

Preventing and working through neighbourhood conflict



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E-NEWS UPDATES

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Waterloo Neighbourhoods e-newsletter includes information about neighbourhood projects, grants, ideas, and what's happening.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible formats upon request.

Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

About this guide

Neighbourhoods are diverse and vibrant spaces, but sometimes uncertainty, loss of control, and misunderstandings can make neighbour relationships difficult and stressful. This informational guide aims to help neighbours prevent conflict, approach neighbours in respectful and positive ways, and work through disputes if they arise.

By developing strong relationships and communicating effectively, neighbourhoods can be harmonious spaces where everyone feels safe, welcome, and connected. If you have any questions about information in this guide, please reach out to neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca.

What is neighbourhood conflict?

Neighbourhood conflict can be disruptive and make everyday life challenging and uncomfortable. Some of the most common neighbourhood conflicts are about things like:

- Fences,
- Trees/shrubs/plants/gardens,
- Noise,
- Lifestyle/environmental issues,
- Children or teenager behaviour,
- Dogs or other animals, and
- Invasion of privacy.

Conflict is normal and can emerge when neighbours with different priorities, attitudes, and values are living nearby. Whether the differences are real or perceived, conflict can lead to stress and tension for people involved.



Neighbourhood conflict can also occur online in spaces like Facebook groups and online chats. The tips included in this guide can help you resolve conflict in these virtual spaces. In addition, if you are a moderator of an online group and are looking for guidance to handle neighbour conflict and negative behaviour, check out the [Managing a Neighbourhood Facebook Group guide](#) for some helpful tips.

Preventing conflict

Developing positive relationships with neighbours and fostering effective communication are important ways to prevent conflict. Check out the list below for tips to help you build relationships, encourage communication, and ultimately prevent conflict between you and your neighbours:

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS BEFORE THERE IS AN ISSUE

Establishing positive relationships with your neighbours can help prevent conflict in the first place. When you know your neighbours and are comfortable having conversations, you can chat about problems before they become a major source of conflict.

To get to know your neighbours, make sure to say hello and introduce yourself. When a new neighbour moves into your neighbourhood or building, consider sending a welcome letter with a positive greeting, some information about their new community, and your contact information to help support future connections. For more details on welcoming new neighbours and building relationships, check out the Welcoming New Neighbours guide on the [neighbourhood's website](#).



Neighbourhood parties and events are also great opportunities for neighbours get to know each other and develop positive relationships. If you are thinking about planning an event for neighbours, check out the [neighbourhood's website](#) for tips and helpful information.

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR NEIGHBOURS SHOES

In urban neighbourhoods, changes to properties can greatly affect neighbours. It is important to think about this when taking actions like updating your property, getting a new pet, or hosting events and gatherings. If you are planning to do something that might affect your neighbours (like renovations, yard work, or hosting a party) let them know. Informing your neighbours ahead of time is considerate and lets them provide input.

For example, if you are planning to host a party in your backyard or a neighbourhood street concert, give your neighbours plenty of notice. When letting them know about your plans, ask them if they have any concerns and work together to determine a solution that works for both of you. For example:

- If noise is a concern, agree on a time to turn off the music;
- If parking on the street is a concern, consider other spaces for guests to park.

Informing your neighbours and planning ahead can help prevent future disagreements and tension.

BE POSITIVE AND CALM

If a neighbour is doing something that bothers you, be positive and assume the person is not aware of the problem they are creating. Before jumping to conclusions, getting frustrated, and escalating the problem (by reporting it to bylaw or police), connect with your neighbours and notify them of the issue and discuss possible solutions.

FOSTER OPEN COMMUNICATION

Creating positive relationships with your neighbour supports open communication. When neighbours feel comfortable chatting with each other, they are more likely to discuss problems before major conflicts occur. To encourage open communication consider the following tips:

- If something is bothering you, talk about it. Often we think that people know our needs and how we are feeling but in reality, they do not. If something is bothering you, connect with your neighbour and communicate your concerns.
- Welcome and connect with new neighbours early. When new neighbours move in, reach out, and welcome them to the neighbourhood. If you are comfortable, consider providing your contact information to encourage future connection. For more tips on welcoming new neighbours, check out the [neighbourhood's website](#).
- Lead by example. If you are doing something that affects your neighbour (hosting a party, planning a change to your property) connect with neighbours that may be affected. Your actions will encourage other neighbours to communicate with you in the future.

