

CAO Guide on Communication and Conflict Resolution



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INTRODUCTION

Condominium living offers many unique benefits, including shared amenities, security, and a sense of community. However, it also comes with important responsibilities, chief among them the obligation to ensure that all residents can reasonably enjoy their living space without disruption.

As differences of opinion can lead to conflicts in any community setting, it is essential that all members of the community work together to effectively manage issues and promote harmonious living.

This guide provides some practical tips and strategies for condo board directors and other members of the community to navigate conflict and foster a positive community living environment.

Defining Conflict:

Conflict, in the context of a condominium community, refers to any situation where there is disagreement, tension, or opposition among

individuals or groups regarding interests, beliefs, or actions. It encompasses a wide range of disputes and disagreements that can arise in communal living settings.

It manifests in various forms, including disputes between individual owners, tensions between the condominium board and individual owners, discord among members of the condominium board, and disputes involving condo managers.

This guide contains four sections aimed at preventing and managing conflict:

- 1 **Community Foundations:** Establishing clear expectations.
- 2 **Impactful Communication:** Fostering transparency and understanding.
- 3 **Navigating Conflicts:** Understanding root causes and addressing issues promptly and constructively.
- 4 **Tools and Resources:** Equipping directors for success with additional takeaways.



1. COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Create Strong Foundations

Establishing robust community foundations in condos enhances communication by fostering trust and understanding among residents and board members, facilitating prompt and constructive conflict resolution for a harmonious living environment.

Condo boards set the tone in their community by establishing **clear expectations**. This can be achieved by:

- 1 Updating governing documents as needed to establish clear expectations for community members.
- 2 Communicating these expectations early and often.
- 3 Ensuring that the governing documents do not contradict any legislation like the Condo Act.
- 4 Fostering a culture of education by empowering community members with tools and resources.



What are condo governing documents?

- The Condo Act
- Declaration
- By-laws
- Rules

[Read more about how to access and change them here.](#)



1.2 Meaningful Rules

Rules are created to promote the safety, security, and welfare of owners and property or to prevent unreasonable interference with the use and enjoyment of units and common elements.

Update Rules to Meet Community Needs

Periodically review and update rules to address emerging common issues and keep the governing documents relevant to the evolving needs of the community.

Anti-Harassment Rules

Establish clear anti-harassment rules and develop a policy to address and prevent harassment within the community. This guide will address managing harassment in a later section.

Communication Protocol

As a best practice, boards should develop a communication protocol to be added to condominium rules. This establishes a clear system for communication between the board, owners, and managers. It should detail who to contact for specific issues, the communication path, expected acknowledgment and response times. This reduces duplicate requests and ensures clarity for all parties involved.

As a board, ask:

When was the last review of the condominium rules?

Are there any outdated rules that are not enforced that should be removed or adjusted?

Are there any common issues not currently addressed by the rules?



Equip your Community with Educational Resources

Condominium ownership comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities. Boards can educate owners by directing them to helpful resources. The [CAO Condo Owners' Guide](#) offers introductory information on condo governance, finance, owners meetings, repairs and maintenance, and resolving common issues.

1.3 Three Ways to Foster a Community Living Mindset

COMMUNITY LIVING MINDSET

Everyone has the right to feel safe, welcome and respected in their community. This requires all to be accountable for their actions and contribute to harmonious condo community living through civility, compromise, and patience.

1 Encourage involvement, inclusion, and volunteerism



Create opportunities for participation in activities, committee projects or the board

- Builds relationships and trust
- People who feel valued, heard, and included are more likely to get involved



Highlight community successes – get permission from community members to share positive stories

- Creates champions of positive news
- Inspires volunteerism and community involvement

2 Host community events and social gatherings



Plan events such as game nights, fitness classes, book clubs, food and toy drives

- Opportunity to form connections and create a sense of community
- Promotes empathy

3 Use effective, timely and consistent communication



Ensure that residents are informed about the declaration, by-laws and rules

- Minimizes disputes
- Promotes early and harmonious resolutions
- Reduces blame and pushback



Give owners opportunities to contribute ideas, particularly at AGMs and other owners' meetings

- Owners feel heard and valued



Board directors can learn more from the [CAO Guide on Governing Condos](#) and by reviewing the [Strong Foundations Checklist](#).

