

# SDDFS NOTES

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## Special Points of Interest:

- Conflict Resolution Techniques
- Proven Programs
- Lake County's Second Step Program
- What the research says about conflict resolution and peer mediation

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## Conflict Resolution Education

Conflict is a natural, normal process. We all experience it. What differs is how we deal with conflict in our lives. Toddlers, often-times, deal with conflict physically; they hit, bite, push and shove. Hopefully, by the time we are adults we have learned how to deal with conflict in a more positive way: communication. We use our words. Unfortunately, these communication skills are sometimes difficult to learn, and not always learned through personal experience.

Educators spend an inordinate amount of time and energy managing disputes between students. Where educators once dealt with gum-chewing and other minor infractions, increasingly they are having to worry about violence-related issues both in their class-

rooms and throughout the school campus.

Many people feel that the frequency and severity of conflicts are increasing in schools. Children are growing up in a society that accepts a degree of violence as normal (See Figure A, p. 3). The reasons for and degree of conflicts in schools are debatable. Do schools merely reflect an increasingly more violent society? Has the violence in schools been overestimated and over emphasized?

Regardless of the root causes, conflict and its ensuing violence is present in our schools. The more immediate causes vary from school to school depending largely on age, socioeconomic status and other demo-



graphics. Several studies have suggested that the most common types of conflict in schools are verbal harassment, verbal arguments, rumors and gossip, physical fights, and dating or relationship issues (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Statistics indicate that conflicts become physically aggressive faster in more urban schools as well as in schools serving younger students (Johnson & Johnson, 1996, p. 469).

For the past twenty to thirty years, schools have become more and

See Overview, Page 2.

## What the Research Says



### Is CR/PM Effective?

#### Strengths:

- Students achieve higher levels of academic performance (as cited in Carruthers, et al., p. 7).
- Students learn a variety of prosocial attitudes (ibid).
- Students apply the skills they have learned to actual conflict situations (ibid).
- Peer mediation programs produce agreement rates 80-95% of the time (ibid).
- Disputes that are resolved through peer mediators tend to endure (ibid).
- Student—student conflicts referred to teachers are reduced (Johnson, 1996, p. 494).

## Conflict Resolution, Overview

Continued from page 1

more interested in adopting programs that help students solve their disputes. Conflict Resolution (CR) programs aim to teach students to manage anger, control aggressive responses, understand conflict, and avoid and diffuse potentially physically violent confrontations.

The goal of conflict resolution education is to promote the understanding of conflict and to help individuals develop the ability to deal with conflicts effectively and constructively in their lives. Conflict resolution means settling or solving a disagreement between two or more people. Effective conflict resolution addresses the root issues of the conflict and aims at solutions that will make the situation better in the future for all individuals involved. By developing conflict resolution skills, students can approach conflict in a thoughtful, meaningful way that produces satisfying, positive results.

Conflict resolution has shown itself to be a promising strategy in violence prevention. It has been found to successfully aid students in solving conflicts in and out of class. It has also been credited with increasing prosocial attitudes. A certain type of conflict resolution, known as *Academic Controversy*, has even been credited with increasing academic achievement (Carruthers et al. p. 6 and Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p. 105).

Another type of program that is often associated with conflict

resolution is peer mediation. Peer mediation (PM) training is provided to a few students to mediate disputes between other students. Student mediators are taught to remain impartial. They generally are the same age as the disputants. Both conflict resolution and peer mediation allow students to settle disagreements peacefully amongst themselves. Research data has indicated that peer mediation is an effective strategy in reducing violence only when combined with a systematic social skills program (such as the skills that are taught in a conflict resolution program). In the absence of social skills training, evidence suggests that peer mediation may do more harm than good (As cited in Bender, p. 104).

Conflict resolution and peer mediation involve teaching students how to think, how to reason and how to communicate with each other. These are not skills that are easily taught, educators have been trying to convey these skills to their students for hundreds of years. Currently, there are thousands of different conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in use throughout the world. This publication will explore a few of the proven programs listed in the *Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program Inventory* and will provide other valuable resources in the areas of conflict resolution and peer mediation.

## Second Step in Lake County, FL —



Lake County is using a combination of proven programs from the *Safe and Drug Free Schools Program Inventory* as part of their violence prevention program. According to Donna Coates, the Lake County SDFS Coordinator, Second Step is working especially well in her district.