RESPECT THE PRIVACY AND DIFFERENCES OF NEIGHBOURS

Every neighbour is different, while some people may be interested in developing relationships; others are content to stick to themselves. Be respectful of how interested others are in interacting.

People are motivated by their own experiences and backgrounds, and while some things may seem wrong or strange to you, in reality they are just different. Be respectful of your neighbours, their different views, and feelings.

KEEP YOUR PROPERTY IN GOOD SHAPE

To promote positive relationships with your neighbours, it is a good idea to keep your property clean and tidy. Here are some helpful tips to consider:

- Adhere to the property standards bylaw.
- Cut your lawn regularly.
- Keep gardens neat and tidy.
- Bring garbage and recycling bins in as soon as possible.
- Promptly clear snow, ice, and other debris from sidewalks and walkways.
- Keep items like children's toys and lawn tools put away.

ATTEND COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD EVENTS

To build strong relationships with your neighbours and prevent future conflict, consider attending (or hosting) neighbourhood events. Whether it is a block party, a simple backyard barbeque, or something virtual, getting together and developing relationships with your neighbours promotes open and honest communication that can help to prevent future conflict.



If you are hosting a neighbourhood event that will affect other neighbours, like a street party or outdoor concert, take time to notify them. Consider distributing letters, posting in social media groups, and hanging posters to notify residents. To ensure you inform all neighbours, use different forms of communication.

Working through conflict

Despite our best efforts to prevent conflict, disagreement can still occur between neighbours and is a normal part of life. Although normal, resolving conflicts can sometimes be tricky and uncomfortable. This section provides tips to support neighbours and their efforts to work through conflict and difficult conversations.

KNOW YOURSELF

Before connecting with a neighbour to resolve the conflict, think about what your goals are for the conversation and resolution.

- What is the main problem that you are hoping to resolve?
- What are the key actions or changes that you would like to see?
- What are some compromises you are willing to make?

Taking time to reflect on some of these questions before chatting with your neighbour, can help focus the conversation and promote an effective resolution.

BE CALM AND TRY TO DE-ESCALATE THE SITUATION

If a neighbour approaches you with an issue, be calm, avoid becoming defensive, and let them know that you appreciate them bringing the issue to your attention. To diffuse the situation, consider the following actions:

- Thoughtfully listen to your neighbour and acknowledge that you hear their concerns and are committed to resolving the problem.
- Avoid raising your voice. Speaking calmly can help diffuse a situation and prevent the discussion from turning into an argument.
- Listen to your neighbours concerns before expressing your thoughts and feelings on the issue.
- Speak slowly and clearly throughout the conversation.
- Focus on the solution. Instead of dwelling on the problem, focus on ways you and your neighbour can work together to resolve the issue.



If you and your neighbour are struggling to come to a resolution, consider taking a step back and scheduling another time to connect. Taking a break can help reduce the tension, de-escalate the issue, and provide time for both parties to reflect and think of alternative solutions.

TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBOURS PERSPECTIVE

In every situation, there is more than one perspective. When connecting with your neighbour and working to resolve a conflict, listen to the other person's perspective and try to understand how they are feeling:

- Be curious about what the person's perspective might be. Ask your neighbour to share their perspective and acknowledge it. You can appreciate and understand someone's perspective without having to agree with it.

- If you are struggling to understand and agree with your neighbour's perspective, challenge yourself to find a small part of their perspective that you agree with. Finding common ground can help pave the way to a healthy resolution.

ACTIVELY LISTEN

When talking with neighbours and resolving conflict, make an effort to actively listen to your neighbours thoughts and perspectives. Here are some tips to help you engage in conversations:

- Listen to understand. Often when someone is talking, we are internally trying to prepare a response. Do your best to be in the moment and listen to understand.
- Ask questions and listen for the responses.
- Nod, lean in, and make eye contact. Physical cues, like nodding, show that you are engaged in the conversation and this can help make your neighbour feel valued and heard.

AVOID GETTING OTHER NEIGHBOURS INVOLVED

If you are having with an issue with a specific neighbour, avoid getting other neighbours involved. This can lead to gossip and create an uncomfortable dynamic in your neighbourhood.

CONSIDER WRITING A NOTE

If you are uncomfortable confronting your neighbour directly, consider writing a thoughtful note that identifies your concerns and expresses your interest in coming to a resolution. Leaving a note will allow your neighbour to read your concerns, process them, and connect at a time that is suitable for both parties.