2. IMPACTFUL COMMUNICATION

In establishing strong community foundations, it is essential to understand the pivotal role of impactful communication. In this section, we delve into practical strategies for effective communication for condo directors, aimed at preventing conflicts and fostering positive interactions within the community.

2.1 Proactive Communication

Proactive communication fosters transparency and understanding, minimizing misunderstandings and prevents conflict. By regularly sharing updates, addressing concerns promptly, and collaboratively devising solutions, conflicts can be mitigated while promoting a strong condo community.



2.2 Practicing Clear Communication

Boards should think carefully about their community's preferred method and style of communication. Generally speaking, audiences prefer concise and direct communications that shows understanding of the issues being experienced. Here are some techniques that can help when crafting communications materials for condo communities:

C	Choose the appropriate format of communication for your community	Some communities prefer virtual meetings, others physical letters, in-person meetings, e-mail, teleconference, etc.
L	Lead with the most important points	Don't frustrate your audience by making them search for the essential info they need
E	Examples and educational information help clarify important points	Use relevant examples, facts and data
A	Avoid jargon, complicated language, and acronyms	Use plain language to be clear and inclusive
R	Read your message aloud	Helps to catch mistakes or complicated language in written responses



The Condo Act requires the communication of certain information using specific [forms](#).

2.3 What Format is Best?

Simple issues can often be addressed with a quick phone call or email.

Complex issues, where relationships are at stake, may benefit from an in-person or virtual meeting.

All communication should consider the target audiences' language barriers, cultural differences, and accessibility.



Learn more about [solving common condo issues](#) on CAO's website and download a sample letter template.



Layered Communication

Boards should consider **sharing information** in **several formats** and at **various times** to ensure accuracy, consistency and increase understanding of the message. These act as reasonable attempts by the board to address issues and communicate solutions.

Examples:

- 1** Post a **note** on **mail room bulletin board** and near elevators
- 2** Post the **same note** on the condo's **online portal**
- 3** Share the **same information** in the condo's newsletter



2.4 Prevent Misunderstandings from Escalating

Directors should be mindful of their conduct and communication style in conversations, both during board meetings, individual interactions, and when speaking with the entire condo community. Resist the natural human instinct to become defensive or push back during a conversation, as it can quickly escalate tensions.



Learn about other de-escalation techniques by watching CAO's Webinar on [Managing and De-escalating Conflict in Condos](#)

Consider this framework:

RECOGNIZE Show you are actively listening



Body language:

- Nod your head
- Make appropriate eye contact

Verbally:

- "Thank you for sharing."
- "I understand this is a concern for you."
- "I appreciate you sharing this information with me."

PIVOT Move the conversation from the complaint to the solution



Paraphrase the person's main points:

- "I hear that"
- "It sounds like ..."

Capture the emotion:

- "I appreciate that this has been frustrating for you."
- "I empathize with the challenges you have faced."

- **Avoid** using "but," use "and" instead
- **"I understand... and..."**
Instead of "I understand... but..."

RESOLVE Finalize a solution after fostering collective understanding



- "Let's look at how we can solve this together."
- "Let's discuss a mutually satisfactory way to address this."
- "Let's discuss the options that could help here."

2.5 Document Efforts and Outcomes

Use an issue log to help your board track issues over time. Include whether an issue has escalated or if steps taken to de-escalate were successful. This approach helps to build on successes and ensure accountability, transparency, and informed decision-making, fostering a more harmonious living environment for all residents.



See our guide on [Issues Management](#) for more.

2.6 Navigate Unpopular Decisions

The condominium board has ultimate accountability for controlling and managing the affairs of the condominium corporation. This may sometimes mean having to share information about decisions that may be unpopular and enforce compliance with the Act, declaration, by-laws and rules.

Consider using these **communication strategies** to address and minimize misunderstandings:



Communicate early and often.

Provide residents with ample notice of upcoming changes to avoid surprises. Use layered communication to give residents time to prepare and adjust.



Open and Transparent Communication

Openly acknowledge the situation. Transparency builds trust and helps residents understand the reasoning of the decision.