Second Step is being used as part of the social studies curriculum in seven of the twelve middle schools in Lake County.

The teachers implementing the program find it very teacher-friendly and believe that it is helping them reach their violence prevention goals. Evaluation studies of the Second Step program in Lake County show the following results:

- A three year decrease in disorderly conduct incidents in middle schools in Lake County. Statistics are as follows: 9.3 per 1000 students in 2000-2001, 6.3 per 1000 students in 2001-2002, and 4.9 incidents per 1000 students in 2002-2003.
- An average knowledge gain of 60% of participants based on pre/post-test scores during the 2002-2003 academic year.
- In a 2001-2002 survey, when asked if Second Step was good for your school, student participants responded positively by a ratio of 4 to 1.
- In a 2001-2002 survey, the majority of teachers recommended that Second Step absolutely be taught in their schools and even expanded to other schools during the 2002-2003 academic year.

**Figure A.** (As Cited in DeJong, 1994)  
**Percentage of High School Students in Agreement with Attitude and Belief Statements That Support the Use of Violence**

Attitude/Belief Statement	Percentage Agreeing
If a girl sees someone flirting with her boyfriend, she should fight with her.	81.4%
It's OK to hit someone who hits you first.	73.9%
Sometimes it is necessary to fight with people who are rude or annoying.	48.6%
If I'm challenged, I'm going to fight.	43.4%
If someone steals from me, the best way to handle it is to beat the person up.	25.6%

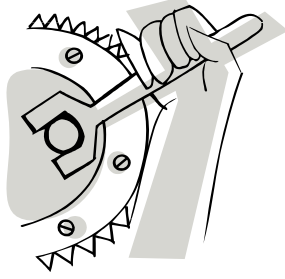
### What the Research Says



#### Is CR/PM Effective?

#### Weaknesses:

- It is not known how well students maintain conflict resolution skills and attitudes over time (Carruthers et al., p. 6).
- Peer mediation programs used in isolation (without a strong social skill-building program in place) have not been shown to be effective (As cited in Bender et al., p. 104).
- CR/PM programs are not to be used in victim/bully situations. Bullying is often based on power and control and requires adult participation and guidance. "Bullying represents an abuse and violation of another person's rights and not a conflict (Olweus, 1999)".



## Proven Programs

The Florida Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free School's Project maintains the *Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program Inventory* which includes a list of proven violence prevention programs. These programs are "based on scientifically based research that provides evidence that the programs to be used will reduce violence". For more information, visit the FIE/SDDFS website at: <http://www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs>.

### Conflict Resolution in Florida:

In Florida, twenty-one districts are implementing proven programs in the area of conflict resolution and peer mediation.

The top five proven CR/PM programs funded by Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools are :

1. Second Step
2. Peer Mediation Program
3. Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders
4. Peers Making Peace
5. Violence Prevention Curriculum for Youth Providers

## PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM

Peer Mediation Program is one component of a comprehensive school-based conflict resolution program. In this program, students are nominated to receive peer mediation training and then serve as neutral mediators who assist other students in resolving situations of conflict. The training takes approximately 12 to 15 hours over two days and includes activities related to understanding conflict, responses to conflict, origins of conflict, communication skills, the role of the mediator, and the mediation process. In addition, subsequent biweekly meetings incorporate more advanced activities such as addressing bias awareness, social and cultural diversity, advanced communication, dealing with anger, caucusing, negotiating and group problem solving.

## AGGRESSORS, VICTIMS, AND BYSTANDERS

Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders is a program designed for middle school students. It operates under the assumption that violence is learned, and can therefore be *unlearned*. The backbone of the program is the four-step "Think-First Model of Conflict Resolution". The Think-First Model provides students with a framework for dealing with and changing the habits of thought that can result in violence. Through classroom activities, students explore this model in depth and practice the skills needed to carry out each step effectively in real-world conflict solutions.

Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders has been field-tested with nearly 700 students in urban, suburban and small-city school districts. In schools and in communities at high risk for violence, the curriculum changed students' thoughts and actions away from support of violence to increased:

- beliefs that aggression is not a desirable response
- intentions to resolve conflicts without aggression
- attempts to avoid violence and seek relevant information
- withdrawal of bystander acceptance and withdrawal of encouragement of aggression

## PEERS MAKING PEACE

Peers Making Peace is a peer-mediation program for students K-12. It uses a preventive approach for handling conflicts both in and out of school. The program's goal is to improve school environments by reducing violence, assaults, discipline referrals, and increasing academic performance. This is accomplished by training teams of students to act as peer mediators on their school campuses.