While notes may be a good idea, it is hard to convey feelings/emotions through written text. When leaving a note, it is important to encourage a future conversation where both parties can connect peacefully and come to a mutual agreement. Include your contact details to encourage future discussion.

CHANGE UP THE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

If you and your neighbours are communicating over the phone or through a virtual platform (like social media, online messaging, or email), it can be helpful to change how you are connecting. Not all types of communication work for all types of conversations. Text and emails can be easily

misinterpreted and it is difficult to understand the persons tone. If you are working to resolve a conflict, it is likely best to connect with your neighbour in person.

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR BOTH PARTIES

When communicating with neighbours and resolving conflict, allow both parties to share their main concerns and interests first. Then collaborate to brainstorm potential solutions that work for both parties. When deciding on a resolution, consider the following steps:

1. Know your own needs and concerns. Consider writing these down and prioritizing them.
2. Connect with your neighbour and listen to understand their issues and needs.
3. Brainstorm a list of potential solutions and review how they align with both you and your neighbours needs.
4. Work together to select the solution that works for both parties. Be willing to compromise throughout this process.

REMEMBER WHAT IS IN YOUR CONTROL

When resolving conflict, it is important to remember what you can control and what you cannot. Focus on the things you can control, such as:

- Your behaviours and how you communicate,
- How you react to situations and triggers, and
- Your daily choices.

If you are having difficulty controlling the conversation and things are becoming intense, step back and consider getting help when needed.

GET HELP WHEN NEEDED

Not all disputes with neighbours are solvable with simple communication. If you have discussed the problem with your neighbour and are struggling to come to a resolution, or the issue continues to persist, it may be worth seeking the help of a third party.

If you are struggling to come to a resolution with your neighbour, mediation may be a helpful next step. For more information on mediation, continue reading.

EXPLORE MEDIATION

Mediation is a process where a neutral mediator guides you and your neighbour through stages in a discussion. The goal of this guided discussion is to come to an agreement that meets the needs of all parties.

Local organizations, like Community Justice Initiatives (CJI), offer free mediation services for neighbours. CJI assists neighbours to resolve conflicts over noise complaints, property boundaries, personal differences, parking complaints, snow removal, landlord/tenant issues, and more. Referrals can be received from city bylaw officers, police officers, community agencies, or individuals. Diffusing these issues leads to safer, more welcoming neighbourhoods.

Community Justice Initiatives Waterloo Region (CJI) is a non-profit organization known worldwide for starting the first modern Restorative Justice program. Restorative Justice is a way of addressing conflict and crime that engages the person who caused the harm, people who were affected by the harm, and the community. To learn more about mediation and the services offered by CJI, visit [their website](#).

CONTACT BYLAW OR POLICE

When possible, neighbours are encouraged to work together to solve issues through conversations and supports like mediation. When other attempts have been unsuccessful, the situation is unsafe, or harm may occur, it may be appropriate to involve bylaw and police.

Although involving bylaw and police may stop the disruptive behaviour, it is important to recognize that this could have negative effects. Potentially, this action could:

- Negatively impact existing relationships with neighbours;
- Prevent the development of future relationships;
- Influence how future disagreements are handled;
- Negatively affect neighbours feelings of safety and belonging;
- Be unhelpful as it may not be an appropriate situation to involve bylaw and police;
- Heighten existing conflict; and,
- Create an ongoing neighbour dispute.



Reporting your concern to bylaw and police should never be used as a way to retaliate or 'get-back' at your neighbour.

Due to the potential consequences, when you are comfortable and feel safe, consider connecting with your neighbour or engaging in mediation before involving bylaw and police.

Helpful resources

- Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) is a local organization that offers mediation services and training for community members. For more information on their services visit [CJI's website](#).
- The Ripple Effect Education (TREE) offers skilled-based programs and workshops to equip youth with the skills they need to resolve conflict in healthy and independent ways. If you are interested in learning more about the programs, check out [their website](#).
- For more tips on communication and resolving conflict, check out these helpful [blog posts](#) written by a conflict and communication coach.
- To access more information on city bylaws and to make a report online, visit the City of Waterloo [bylaw and enforcement webpage](#).
- To report non-emergency concerns, visit the [Waterloo Regional Police website](#).