Provide Context and Rationale

Explain the board's decisions. A clear rationale helps owners see the big picture. Be sure to break down complex financials into easily digestible points. Utilize hired experts to help explain complex issues.



Community Engagement

Involve residents in decision-making where possible. Seek input through surveys, meetings, or resident forums. Involving residents shows a commitment to shared decision-making.



Remain Impartial

When delivering news, it's important to remain impartial and avoid expressing personal opinions on the decisions being conveyed. Instead, focus on presenting the information objectively. For instance: "The board has decided..."



See our [Helpful Communication Tips & Back Pocket Communication Scripts](#) for more.

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

At times, difficult conversations or unpopular decisions may lead to concerns escalating. This necessitates the involvement of conflict resolution processes to reach mutually satisfactory agreements. In our next section, we explore techniques to help effectively address these challenges.



Conflict resolution is an informal or formal process used to solve a disagreement through a mutually workable resolution.

3.1 Identify an Escalating Issue

Despite following good practices, issues may still arise in a condo community. To mitigate this, it is crucial to address issues promptly, ensure individuals feel heard and understood, and effectively manage conflicts.

Additionally, escalation may occur because of repeated requests from the same individual about the same concern who does not allow sufficient time for a response. Even though the message may be valid, the frequency of communication can exacerbate the conflict. When issues arise, a timely response can help clear the air, build understanding, and preserve the relationship.

Use the following *TOO HOT* technique to **identify common signs** that a conversation may be escalating into a conflict:

TOO HOT



Talking faster and louder



Oppositional or agitated statements



Openly blaming, shaming, or demanding



Higher level of emotions



One-sided solutions



Tone of voice changes

3.2 The Role of Managers

Effective conflict resolution within condominiums hinges on the board's oversight of the manager's activities. To facilitate this, boards should establish transparent communication channels with managers, outlining clear conflict resolution procedures and expectations. Regularly reviewing and assessing the manager's handling of conflicts ensures accountability and promotes a proactive approach to resolution. Despite the presence of managers, boards retain ultimate responsibility in addressing conflicts, emphasizing the need for active involvement and oversight.



See our guide on
[Overseeing Condo
Managers](#) for more.

3.3 Addressing Conflict

A **timely and informal discussion** can help to deal with an issue quickly, build understanding and preserve strained relationships.

Follow these steps to help prepare yourself for an initial discussion:

- 1 Check and shift your **mindset**. Have you made **assumptions** about the situation or the person?
- 2 Reflect on **how you may have contributed** to the situation.
- 3 Decide how you want to **approach** the conversation. For example, focusing on solutions instead of problems, and having an open mind and ready to listen.
- 4 **Prepare questions** that will help you to better understand their concerns.
- 5 **Practice** in front of a mirror to hear how you sound, observe your body language, and build confidence.
- 6 Ensure decisions are made collectively by the board. While one director may lead discussions, the ultimate decisions should represent the **board as a collective**.



3.4 Communicating with Unresponsive Individuals

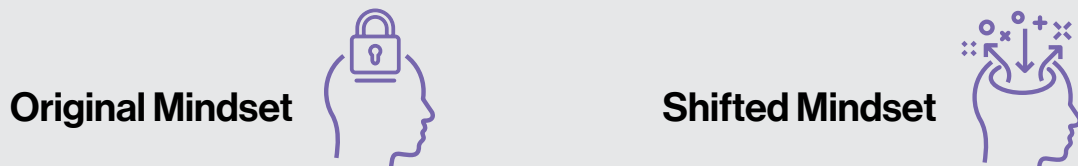
Some individuals may be unresponsive to a condo board's communication attempts. The board should consider ways to resolve the issue without immediately escalating to a legal proceeding. Here are some things to try:

- > Consider the communication format. Would a phone call be more appropriate than an email for this issue and this individual?
- > Give them a reasonable amount of time to respond.
- > Document your attempts to communicate with them.

You can **use templated letters** found on CAO's website as a next step. Follow the steps for your specific issue [on this page](#).

