

TIPS FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT WITH NEIGHBORS

Your behavior affects your neighbors, just as what they do affects you. The primary way to prevent conflict with neighbors is to *be* a good neighbor. Simple consideration and conversation with neighbors helps achieve a peaceful coexistence. Below are a few tips:

Meet Your Neighbor: Introduce yourself, learn each other's names, and regularly say "hello" or "good morning" before there is any need or problem.

Keep Your Neighbors Informed: Contact your neighbors before undertaking something that might affect them—such as hosting a big party, building a fence, cutting down a tree or getting a puppy.

Be Aware of Differences: Differences in age, ethnic background, or years in the neighborhood can lead to conflicting expectations or misunderstandings. Make an effort to talk with and understand each other. Focus on what you have in common with a neighbor.

Consider Your Neighbor's Point of View: Literally! How does your compost pile, play equipment, or car repair look from your neighbors' backyard or windows? Keep areas in others' view reasonably presentable.

Be Appreciative: If a neighbor does something you like, tell them! They will be pleased to hear you appreciate their gestures of friendliness or that you noticed the yard work or home improvement they are working on. It will be easier to talk later if a conflict does arise.

Assume the Best: Most likely, your neighbors don't know that they are annoying you. You may not have the same expectations regarding privacy, noise, parking, etc. Most people don't intentionally try to create problems. Presume the neighbor doesn't know about the annoyance. Jumping to conclusions can decrease the possibility of an easy resolution.

Pick Your Timing: Don't begin a discussion when you are upset, the other person is leaving for work, or you have just had a terrible day. Pick a time when you can both take time to listen.

Give Information: Do not interpret your neighbor's behavior – as in: "You are blocking my driveway on purpose!" Instead, give information about what the problem is and how it affects you: "When your car blocks my driveway, I am unable to get to work on time."

Show That You are Listening: Give the other person a chance to hear you, think about it, and respond. Relax and listen—try to hear how the other person feels. You may or may not agree with everything that is being said, but the fact that you are discussing the problem together is a good thing.

Show Respect: Talk directly to the person with whom you have a problem instead of sending a letter, banging on the wall, or complaining to everyone else. Do not gossip.

Cooperate and Be Specific: Two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. A specific agreement such as "I will turn off my music at midnight" is better than a vague "I won't play loud music late at night".

Stay in Contact: Having regular and positive contact with one another is a wonderful way to maintain a positive relationship. If you are having positive interactions with your neighbors, if and when you do have a conflict it will be easier to address.

Get Help When Needed: At times you may need the help of a neutral third party trained in conflict resolution. If it seems that your efforts to communicate with a neighbor are not resolving the issue, do not hesitate to call your local community mediation program.

This document is adapted from:

Community Mediation Services: CMS offers Clark County residents an informal, private way to improve communications and resolve disagreements. Visit www.cityofvancouver.us or call 360.619.1140.

Neighborhood Mediation Program: Resolutions Northwest provides free mediation services for neighbors within the City of Portland. Contact 503.595.4890 or visit www.resolutionsnorthwest.org.