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**Tony Whatling (2023) Dealing with Disputes and
Conflict: A self-help tool-kit for resolving
arguments in everyday life, Routledge**

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Book Review by Dr Treasa Kenny

Dealing with Disputes and Conflict

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This book is primarily aimed at people who are involved in disputes in their lives and work. These may be people working in a range of professional contexts such as human resources, line management, health and social cares, education and counselling. The anticipated reader is identified as a 'lay mediator' who is not trained, qualified or experienced in the subject or activity of mediation. With over 50 years' experience of working with people in dispute, the author brings the area to life through the use of everyday language, practical examples and thoughtful explanation. Interestingly, from Chapter 8 onwards there is much that is also useful and relevant to professional mediators.

In the course of its 78 pages split into 14 chapters, this book sets out practical strategies and solutions to resolve dispute and conflict. The book begins by grounding the reader into important concepts such as defining mediation practice in Chapter 1, exploring the various theoretical lens for dispute resolution in Chapter 2, and discussing transactional analysis as a way to understand everyday interpersonal communication in Chapter 3.

The next section of the book offers the reader the opportunity to self-assess their own strengths and development goals in terms of being an effective mediator (Chapter 4). A particularly important message here is building the capacity to remain in the ‘adult’ state previously explained in relation to transactional analysis. Building from here, Chapters 5 through to Chapter 7 set out the tool-kit of the book’s title with an exploration of core skills and strategies needed by dispute resolvers.

Then the book moves on to raising the reality of disputes where the people involved do not immediately respond to the resolution process. Apology and reconciliation are considered, particularly the need for apology to be genuine and constructive (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 brings us to the modern dilemma of social media conflicts while Chapter 10 introduces additional ideas and concepts to supplement the tool-kit.

In Chapter 11 the book offers ‘health warnings’ in terms of safe practice including safety for all, facilitating constructive processes and thinking through potential consequences of engaging in dispute resolution. Chapter 12 was originally published as an article in 2015 and it asks the reader to consider the degree to which dispute resolvers do or do not apply what they know to their own life conflicts. Chapter 13 provides case examples from various dispute contexts to offer the reader insight into how the book’s content can be applied in reality.

The final chapter of the book offers an overview of dispute resolution in the United Kingdom as well as guiding the reader to reflect on their learning from the book. It also provides recommended reading to continue learning about this area.

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