

# The Power of Conflict Coaching

As part of the 2025 Law Seminar Series

**Tuesday 29th July at 11.00 AM**



**Free Event**

Please register through the QR Code.



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CRICOS Provider Code 00117J



# About me



## Pracademic

### 15 years experience as a practitioner:

- *Certified Conflict Coach (Conflict Coaching International)*
- *AMDRAS accredited mediator*
- *Trained in restorative justice conferencing and group facilitation*

### 15 years experience as an educator (university and private training)

PhD (Conflict Resolution/Law), Grad Cert Psychology,  
Master of Conflict and Dispute Resolution

Lead Trainer and coach mentor at Sam Hardy's  
Conflict Management Academy

Adjunct Senior Research Fellow Cairns Institute, JCU



## In this presentation

- ✓ Introduce conflict coaching
- ✓ How it supports people in conflict engage more constructively in conflict
- ✓ When, where and why conflict coaching is used as a stand-alone process
- ✓ How conflict coaching can be used and support other conflict resolution processes (e.g. mediation)
- ✓ Conflict coaching skills
- ✓ How having conflict coaching skills can support the work of mediators, restorative justice convenors, and lawyers
- ✓ Conflict coaching training





# Conflict (management) coaching

A **one-on-one** process, involving

- Someone **trained as a coach AND trained in conflict dynamics**; and
- A **client** who wishes to manage conflict (or manage people who are in conflict) more effectively

Aimed at **changing the client's mindset** about conflict (impacting their experiences and behaviours)

Uses a process of **facilitated reflection** on the client's own conflict experiences

