

REDUCING TENSIONS IN A STAND-OFF BETWEEN WARRING GROUPS

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BACKGROUND

Tensions had escalated between two groups with a history of hostility and violence. A caller who knew both parties was worried that one of the parties was on the verge of violence and contacted Peaceful Solutions.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

Both parties agreed to speak with the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator independently as a first step.

The first party was extremely angry and spent the first part of the meeting threatening violence. It took time to understand the problem but using compassionate and empathic responses the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator established that he was the father of a baby and the baby's mother was now in a relationship with the other party.

He had been told by a friend of the mother that her new boyfriend was not going to allow him (the father) to see his baby. He had taken this up with the mother in a discussion which became heated and ended badly. The mother's boyfriend had jumped to her defence and threatened the father for verbally attacking his girlfriend.

The second party had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for six months. During this time he had heard her complain that her baby's father had provided no financial support and became hostile when she asked him for money. On one occasion he came home to find her in a distressed state. She said the father had been there, shouting and telling her that no one was going to stop him seeing his child. The second party decided to defend his girlfriend and went to the first party demanding he stop his aggression.

Each of the parties consulted their respective friends who fuelled the dispute by supporting their side as being right. Threats were passed by proxy and tensions were spreading. The caller felt the problem had grown disproportionately.

ASSESSMENT

It was clear that although both parties were defending something precious (the first party his relationship with his baby and the second his girlfriend), the actual dispute was based on gossip and misinterpretation. The mother's friend had meddled, with potentially fatal consequences.

REMEDY

Working with the parties prior to a face-to-face meeting the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator was able to establish that the second party did not want to stop the father from seeing his baby, nor to pass comment on the issue of financial support for the baby. He was simply asking that he treat the baby's mother with respect. The first party wanted to be sure that he could see his baby.

He felt shame and embarrassment that he could not provide financially, and constantly felt the mother was holding this as a threat. It was this sense and their inability to communicate with each other that triggered the angry reactions.

OUTCOME

Having done so much ground work, the face-to-face meeting was relatively straightforward.

The miscommunication was cleared up and an understanding reached about the needs of each party.

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