3.5 Shifting Your Mindset

How we think about conflict can affect our willingness to work on a solution. **Check and shift your mindset** when addressing conflict. Here's some examples to guide you:



Original Mindset

Shifted Mindset

"This is going to be awful."

"This is an opportunity to clear the air and better understand each other."

"We can't agree."

"I'm confident we can come to a mutually satisfactory agreement."

"I don't want to hurt their feelings, so it's best not to say anything."

"I can provide feedback that is supportive, respectful and sensitive."

"I am fed up with this situation."

"I empathize with the fact that you must also be frustrated with the situation."

3.6 Four Step Conflict Resolution Roadmap

This framework aims to collaboratively resolve conflicts while considering the interests of other parties' needs, values and priorities.



Step 1: Prepare

- Set and confirm the meeting time and place
- Determine how to phrase your perspective and what questions to ask: check and shift your mindset
- Consider the best options to gather facts, not just each other's opinions



Step 2: Explore the Issues

Agenda:

- Confirm topics to discuss and resolve
- Ensure everyone provides input and agrees what is to be discussed

Discussion:

- Share perspectives and listen to each other's underlying interests
- Focus on common ground
- Ask open-ended questions to better understand
- Don't move to problem-solving too soon
- Speak respectfully, avoid inflammatory language, be aware of your tone
- Avoid making assumptions, focus on facts and be open-minded when listening



Step 3: Brainstorm Options

- Brainstorm solutions that address your shared interests
- Aim for a mutually satisfactory agreement

"This discussion is important, and I look forward to solving this issue together. I suggest we talk more about the issue and the impact, then go back to the ideas you raised."



Step 4: Agreement and Follow-up

- If all parties have come to an agreement:
 - Ensure that each party has the same understanding of the agreement
 - Follow-up to discuss how the agreement is working

All parties should have the opportunity to contribute to the final agreement. You may choose to have one party draft and share with others for input.

"This conversation was helpful and I'm glad that we worked together to address and resolve this issue. It may be helpful for each of us to recap what we understand the agreement to be."



3.7 Getting a Conversation Back on Track

Discussions about conflict can easily move away from the focus of the conversation, which should be addressing and resolving the issue.

Try this to get things back on track:

- Acknowledge that the conversation is off topic
- Suggest a short break, if needed
- Use the meeting agenda to refocus
- Utilize an impartial facilitator to keep the conversation on track

3.8 Director Facilitated Conversations

Board directors that are facilitating conversations between disputing parties should take all the necessary steps to **ensure a safe and respectful meeting environment**.

Facilitators are meant to be **impartial**. Any perceived bias toward one party can cause the conversation to become:

- More emotionally charged
- Difficult to navigate
- Disrespectful, ineffective, or potentially unsafe

Facilitators should actively listen to all parties, encourage constructive communication, and establish clear ground rules to ensure a productive discussion.

If disputing parties cannot come to a resolution, ensure parties are aware of reasonable and appropriate next steps, including options for formal dispute resolution which is discussed at the end of this guide.



Review the Condo Act for specific disputes that are required to be managed through mediation or arbitration.

3.9 Putting Agreements in Writing

Most agreements should be in writing and signed by all parties involved.

As a best practice, agreements should include:

- > Date
- > Names of the parties
- > Summary of the resolution
- > Terms and conditions
- > Confidentiality and privacy expectations
- > Follow-up plan
- > Printed names and signatures

3.10 Addressing Unresolved Conflict and Seeking Support

It is very good practice to self-reflect honestly and be open-minded to identify when the condominium board and/or condominium manager lacks the right skills, leadership, style, or time to effectively manage a problem. Engaging professionals to investigate and provide impartial guidance – from legal advice to obtaining an engineering report or commissioning a noise study – can keep an issue from getting worse.

When it comes to conflict resolution, involved parties must be willing to collaborate, have a willingness to resolve the issue and be committed to the outcome. If this cannot be agreed to by the parties or if safety concerns limit discussions from occurring in the first place other approaches may be necessary.



3.11 Formal Dispute Resolution

The CAO and other provincial consumer protection organizations offer dispute resolution services that support condo communities in settling a range of common living issues, depending on their jurisdiction.

