and positional.").

iii. Trusted colleagues also clearly communicate and ensure participants' agreement with specific goals (e.g. "We'd like to propose some goals for our meeting [1-5 below]. Do either of you have any other thoughts? Are you willing to work towards these together?").
The 5 Basic Goals of the discussion are:
   1) Help participants each communicate *some* degree of responsibility for any discord, honestly and sincerely.
   2) Facilitate communication of mutual understanding and respect. Assist participant's to communicate their understanding of other participants' concerns as well as his/her *subjective* experience, e.g. "You're upset because you think I sidelined you. It's understandable and reasonable that you might think/feel/behave in X ways, given ABC."
   3) Support participants to make and accept respectful requests for specific, desired, effective behaviors (rather than negative assumptions, judgments or complaints or describing what you don't

like), e.g. "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to make sure I'm included before making a team decision?"

4) Support participants to identify and commit to specific steps towards the more effective behavior(s) requested by the other, within a specific, reasonable time frame (e.g. "So in our team meeting next Tuesday, would you be willing to be mindful of checking in with me to ensure I'm on board?"). Reliability and follow-through build trust, so encourage participants to calendar any needed reminders to ensure they're prepared to follow through. And,
5) Offer to assist participants, if they'd like, to identify sources of support or resources to help them to meet the specific time frame agreed upon.

iv. Invite participants to: Offer/propose possible win-win solutions (e.g. "What if we were to do XYZ . . . ?); Ensure they solicit feedback (e.g. "What do you think?"); and, Seek confirmation of understanding (e.g. "Am I getting this/your dilemma/your experience?"). Consider summarizing and sharing written understandings/agreements and sharing these to reduce the likelihood of continued or future misunderstanding.

v. Remind participants to avoid negative assumptions, judgments, complaints and criticisms. These are inherently alienating and risk derailing any CDR process. Instead, redirect participants to make respectful requests for the specific effective behaviors they consider could be more effective *for both of them* (e.g. Strengthens trust within the team when one requests/receives an affirmative response to: "I'm wondering if you'd be willing to check with me before moving forward with your proposals, and first ensure I'm on board?" versus a negative judgment/accusation: "You're not a team player. You make unilateral decisions and go solo in disrespectful ways.")

vi. Trusted colleagues check to ensure resolution is mutual, and that participants commit to seeking additional meetings, if discussion results are unresolved for anyone (e.g. Trusted colleagues may ask: "So, is this resolved for you?" "Are you getting what you needed from Juan?" "Is something left that feels unfinished or unaddressed?" "If you're not sure if there's anything lingering, will you each initiate another conversation directly with Participant X, or call another meeting with all of us, as soon as you're aware of it, so we're sure to get it sorted out?").

## II. C. "Facilitation Committee" Involvement:

1. VDC members consent to serve on the Facilitation Committee on both their **VDC Membership Applications** and **Annual Attestation** forms.
2. If above options are unsuccessful, the next step is for the individual or the professional team to ask the Executive and Membership Committees for help forming a "**Facilitation Committee**" of VDC professionals of each profession to identify, articulate and address challenging and emotionally laden issues in neutral, non-judgmental ways. In selecting a Facilitation Committee:
    i. Extent of professionals' ongoing Mediation and Collaborative training and experience, as well as personality, background and experience that best fit the challenge and personalities involved shall be considered.
    ii. VDC Members involved may also suggest VDC members they deem neutral and skilled, although the Executive and Membership Committees shall have final say.
    iii. Ensure involved professionals' perspectives are clearly communicated, validated and heard, and
    iv. Help facilitate the offering of proposals and agreements that work towards restoring trust, respect and mutual understanding, with **6 Steps and 5 Goals stated above**.
3. As determined by the Facilitation Committee, all individual(s) involved will be asked to reflect on and remedy any ineffective behavior that contributed to the disconnect, and shall meet with one or more members of the Facilitation Committee, depending on the situation.
4. The Facilitation Committee shall, in collaboration with involved members, determine final "Action Steps" needed to restore understanding, respect and trust.

