

# My Definition of Confrontation

**Balancing confrontation with personal risk taking.** *Confrontation is a respectful interaction between two people, when one caring person is willing to disclose their internal responses to another's behavior.* Confrontation is caring enough to say something. In the text for this course, the purpose of group work is to “discover ourselves as feeling persons and to identify the defenses that prevent this discovery.”

We are well-defended beings. We all put walls of protection between others and us. It becomes hard to see each other through these walls and to interact freely. Protection in this sense is over-protection. When these walls of safety are threatened we sense it with alarm. At some level we fear the loss of the thing we value the most—our safety. *Confrontation*, in the sense of our walls being challenged by someone, is a term that carries a negative connotation. We usually think “to confront” is to attack. How can confrontations, then, be any good? Confrontation must be defined carefully by asking *what* is being confronted and how. The target of confrontation is not the person but the walls that hide the person from meaningful connection.

Confrontation is distorted and dishonest when it is done without the concept of “*leveling*” on the part of the one doing the confronting. As defined in the text, *leveling* is the ability to “*respond openly to being confronted... We level when we take the risk of being known, by spontaneously reporting our feelings... If instead of leveling, we respond without naming a feeling [our own feelings]... we are hiding.*” Confrontation without risk taking is usually little more than an aggressive form of hiding. It is not confrontation in the sense meant here because it is not an honest and authentic expression of our true self to another human being.

**When to confront.** Confrontation is necessary to the successful treatment of addictions. It is a skill that helps during the conflict stage(s) of a group's life cycle. However, even the gentlest of confronting can be experienced as an attack. It is therefore helpful to be mindful of three competencies mentioned in the text: “(1) the ability to pick the proper affective moment, (2) the ability to discern that the members can handle it, and (3) the ability to see that the member can profit from it.”

**Do's and Don'ts.** To confront is to take a risk and it therefore takes courage. It is important to be clear about *what* you are confronting. Stick with the “**data**,” the facts and the behaviors. Avoid confronting based on your opinions about what someone might be thinking or feeling. Don't take guesses. Check it out by respectfully exploring it first. The data are the actual, observable behaviors—not your impressions or interpretations. Don't judge. When confronting, you are *disclosing your internal responses*, such as your own feelings about the matter. Confronting is not interpreting the motives of the other person and then attacking. It is sharing our responses of concern regarding the actions of the other person. Confronting is not an opportunity to give advice to the other person. Instead of saying, “Don't let other people walk all over you so much” you could say “When others walk all over you I feel angry at them for doing it, and upset at you for not protecting yourself.” Examples: (the **data** are in bold; the *self-disclosures* are italicized)

- “Your **voice is loud**. I find that a little *frightening*.”
- “You have **not spoken** today in this group session. Your silence makes me *feel uneasy*.”
- “You say **you can go into the bars and just have a coke**. I *fear* that you are taking a risk with your sobriety.”
- “Every time I speak, **you cut me off**. I *don't like* it and I *want* you to quit interrupting me.”

Confront your fellow group members like a doctor confronts a wound—to clean and bandage it; with skill, with care, and with healing in mind. “If it is harmful, it is not good confrontation.”