

## OTPIC Officially Retired

As of December 2, 2005, the Online Training Program on Intractable Conflict (OTPIC) has been officially retired, and is *no longer open to new registrations*.

The successor to OTPIC is a course called [Dealing Constructively with Intractable Conflicts \(DCIC\)](#). The new curriculum is built around one of our major projects, [Beyond Intractability](#), and offers a much more extensive and informative set of learning materials than that available through OTPIC.



## International Online Training Program On Intractable Conflict

Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, USA

# General Information about Communication Problems

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Almost all conflicts involve communication problems, as both a cause and an effect. Misunderstandings, resulting from poor communication, can easily cause a conflict or make it worse. Further, once a conflict has started, communication problems often develop because people in conflict do not communicate with each other as frequently, as openly, and as accurately as they do when relationships are not strained. Thus communication is central to most conflict situations.

Communication involves at least two parties--the speaker and the listener. Sometimes there are third parties: in-between people who carry messages from one person to another, or the media, for example, which has such transmission of information as its primary goal. Problems can develop at all three of these sources.

Speakers often are not clear themselves about what they mean, which almost assures that what they say will be unclear as well. Even when people know what they mean, they often do not say it as clearly as they should. They may hide their true feelings or ideas intentionally or unintentionally. Either way, people often get confused about other people's messages. This is especially common when people from different cultures try to communicate. Even if their languages are the same, culture acts like a lens through which we see and interpret the world. If their cultures are different, it is easy for the same statement to mean one thing to one person and something different to someone else. Thus intercultural communication is especially prone to errors.

Listeners also are sources of communication problems. People often fail to listen carefully. They may assume they know what the other person is saying or will say (because they have heard it before, or they assume that one person is "just like" another person from the same group). Also, when people are in conflict, they often concentrate more on what they are going to say in response to their opponent's statement, rather than listening to their opponents' words with full attention. The result, again, is misunderstandings, and often unnecessary escalation of a conflict.

Third parties can make communication better, or they can make it worse. Skilled third parties can help speakers clarify what they are saying, and they can help listeners hear what is really meant. They can act as go-betweens, carrying messages between people who cannot or will not meet face-to-face.

Unskilled third parties, or third parties with a different agenda can make matters worse. The media's goal, for example, is often not helping people understand each other better, but rather, presenting the story to meet the media's own goals which may be to inflame the readers' anger in order to sell more newspapers, or to support the publisher's or government's own interests and views.

Click [here](#) To read about specific Communication Problems.

## **Links to Examples of Communication Problems:**

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