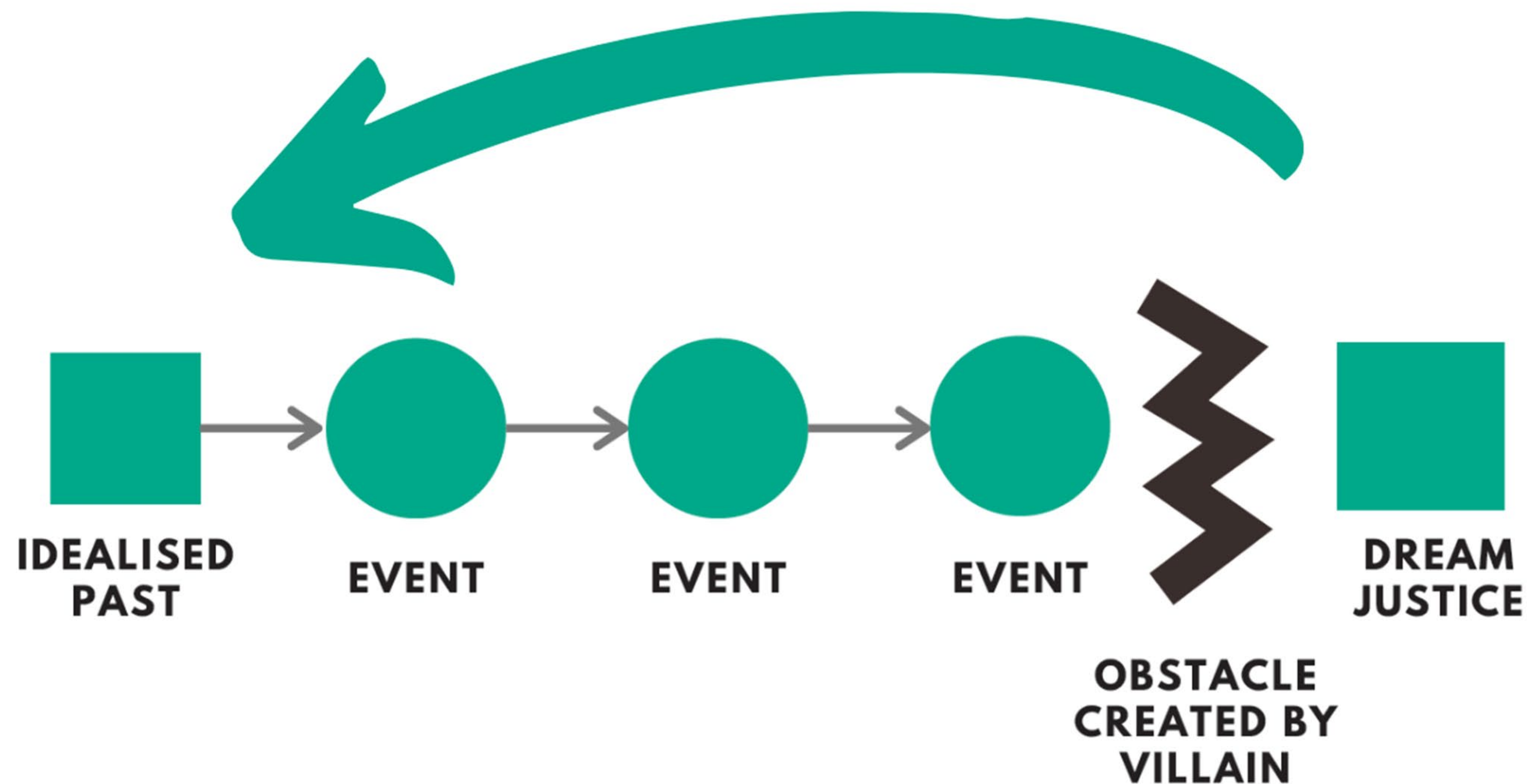


# People in conflict...



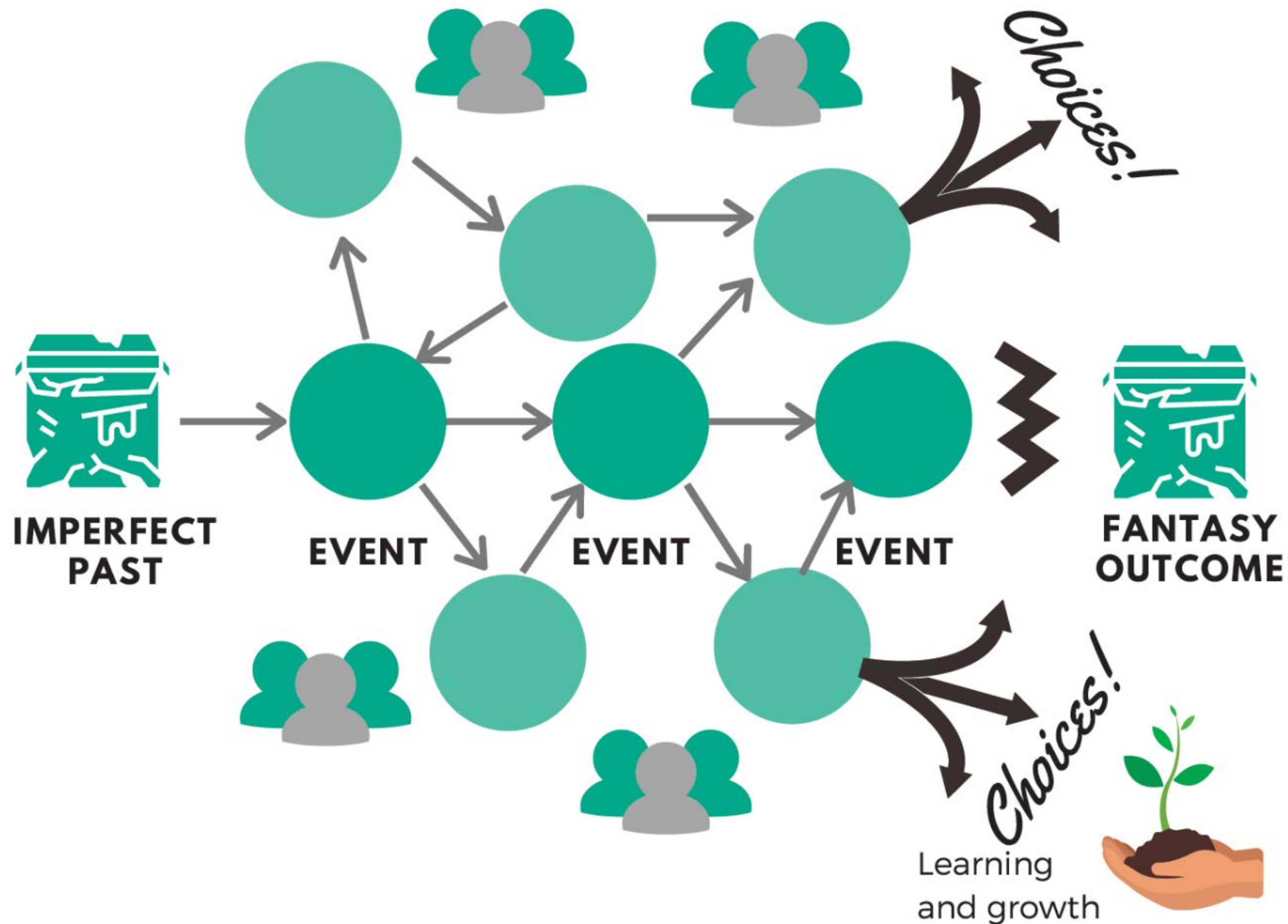
- Tend to over-simplify things
- Forget facts / information
- Only see one narrow perspective
- Ignore their own contributions and choices
- Stereotype
- Get stuck in the past
- Have unrealistic expectations about outcome
- Have trouble regulating / expressing their emotions constructively
- Find communicating with the other people involved in the conflict very difficult/ impossible

