



COMMON SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN COMMUNITY

BY HELEN STEVENSON

COMMUNITIES OFTEN EXPERIENCE conflict over the same kinds of issues. These often seem to involve differing expectations in a few basic categories:

Space, boundaries

- External, physical boundaries: land ownership and usage; privacy in a shared house.
- Personal boundaries: undesirable physical contact, using or borrowing someone else's personal items.

Health and lifestyle

- Food purchases, preparation and storage, quantity and quality.
- Use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco.
- Who cares for an ill person; who decides what kind of treatment they'll receive?

Time

- Personal and family time vs. community work projects, meetings.
- Scheduling projects/meetings in mornings vs. evenings.

Intensity of Relationships

- Inclusion of newcomers: open-arms welcoming, or "find your own place"?
- Smaller, tighter subgroups of friends within the larger group: people's natural preferences, or "cliques"?

- All members attend all meetings? Or some decisions are made by committees?
- Is there a place for the loner, artist, or introvert?

Structure of Relationships

- Cooperative decision making (such as consensus or voting), or decisions made by one person or a small group?
- Male or female dominant, or no one gender dominant?
- Place of a spiritual teacher or guru.
- Place of elders.
- Place of children.

Response to Problems

- Avoidance of problem, or recognition and working toward a solution?
- What's the method of problem solving?

Care of Tools and Equipment

- Who sets standards for group equipment and care?
- Is there a consequence for someone who gives improper care? Who pays for repairs or replacement?
- Community owned or personally owned tools and equipment?
- Duration of loan of tools or equipment.

Financial Arrangements

- If people contribute money to a community and later want to leave, do they get their money back again?
- Can someone who is leaving sell their house or house and land to anyone, or must the community approve the buyer?
- Envy and resentment, when some members have greater financial assets than others.
- If income-sharing, do members retain personal funds and/or equipment? Does a new member contribute assets, savings, or vehicles? If they leave do they get them back? Who decides on fundable personal needs?

Standards of Behavior

- What are standards of acceptable behavior with each other in the community?
- Standards of acceptable behavior "outside," where it reflects on the community?
- Are there procedures to handle unacceptable behavior?

Care of Children, Animals

- How much control over children's behavior do non-parents have; how much control over animals do non-owners have?
- Can community members request, or require changes in the parents' child-raising style? Can members request or require that pet owners' restrain, fence, or train their animals? Problems with other people's children and dogs often cause the most intense community conflicts. Ω

Helen Stevenson, an activist for 38 years in the community of Argenta, B.C., helped found and taught in the Argenta Friends School, a Quaker high school and "community within a community." Before emigrating to Canada, she helped create the interracial community of Mountain View Homesteads in Tracy, California.