

A model to help us deal with challenging situations

The M.O.T. Process

To help us keep safe “on the road” with others

- Sometimes we feel uncomfortable in situations with other people.
- Sometimes we get upset because of what somebody said or did, or didn't do.
- Sometimes we are in situations of conflict or potential conflict with others.

These situations can be very challenging, particularly if the relationship matters to us.

The **M.O.T.** process can help us to avoid **reacting** and to find more effective ways of **responding**.

When we **react** there is a risk that we will say something that is blameful, judgemental or criticising. The other person may experience this as an attack, thus making the situation worse and preventing us from getting what we want. This may also damage the relationship.

The **M.O.T.** process can help us to **stop and think** constructively. It is a structured way to give ourselves time to work out what is really going on. After putting our problem through an **M.O.T.** it will then be easier for us to **respond** more effectively instead of **reacting**.

How does the M.O.T. process work?

When working through problems with others and challenging situations it is helpful to follow these three steps and ask ourselves the following questions:

Me	What is going on for me? How am I feeling ? What do I need that I am not getting? What do I need to happen differently?
Other	What is going on for the other person? How are they feeling ? What do they need ? What are they trying to get for themselves?
Take action	What can I or we do to meet our needs? What is the best way to find a win-win solution for both of us?

Me: It is crucial that my first step is to get in touch with myself in order to understand the reason for my discomfort or upset. An effective way of knowing what is causing my problem and understanding why I am upset is to become more aware of my feelings, those on the surface, and those underneath.

There is always a good reason for our emotions and feelings. They are like signals or monitors constantly telling us how well our needs are being met. If something important for us is missing, if one or more of our needs is not being met or is violated, then it is natural that we feel some kind of upset. This is often some degree of anger, fear or sadness or a mixture of these. Working through this process, making sense of what is going on for me, will help me to identify my feelings and needs, and then to **acknowledge, understand and accept** them. We could call this process **self-empathy**.

Ignoring and suppressing emotions and needs can be harmful for our wellbeing, whilst empathy is a good way to feel better about ourselves. The more we understand and accept our feelings the easier it is to step back from their powerful grip and the more effectively we can help ourselves to calm down and relax. When we feel too upset it becomes much harder, even impossible, to think of others, because our strong emotions tend to flood our brain and hinder our ability to think clearly. However, when our distress has subsided enough through self-empathy and we are feeling a little calmer and more relaxed, it is usually easier to consider others and attempt to understand them.

Other: When trying to understand what is going on for the other person and working out what they might be feeling and the need(s) they are trying to meet, it could be helpful to bear in mind:

- Even though all behaviour is an attempt to meet needs, to get something important for oneself, people are not always aware of their needs, particularly when they are acting impulsively.
- It is useful to separate **behaviour** from **feelings** and **needs**. Feelings and needs are always valid in themselves. It is the behaviour we might have a problem with. We might find somebody's behaviour unacceptable because it violates our needs.
For example, somebody gets very frustrated because the other person is ignoring them; then they start shouting abusively. Whilst their anger and need to be heard are understandable and valid, their aggressive behaviour is likely to be considered unacceptable by the other person because it violates their need for respect and safety.
- Sometimes all we can do is to make some reasonable assumptions. However, it is best to check these with the other person, whenever possible.

When we manage to understand the need(s) underlying this behaviour that we find difficult, it is easier for us to reduce the strong emotions that were initially triggered. It is also easier to deal with conflict when we are able to remain connected to the other person (empathy), whilst not accepting their behaviour.

Take action: Even though it is common for many of us to quickly jump to "fix it" solutions when we face a problem, deciding what to do in a challenging situation is greatly helped by time spent working out the roots of the problem. Dealing with the cause is usually more effective than dealing with the symptoms alone. Frequently, problems centre around unmet needs. After understanding which of my needs and the needs of others are unmet, after understanding what important things are missing for each one, then a mutual beneficial solution often arises.

Conflict situations are about colliding needs. Working out ways in which everybody gets their needs met is the most effective way of resolving conflict. Sometimes this is complicated and needs time. Sometimes it is not possible to meet the needs of both at the same time and decisions need to be made about who is going to wait. When this happens it is important that those who will wait know that their needs will be met in the end. Sometimes people need to negotiate about the most appropriate way of meeting their needs. This is best done when both are aware of their particular needs and can express them. Often just being heard by a supportive listener is enough for us to work out for ourselves the unmet needs. Sometimes it is helpful to reach some form of compromise, but this will only work if both people recognise that their needs are adequately met by this compromise.

Sometimes I might decide that it is not possible for me to get my needs met in a particular situation or with the help of a particular person. If this arises it might be helpful to withdraw and seek alternative, more effective ways, of getting what I need for myself.

Unfortunately there are no tools or skills that will always work in every case, because situations are always different and needs change all the time. This is one of life's challenges that requires awareness and creativity.

However there are some **general tools** that will be useful in many different situations:

- Constantly acknowledge your own feelings and needs. Stay connected to these throughout the whole process, including when you are considering the other person
- Give others understanding and acknowledgement for their feelings and needs
- Separate **behaviour** from **feelings** and **needs**
- Use listening skills to connect to others and to help them understand their feelings and needs
- Express your feelings and needs in a clear, respectful and assertive way using "I" sentences
- Ask others to help you meet your needs, using reasonable and realistic requests, rather than demands
- Negotiate
- Accept that sometimes it is not appropriate or possible to get your needs met with the help of a specific person at a particular time. When this happens seek alternative, more realistic ways of getting what you need