[Issues & Dispute Resolution - Condominium Authority of Ontario](#)

The Condominium Authority Tribunal

The CAT provides condo owners and corporations in Ontario with online mediation and adjudication services that are convenient, quick, and affordable. Learn more about how the [Tribunal can help](#) and its [jurisdiction](#).

ADR Institute of Canada

The [ADR Institute of Canada](#) can help condo boards access designated Alternative Dispute Resolution professionals.

Condominium Management Regulatory Authority of Ontario

The CMRAO is the regulatory authority that handles complaints related to the conduct of condo managers and management companies in Ontario. Learn more about [CMRAO's complaints process](#) and jurisdiction.

Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Some issues that cannot be addressed or resolved through CAO, CMRAO or the other provincial consumer protection organizations can be brought before the Superior Court of Justice, including matters related to sections [134](#) and [135](#) of the Condo Act. Learn more about [the SJC](#).



3.12 Managing Harassment

All condos should aim to **establish clear, consistent, and transparent processes** for how to prevent, prepare for and respond to harassment in their community.



[CAO's anti-harassment rule sample](#) can help guide condo corporations in drafting their own anti-harassment rules to fit their unique circumstances. Corporations looking to update their rules or draft new ones should consult with their legal counsel to ensure any changes to governing documents do not contradict the Condo Act or any other laws or regulations.

Here's how you can help address instances of harassment in your condo community:

- > Ensure your condo has an up-to-date anti-harassment rule in place and all owners are well informed
- > Know which governing documents apply to harassment cases
- > Has the individual caused or is likely to cause injury, illness, or property damage?
- > Consider the individual's emotional and psychological state when selecting a communication method
- > Determine if other legislation applies including Ontario Human Rights Code, Occupational Health & Safety Act and the Criminal Code of Canada
- > Seek advice from legal counsel to determine best steps to de-escalate and resolve the conflict safely



Emergency Situations

Contact emergency services* if you experience **any** of the following:

- > You believe that you or another person are being threatened
- > You are concerned for your safety or the safety of others
- > There is risk of damage to your property or the condo corporation's property

**Utilize non-emergency phone lines for situations that are concerning but not urgent.*



3.13 Rebuilding Trust After Conflict

Rebuilding trust and relationships post-conflict is a vital step of the resolution process. Acknowledging responsibility and honouring commitments set the stage for this rebuilding. Open communication fosters transparency and understanding, while respecting privacy ensures individuals feel safe to express themselves. This journey requires commitment, accountability, and a genuine effort to learn from past experiences, strengthening the community's harmony and resilience.

3.14 Conclusion

Successfully managing community living in condos requires a combination of clear communication, mutual respect, effective governance practices by the board and a commitment to fostering a sense of community. By utilizing this guide and working collaboratively to address issues and challenges as they arise, condo communities can cultivate a positive and harmonious living environment for all residents.

The following section includes additional resources to add to your director's toolkit. These offer practical takeaways and actionable steps to expand your skill set further.

4. TOOLS AND RESOURCES

In this section, you'll find a collection of additional tools and resources. These practical takeaways and extra tips are designed to enhance your skills and provide further support beyond the main content of the guide. Explore these resources to expand your knowledge on communication and conflict resolution in condo settings.

4.1 Other Legislative Considerations

Criminal Code of Canada

Condo corporations should work with legal counsel – and police services when necessary – to determine if the [Criminal Code of Canada](#) applies to a particular condo conflict, such as:

- > Criminal harassment, e.g., repeated, and unreciprocated communication, stalking a resident or business
- > Threats
- > Violence
- > Hate-motivated offences

Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

Condo corporations are required to investigate any employee reported occupational health and safety complaints and develop related policies and programs. Consult legal counsel to ensure compliance with the [OHSA](#).

Ontario Human Rights Code

Boards should consider if an issue or conflict in their condo community relates to the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#). The Code prohibits discrimination against people based on protected grounds in protected social areas, such as housing, employment, contracts, good services, and facilities.



4.2 Strong Foundations Checklist

Use this checklist to help your board identify how to manage communication and prevent conflict in your condo community.