# A typical "melodramatic" conflict story





# A more realistic (and constructive) conflict story







## People in conflict talk to others about it, but...

...these are usually to people who are sympathetic to their side of the story (friends/family/colleagues at work).

...these people are often well-intentioned, but not helpful in supporting the person to manage the conflict more constructively

...in settings like the workplace, talking to others about conflict can create even more conflict.



# How conflict coaching can help”

Offers independent, supportive, and challenging guidance

Coaches listen deeply and spot missed opportunities

Coaches help discover new perspectives

Develops long term practical conflict management skills beyond helping with the immediate conflict.

Provides space for practice, confidence and capacity building

Encourages reflection to understand past conflict experiences and support personal learning and growth



# REAL Conflict Coaching

## helps people develop the “5Cs”:



**CLARITY:** Clients gain clarity about the conflict situation.



**COMPREHENSION:** Clients develop a better understanding of their own (and others') needs and goals.



**CHOICES:** Clients recognise past choices (good and bad) and identify and evaluate their choices for moving forwards



**COMPETENCE:** Clients increase their conflict management skills so that they can constructively engage in conflict.

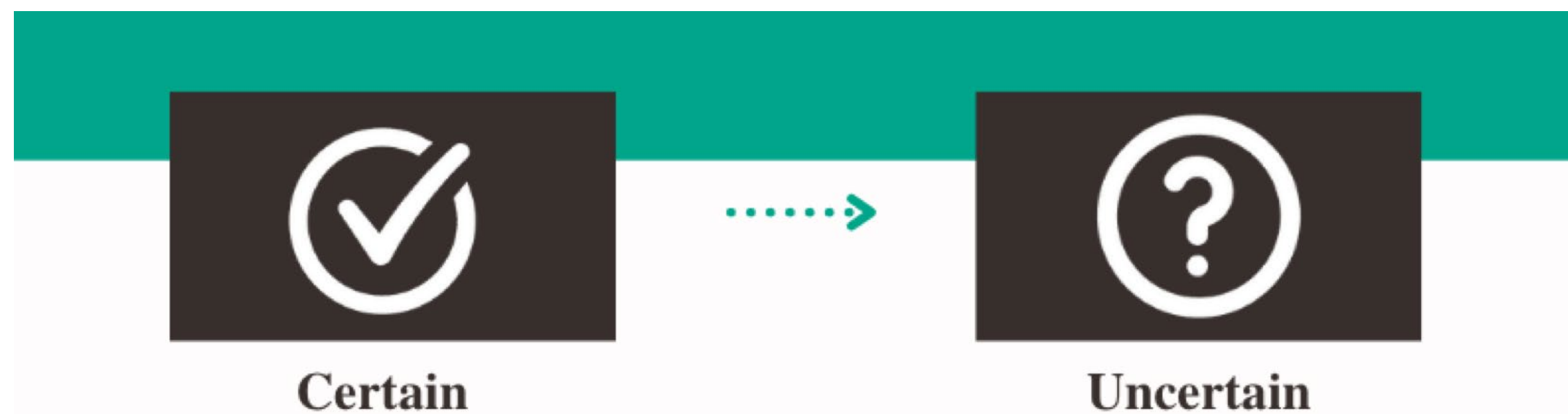
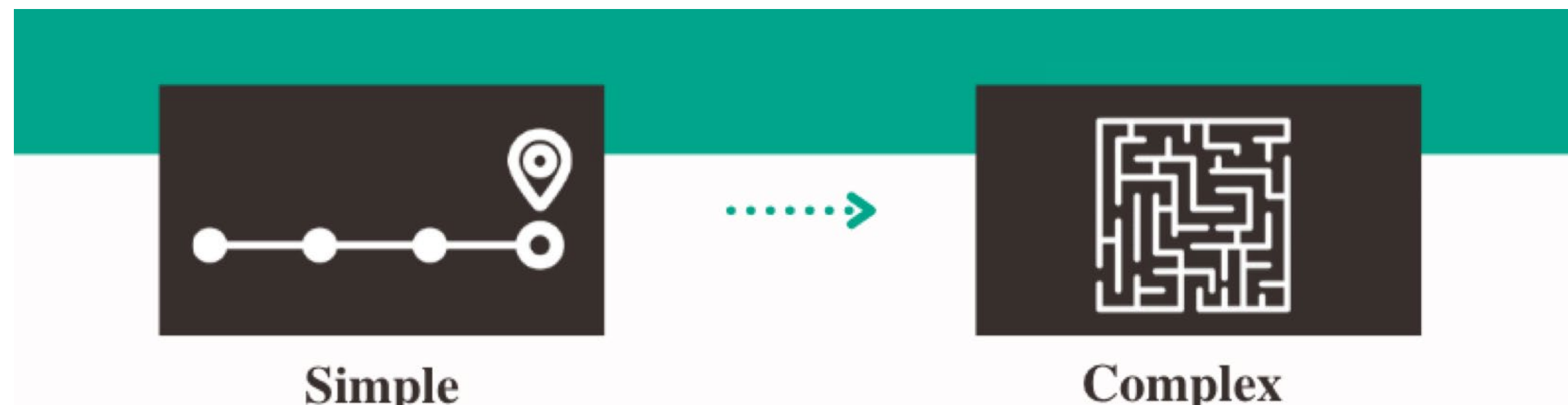


**CONFIDENCE:** Clients develop their confidence to manage conflict now and in the future.



# REAL Conflict Coaching™

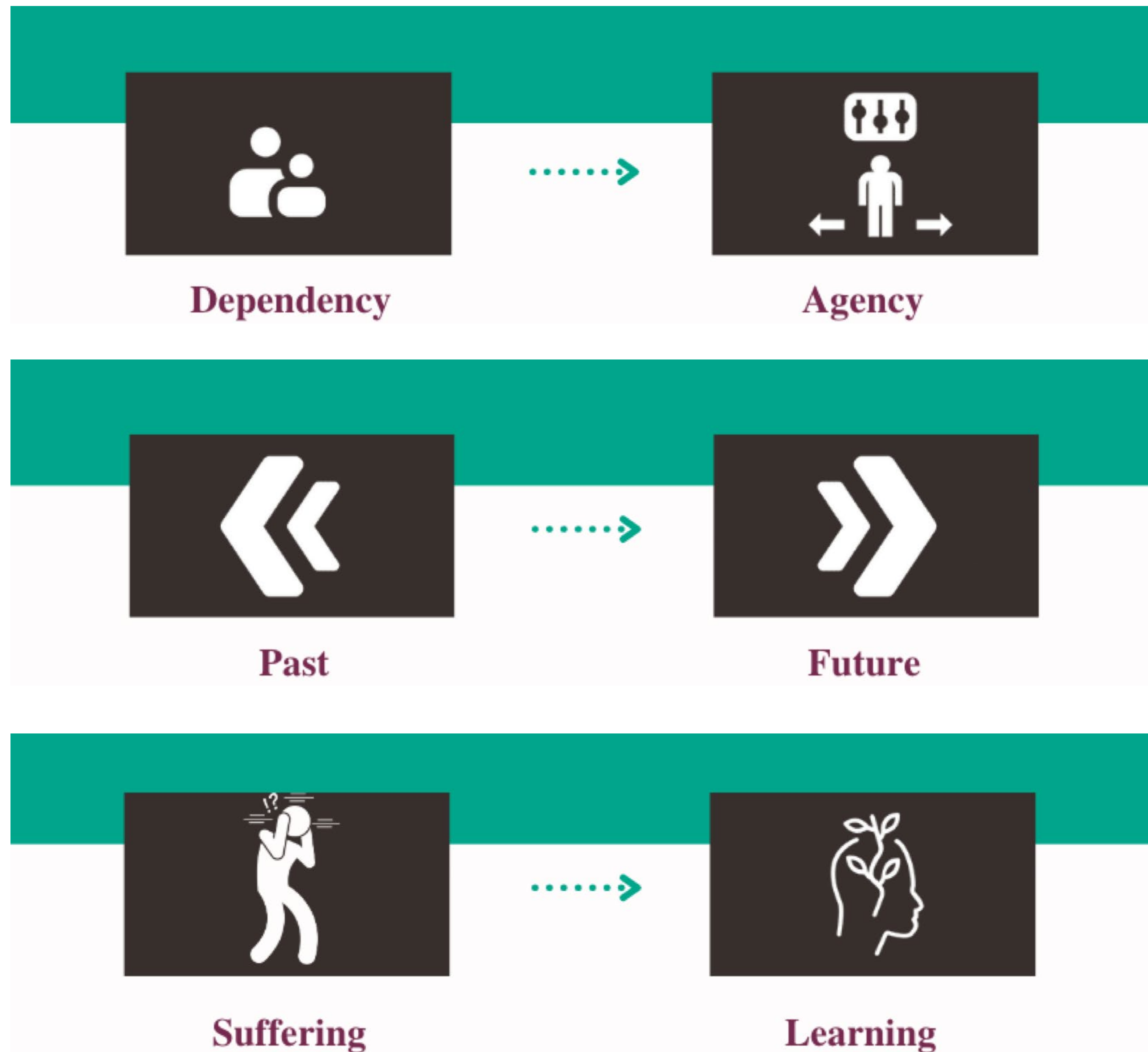
helps people make six important shifts for a constructive conflict mindset:





