

Avoiding the Pitfalls of Social Media

Social media sites such as Nextdoor and Facebook are great tools for communicating and sharing with your neighbors. Garage sales, yard work and baby-sitting services help connect neighbors. Reporting burglaries, construction and other tips help keep everyone informed.

However, social media does not replace the value of face-to-face communication. Knowing the names of your neighbors, waving as you pass by and talking over the fence as you barbecue on the weekend helps humanize your relationships and makes it easier to address any issues when they arise.

If your neighborhood uses one of the social media platforms and it gets abused, what do you do? The personal attacks and the side comments make it difficult for constructive problem solving and tends to escalate simple issues into complex ones. Neighbors start to take sides, fingers get pointed, and mistrust ensues.

According to Dr. Curt Bechler of Venture International, there are steps that you can take when social media platforms start to create conflict:

- *Use their suggestions and ideas when possible:* there actually may be some constructive feedback in the post; take a deep breath and try to avoid immediately reacting.
- *Engage twice, then end with an invitation to talk off-line, one-on-one:* stop feeding the criticism and negativity; demonstrate your willingness to address privately and problem solve.
- *Invite off-line conversation:* acknowledge the comments and immediately demonstrate that you want to talk about this privately and will not engage online.
- *Focus on the issues and solutions, not the individual(s):* “be hard on the problem and soft on the people”. If the post states “Joe drives like a maniac and nearly killed my kid!” Respond: “It sounds like you are concerned about safety and would like Joe to drive the speed limit.” Safety is the issue.

If your association is using a social media platform, displaying guidelines for the use and purpose of the platform will help the moderator know when to intervene and delete inappropriate comments. This can include clear instructions for how the site is to be used and how inappropriate comments will be handled.

Community Mediation Services offers training in conflict management strategies and skills as well as facilitation and mediation services.

Communication with our neighbors is important and sometimes it can be challenging.

Community Mediation Services is here to help support strong communities.

You can solve it. We can help.

Community Mediation Services, 360-334-5862, www.mediationclarkcounty.org