5. Action Steps within an agreed-upon time frame shall be monitored at predetermined intervals by the involved persons as well as the Facilitation Committee.
6. Failure to fulfill said Action Steps within the agreed times, barring notice of severe extenuating circumstances (e.g. medical emergencies), may be considered grounds for the Facilitation Committee to request that a member(s) voluntarily resign from VDC.

Team Mediations or Collaborative Divorce/Trusts & Estates teams work together to support one another's different roles and tasks. In the spirit of collaboration, when clients' dynamics risk "splitting" the team with blaming, badmouthing or paying some and not other professionals, the team will discuss the matter and sustain solidarity to ensure professionals preserve responsibility and control over the process, while clients make the decisions about their lives (per our **Streamlined Protocols Roadmap**).

While clients may dismiss a professional, *all* team professionals have a duty to ensure clients follow the Conflict Management Protocols prior to, up to, and including when the dismissal occurs, per the protocols, which will be shared with clients in these and similar circumstances.

Team professionals will review VDC's Conflict Management Protocols and *the professional team* - not clients - will ultimately decide which professionals are needed (e.g. Child Specialist or Adult Child Specialist), and whether a replacement professional will be required when another is terminated. The professional team will offer suggestions/referrals for substitute professionals with whom they have worked well in the past, as needed, and will ensure that said professionals similarly agree to the Streamlined Protocols Roadmap and these Conflict Management Protocols. In addition, professionals inform clients **verbally and in their respective engagement agreements (or by signing this document),** that:

1. All collaborative professionals are ethically required to be members of a collaborative practice group, mediation-trained and collaboratively-trained.
2. Changing professionals requires the client dismissing a professional to also pay the other spouse's professionals to onboard and update any new professionals.
3. Professional teams work together to block and redirect any client behaviors that challenge transparency, silo team professionals, hijack or undermine the process to control or serve their own ends, without due consideration for the client's impact on the process, or the wellbeing of *all* family members, especially for example, children and/or adult children.

In the spirit of collaboration and mutual respect, Team Members here agree to:

1. Review these Conflict Management Protocols before beginning a case and ensure all professional team members agree to abide by these. Clients agree to abide by the client-related portions of these protocols, and understand that professionals have already agreed to this.
2. Review Streamlined Protocols Roadmap and agree to follow these, or an agreed-upon variation which is written and made explicit.
3. Cease work on a team mediation or collaborative case until all team members are hired and/or paid, including dismissed professionals. The professional team remains in control of the process, not clients' divorce-related decisions.
4. Ensure unpaid team members are paid before final work products from other professionals are provided.
5. Collaborative professionals give their colleagues the benefit of the doubt and support them, per these Conflict Management Protocols. Professionals raise concerns directly with colleagues as suggested, and avoid becoming part of conscious or unconscious client efforts to split and undermine team cohesiveness, and exert control over the Collaborative or Team Mediation processes - which is the responsibility and bailiwick of the professionals, not clients.

While addressing conflict is stressful or at least uncomfortable for most of us, avoiding and/or failing to work diligently to establish and restore a shared understanding, respect and trust is even more costly to the wellbeing of VDC, and our effectiveness on teams and with clients. Our professional effectiveness, as a practice group and on teams, hinges on our willingness to be sufficiently skilled to "walk the talk" in any CDR process.

We strengthen our shared trust and skill as collaborative professionals, as we develop the skills needed to navigate the difficult and necessary conversations / conflicts that inevitably arise from the very nature of our work together. We value a commitment to our shared learning and growth.

Clients' signatures acknowledging they understand, have asked sufficient questions of any coaches or other professionals on the team, and agree to abide by the above as it pertains to them:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Name: | Signature: | Date: |
| Name: | Signature: | Date: |

Mediation/Collaborative Professionals' Signatures agreeing to abide by the above:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Name/Title: | Signature: | Date: |
| Name/Title: | Signature: | Date: |
| Name/Title: | Signature: | Date: |
| Name/Title: | Signature: | Date: |
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