# REAL Conflict Coaching™

helps people make six important shifts for a constructive conflict mindset:





# The REAL conflict coaching system



INTAKE

Goal setting

What happened?

Why does it matter?

Other perspectives

Preferred future

Action steps

Reflection

Closure

EXIT



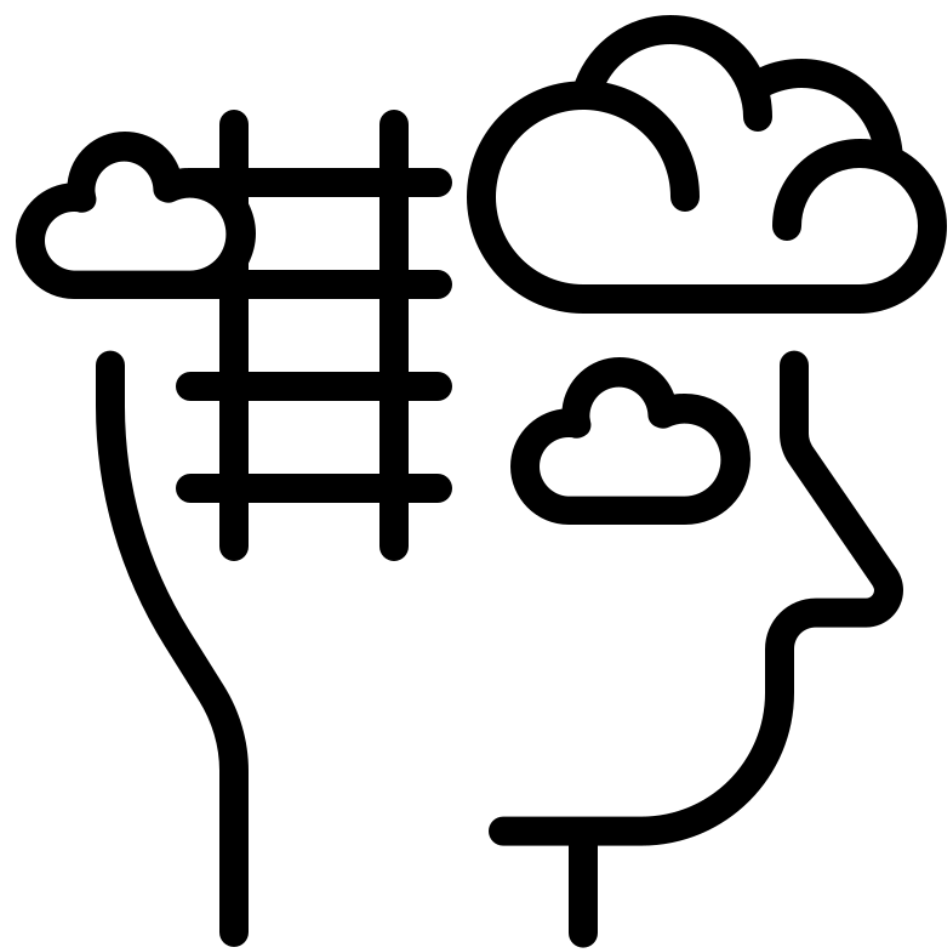
# When and where is conflict coaching used?