Board Questions	Yes	No
Do we routinely review and update the governing documents?		
Do our governing documents clearly set our expectations of community members?		
Is there a process for owners and residents to raise concerns?		
Is there a plan to proactively communicate with residents?		
Have we provided community volunteer activities?		
Does our board set the tone for respectful communication?		
Have we identified steps to address conflict?		

Director Questions	Yes	No
Do I regularly attend board meetings and owners' meetings?		
Am I respectful in my conversations with other directors?		
Do I make efforts to get to know condo community members?		
Am I aware of governing documents and other guidelines that support me in my director role?		

4.3 Helpful Communication Tips

Refer to this list of tips when communicating with your condo community to help manage issues early and avoid escalation into a conflict where possible.



What's Helpful

- ✓ **Embody the 'Five Be's'**
 1. Be approachable
 2. Be mindful
 3. Be self-aware
 4. Be prepared
 5. Be open to ideas that differ from your own
- ✓ **Confirm the individual's preferred way of communicating.**
- ✓ Choose a quiet, private and neutral space for **in-person conversations**.
- ✓ **Use plain, inclusive and respectful language** that is easy to understand and can be easily translated.
- ✓ **Use readable fonts in written communication** and edit before sending.
- ✓ **Use short sentences or lists**, ideally less than 15 to 20 words.
- ✓ Be **curious** and **ask questions** to deepen the discussion, provide clues to solutions, and, help bridge understanding.
- ✓ **Set time limits** for conversations where appropriate; get back to people about another time.



What's Not Helpful

- ✗ **Making assumptions** can be inaccurate and perceived as judgmental.
- ✗ **Communicating when emotions are high.**
- ✗ **Acronyms, jargon, or industry terminology** that may not be understood by all.
- ✗ **Using inflammatory language and blame statements.**
“Maybe you should have thought of that before...”
“What did you think was going to happen?”
- ✗ **Strong punctuation**, such as exclamation marks, and certain emojis can come across as anger.
- ✗ **Generalizing statements** that can create an “us against them” feeling.
“You never...”, “You always...”, or “Everyone feels that way.”
- ✗ **Aggressive non-verbal communication**, such as finger pointing, or stepping into someone's personal space.
- ✗ **Sarcasm**, which amplifies emotions and defensiveness.



Remember: Ask yourself, “Would I want to receive this message?” before sending. If not, rework, reword and revise.

4.4 Back Pocket Communication Scripts

Use these scripted questions and statements to guide challenging conversations in your condo community toward outcomes that serve everyone's interests. Adjust based on the unique circumstances of each issue and individual.

Ask for time before meeting

- > "Can we discuss this at another time? I have a few things that require my immediate attention and want to be fully present for our conversation. How does _____ work for you?"

Address rising emotions

- > "This conversation is emotional for both of us. I value our relationship and want to resolve this together. I think a short break would be helpful. Can we regroup in about _____ minutes?"
- > "This is a tough issue, and our perspectives appear to be different. I'm sure that we can find a workable solution. Is it helpful to take a break and continue our discussion in a few hours?"

Pointing out conversational inconsistencies

- > "I'm not sure how your point about _____ connects to our discussion. Do you mind clarifying to help me understand?"
- > "This is interesting. Earlier you said _____ and now I am hearing _____. I want to double check this with you as I am not sure I understand."

Confirm understanding of the conversation

- > "How does that option work for you?"
- > "How is this resonating with you?"
- > "What's your sense of where we have landed?"
- > "My perspective is based on these assumptions..."
- > "I've come to this conclusion because..."

Ask for time before deciding

- “It’s helpful for me to process what we talked about so we can solve this together. I suggest taking a couple of hours to think before we come back to make our decision. Does this work for you?”
- “We covered a lot of important information today. It is helpful to take more time to think about our best path forward and discuss it with all the directors. May we meet again [time/date] to discuss possible solutions together?”

Request a follow up discussion

- “I appreciated our discussion last week. It helped me understand your perspective and how you were impacted. Can we continue our conversation? I didn’t get to raise a few items and I want to ensure the conversation feels complete for us both.”

CAO Contact

[Message us](#) through our website or call us Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

CAO Local: 416-901-9356

CAO Toll Free: 844-880-5341

TTY (telephone device for the hearing impaired)

[Bell Relay Service](#)

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