In an evaluation of Peers Making Peace, the program was found to decrease:

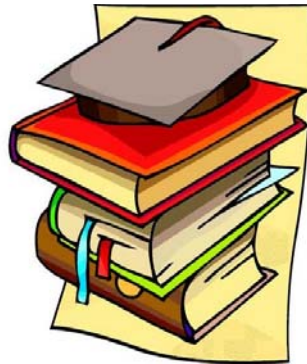
- Expulsions by 73%;
- Assaults by 90.2%; and
- Discipline referrals by 57.7% (As cited in the *SDFS Program Inventory*, 2002)

## RESOLVING CONFLICT CREATIVELY PROGRAM

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is a research-based K-12 program in social and emotional learning. Its primary goal is to ensure that young people develop the social and emotional skills needed to reduce violence and prejudice, form caring relationships, and build healthy lives. RCCP works to change school cultures so that these skills are both modeled and taught as part of the "basics" in education.

An evaluation of the RCCP program in five schools in Atlanta found that:

- 64% of teachers reported less physical violence in the classroom;
- 75% of teachers reported an increase in student cooperation;
- 92% of students felt better about themselves;
- Over 90% of parents reported an increase in their own communication and problem solving skills (RCCP National, 2003).



### EXCELLENT WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CR/PM

Association for Conflict Resolution: [www.acresolution.org](http://www.acresolution.org)

CRU Institute: [www.cruinstitute.org](http://www.cruinstitute.org)

National Center for Conflict Resolution: [www.resolutioneducation.com](http://www.resolutioneducation.com)

National Resource Center for Safe Schools : [www.safetyzone.org](http://www.safetyzone.org)

# Conflict Resolution Techniques

Many different techniques are used with students to help them understand how to resolve conflicts. The following are just two:

## The Think, Talk/Listen, Solve Model (Waugh, 2000)

### Part One: The Thinking Steps

1. Assess Emotions — Learn to recognize anger.
2. Accept Anger, Behave Well — It's okay to be angry if you don't act out.
3. Gauge Intensity — Rate your anger from 1 to 10. If in the mid-range, proceed to conflict resolution tactics.
4. Who and What? — What is the real problem and who is involved?
5. Perspective Check — Keep anger in perspective.

### Part Two: The Talk/Listen Steps

6. Time and Place — Choose the right time and place to bring up the conflict.
7. Avoid Coalitions — Don't try to get uninvolved people to take sides.
8. Express Appropriately — Express your anger in a reasonable tone and manner.
9. Listen Actively — Repeat in your own words what the other person is telling you.
10. Admit Fault — Acknowledge your part in the problem.

### Part Three: The Solving Steps

11. Brainstorm Solutions — Exchange ideas without judging them.
12. Pros and Cons — Decide which ideas have the most merit.
13. Decide and Plan — Choose a solution and plan how to put it into action.
14. Do It — Follow through.
15. Review/Revise — Get together and talk about how well your plan has worked. Make changes.

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## Conflict Resolution Communication (Lincoln, 2002)

1. Express anger in words. Learn to communicate using positive statements.
2. Repeat what you heard and demonstrate an understanding of their feelings.
3. Discuss reason for being angry. Identify the source of the anger.
4. Cool off, take a time out, and collect your emotions.
5. Exercise or engage in a form of physical activity to release anger.
6. Take deep breaths, listen to soothing music, or concentrate on positive and happy events to secure a calming effect.
7. Find a creative solution.
8. Distract negativity by engaging in a situation requiring your full attention and energy.
9. Share a time when you learned to handle your anger and frustrations.
10. Narrate a story, write a poem, or journal to the conflicting party expressing your true feelings and frustrations over the situation and ways to resolve the conflict in a "win-win" format.

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## ENDNOTES

The members of the SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Safe Schools Office at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Please encourage educators to take advantage of our services. For additional information on these resources or to find out how to access these resources, please contact Patricia Elton at (850) 414-0236 (SunCom 994-0236) or by email at [elton\\_p@popmail.firn.edu](mailto:elton_p@popmail.firn.edu).

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