- As a stand-alone process to help with a current or future conflict
- To build capacity of people in conflict (or those who support others to manage conflict)
- As an alternative to mediation (and other processes)
- Pre- and post-mediation (or other process like group facilitation)
- Within workplaces (either using an external coach, an internal coach, or by managers)
- In the family law sector (e.g. to help parents develop and implement parenting agreements)
- In schools and universities (to provide students with support in managing conflict with their peers (e.g. SCSS, website))
- By senior executives and leaders (to help them develop their conflict management leadership skills)
- In community and international peacebuilding programs (e.g. international NGOs to capacity-build local leaders)





# Why is conflict coaching used?



**It's about capacity building (not just conflict resolution).**

- The other party is not willing or available to engage in a mediation or other process
- The client does not feel ready to engage in mediation or other process but wants to do something
- The goal is to build long term conflict management skills rather than “just” conflict resolution
- Confidentiality or informality are critical
- To prepare for a process (like mediation, investigation)
- To avoid escalating
- Time- and cost-efficient
- Improves individual capacity



# Why clients engage in conflict coaching

- To develop better conflict management and communication skills (e.g. sent by management/ HR or self-referred)
- To prepare for an important/ difficult conversation/meeting
- To gain more clarity around what's important to them when they need to make an important decision (whether to take on a new role, etc.)
- To identify and explore options when they feel powerless and choiceless
- To develop more confidence working in a challenging team/environment





Conflict coaching to support conflict resolution processes (e.g. mediation)

# People attending mediation may ...



...not have their facts straight before they start

...not have a mindset that makes them open to having a constructive conflict conversation

...not be ready to face the challenges of the kinds of conversations that take place in a mediation

...not be ready and able to regulate and express their emotions in a helpful way





**The difference  
conflict coaching  
makes to mediation:**

Improved Readiness and  
Mindset of Parties  
Greater Mediation Efficiency  
and Long-Term Success



# Improved Readiness and Mindset



Constructive conflict  
engagement mindset

- More realistic, complex and nuanced version of events
- Recognition that there may be unknowns
- Openness to new information / perspectives
- Regulate and express emotions effectively
- Communicate (more) effectively
- Better understanding of their needs and interests (and those of other party)
- Willingness to engage and contribute to improving the situation
- Recognition of choices
- Prepared for a range of experiences and outcomes
- Future-focused





## Greater Mediation Efficiency and Long- Term Success

Less work that has to be done in the mediation itself – saves time and money

Agreements reached at mediation are more likely to last

# Referral to / delivery of conflict coaching prior to another process may not be possible, BUT...

...having CC skills and techniques can support the work of:

mediators

RJ convenors

lawyers







## INTAKE

Goal setting

What happened?

Why does it matter?

Other perspectives

Preferred future

Action steps

Reflection

Closure

## EXIT

# Skills and Techniques



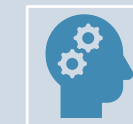
Rapport building



Deep Listening



Summarising



Acknowledging and reflecting



Open Questioning



Appropriate language



Carefully challenging someone's story



Giving constructive feedback





## Why mediators benefit from CC skills and techniques

One-on-one engagement is an essential part of the process (intake and private sessions)

Most CC skills are also important to a range of mediation models and stages

Able to offer additional /alternative service to a client if a mediation does not eventuate (not suitable, other party does not want to participate)





# Why convenors benefit from conflict coaching skills

One-on-one preparatory (and follow up) work is essential to effective restorative justice convening



# CC for convenors - Background

My research (especially RJ and justice needs of victim-survivors )

RJ conferencing training

Work for ARJC and engagement with conveners

Collaboration with Richard Denning (Director ACT RJ unit)

- Article in ARJC Journal
- facilitated conversation at National Mediation Conference 2025
- Webinar at CMA later this year



**National Mediation Conference • 1st**

Connecting Dispute Resolution practitioners : expanding the Dispute Res...

