

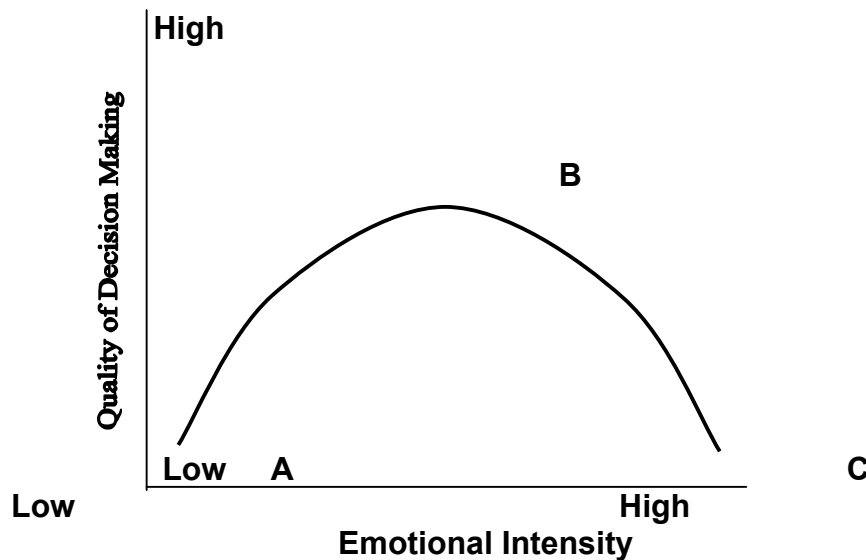
Emotional Intensity as a Cause of Impasse

Helping parties to de-escalate is important because of the relationship that exists between strong emotional reactions and the quality of decision-making. The continuum below illustrates the inverse relationship between the two. As emotional intensity increases, the quality of decision making tends to decrease.

While the inverse relationship generally holds true, there is evidence that some emotional intensity can be useful when it provides energy that can mobilize the individual for creating positive change. Too much emotional intensity, however, can become dysfunctional and problematical. The following points are illustrated with reference to the graph below:

When emotional involvement is low (at point A), people may not care enough to work toward finding solutions. As emotions rise toward (point B) there is an increasing energy to make changes. When emotions become too strong or uncontrollable (point C), parties cannot solve problems using a reasonable process.

After a certain point (Point B), the quality of decision-making falls as emotional intensity rises.



Why is it that when one party gets very emotional about something, another may have very little emotional reaction to it? *The ABCs of Anger* points to the role of meaning and interpretation in the creation of strong anger and other types of reactions.

A = The event that precedes the anger

Interacts with

B = the interpretation and meaning given to the event

Which leads to

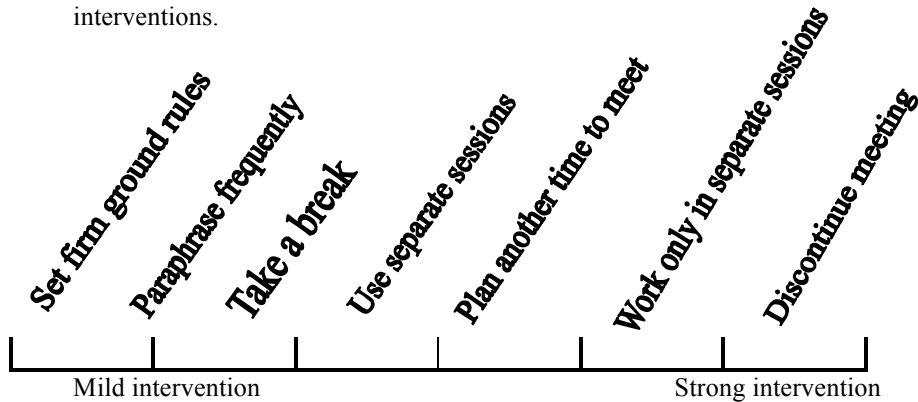
C = the emotional response resulting in specific emotions and behaviors

The mediator can begin to handle and manage the strong emotions of the parties by a combination of methods, attitudes, and techniques:

- Know and understand your own responses to anger, hot buttons and discomforts.
- Name the emotion and accept the party's right to be upset.
- Create a safe place to vent and express emotions.
- Avoid personal attacks and stay focused on the issues.
- Consider the source of the emotion. What precipitated it?

- Set ground rules of conduct and behavior.
- Ask each person to speak for themselves.
- Focus the discussion on the future and away from the past.
- Identify issues objectively. Describe the problem as mutual.
- Describe situations in neutral terms rather than judgmental terms.
- Use positive language rather than the negative words of the parties.

The Mediator can draw upon additional techniques and strategies that are a normal part of the negotiation process. They are presented along a continuum from mild intervention to strong interventions.



Resource:

1. Schroeder, J. (Winter 2007). Cognitive Reappraisal Eases Effects of Strong Emotions in Collaborative Process, Collaborative Review, 9(3), 18-19.



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