2w •

Presenter Profile : [Judith Rafferty](#) and [Richard Denning](#)

Workshop: "Conflict coaching techniques and skills for convenors: Preparing parties for RJ conferences"

NMC2025 brings together world-class thinkers in mediation, peacemaking, and conflict resolution.

Join us in Sydney for three days of inspiring speakers, real-world insights, and transformative dialogue.

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Conference Theme: "The Peace Equation: Crafting and Connecting"

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# Typical “one-on-one” challenges for convenors

Motivate parties to participate in RJ and have reference points to address resistance throughout the preparation stage

Support parties to evaluate options, anticipate consequences, and make informed decisions.

Encourage persons responsible to recognize the impact of their actions and take meaningful responsibility.

Help persons harmed identify and articulate their justice needs and communicate them effectively in a conference.

Help parties anticipate impacts, consider outcomes, and prepare for various scenarios.



# Practical CC skills and techniques for convenors

- Overall preparation of all parties
- “Goal setting” stage to clarify and strengthen party motivation to participate as well as justice needs
- “Preferred Future” stage to develop realistic expectation around what can be achieved in a conference
- Reframing and future focus to help parties move from helplessness and despair to empowerment
- Development of choices and agency should other party not want to engage in a conference
- “Reflection” stage to support everyone experiencing the process as meaningful as possible
- Carefully challenging someone’s story and using “others’ perspectives” to increase insight on harm caused and responsibility-taking of offenders (especially when the offender sees themselves as a victim too or struggles with denial)
- “Preferred future” stage can support effective communication, e.g. of constructive articulation of apologies



# Ethical and practical challenges & considerations when adapting coaching to RJ

**Role Clarity** – Blurred lines between coach and convenor raise ethical and consent issues.

**Autonomy vs. Accountability** – Coaching empowers; RJ requires harm acknowledgment and responsibility.

**Narrative Risks** – Challenging stories in RJ can risk victim-blaming or minimizing harm.

**Process Boundaries** – Coaching is flexible; RJ must align with justice goals, timelines and safety.

**Trauma & Culture** – RJ requires deeper trauma-informed, culturally aware practice



# How lawyers benefit from conflict coaching skills



## **1. Deeper Client Connection and Clarity**

Conflict coaching equips lawyers to listen beyond the legal facts, ask more insightful questions, and respond with empathy.

## **2. More Constructive, Focused Clients**

Coaching supports clients to manage emotions, shift from blame to problem-solving, and engage more productively.

## **3. Improved Negotiation Outcomes**

Clients become clearer on their goals, less reactive, and more solution-focused

## **4. Expanded Professional Value**

Lawyers can offer coaching as a distinct or complementary service, participate in collaborative or restorative processes, and position themselves as trusted problem-solvers, not just legal experts.



# Becoming a conflict coach/ developing CC skills

- Conflict coaches are trained
  - as a coach (adult and reflective learning)
  - in conflict dynamics / conflict analysis
- Conflict coaches frequently offer other conflict resolution services (e.g. mediation and facilitation)
- Mediation and RJ training frequently focuses on facilitation skills rather than one-on-one engagement
- Conflict Coaching training is offered by several training providers in Australia (e.g. QLD Government)
- “Conflict Coaching Fundamentals” course at the Conflict Management Academy (CMA) that leads to accreditation with Conflict Coaching International (*usually fully online but option to offer face-to-face in Cairns (or elsewhere)*)



REAL Conflict Coaching Fundamentals is an online training module designed to be completed at your own pace. During this course you will cover introductory materials relating to conflict and coaching, and you will learn and practise the REAL Conflict Coaching System and skills.



# References

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## CONFLICT COACHING FUNDAMENTALS WORKING WITH CONFLICT STORIES

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