

## I-5: Create a welcoming environment

### Use Conflict Resolution Systems

Some conflict is inevitable. Conflict happens in even the most collaborative environments and should be treated as an opportunity to learn about each other and deepen relationships. It will be critical to teach students how to manage conflict so that they can realize these positive effects while at the same time ensuring that the conflicts don't escalate into negative situations. Some schools and communities have adopted formal conflict resolution education programs that encourage students to express their points of view, voice their interests, and find mutually acceptable solutions.

<p><b>Learn conflict resolution methods and approaches</b></p>	<p>It may be a good idea to gain formal training in conflict resolution before trying to implement conflict resolution in your classroom.</p>
<p><b>Create (and enforce) a shared vision of what conflict resolution means for your classroom</b></p>	<p>Students must be committed to and invested in the philosophy of conflict resolution. Teachers must explicitly share the purposes of conflict resolution to create “buy-in” for the process in addition to teaching students specific methods.</p> <p>Example – Baltimore teacher Annie Lewis:  <i>When conflicts arise in class, I ask the whole class, “How are we going to solve this?” Sometimes the whole class has to be involved, and we’ll sit in a circle and discuss the problem. Other times the students involved in the conflict go to the back carpet and talk it out. My students have become so good at this that I usually just have to go check in with them to see how they’ve resolved it. The key is getting the kids to buy into the shared vision of what they want our class to be, and then to really think about what it takes to make that vision a reality. We have talked so much about wanting a classroom in which they have friends, people are kind to them, classmates help each other, etc., that they really want it. Having this shared vision helps us to want to work out conflicts instead of getting stuck on them.</i></p>
<p><b>Institute Peer Mediation programs</b></p>	<p>Students are trained to serve as mediators to contribute to a positive climate in both the classroom and school-wide. Peer mediation can turn negative student behavior into positive student leadership.</p> <p>Benefits of Peer Mediation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhances teachers’ ability to address conflict</li> <li>• Helps change negative student behavior</li> <li>• Gives students insight into why and how conflict plays out</li> <li>• Empowers students to address problems themselves and for their peers.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Create a Peace Table</b></p>	<p>Students are taught to work out their differences without the presence of a teacher. Resources on the table can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books of famous peace-makers</li> <li>• Stories with peaceful endings</li> <li>• Lists of “peaceful words”</li> <li>• Conflict resolution templates and step-by-step guidance</li> </ul> <p>(To view a video example of a peace table in action, see the illustrations section of I-5.)</p>
<p><b>Teach students to explain their actions to each other</b></p>	<p>Students who explain their actions to each other are more likely to create solutions. Whenever possible, encourage students who experience conflict to step back and describe what happened and how it makes them feel using “I” statements. Teach them to express their feelings (“When you say _____, it makes me feel _____”). Most teachers find it effective to have students first record their thoughts in writing. After having time to calm down and reflect, students can then interact and work towards a solution.</p> <p>“I” statements are a way of expressing one’s feelings without blaming others. For example, instead of saying, “You hurt me,” an “I” statement would be, “I felt hurt when you said those things about my mother.” “I” statements encourage students to recognize and admit their emotions, which is the first step to resolving conflict. They also prevent students from speaking to each other in judgmental ways. When you hear students start to blame others, challenge them to rephrase their words within an “I” statement.</p>
<p><b>Teach students active listening skills</b></p>	<p>For conflict resolution to work, students will need to listen actively. Students on each side of the conflict need to feel that they are heard and understood. Again, this type of active listening is something that should be taught and modeled.</p> <p>Students need to be taught the five components of active listening:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not talk.</li> <li>2. Keep hands still.</li> <li>3. Look at the speaker.</li> <li>4. Sit up straight.</li> <li>5. Concentrate.</li> </ol>

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**Expose students to a variety of conflict resolution options**

Encourage students to develop a set of options for resolving the conflict, and to choose the solution that is mutually beneficial. If you encourage creative problem-solving, students will begin to see that there are mutually beneficial ways to solve problems that will allow them to work towards the classroom community they desire.

Middle School Example: Ms. Jacobs' 7<sup>th</sup> graders fought constantly. She felt that she was losing patience with their bickering, and she was concerned about the amount of class time that was being wasted on student disputes. Most troubling, she felt that her students weren't even making any progress towards learning how to handle conflict more effectively, and she feared that their confrontations would turn increasingly violent as they grew older. She decided to implement a new policy that she had learned as an Outward Bound instructor for adjudicated youth. The program is called "VOMP" and it dictates exact behaviors for dealing with any conflict that arises. The steps include:

1. "V" for VENT – Inform both parties that they will get to VENT. Choose one person to express what happened from his or her point of view, and then allow the other person to do the same. (Leon: "Joaquin stepped on my foot!"...Joaquin: "Leon said I was stupid!")
2. "O" for OWNERSHIP – Tell both parties that he or she must individually take ownership for whatever behavior of which they have been accused. (Leon: "I guess I did call him stupid."...Joaquin: "Yeah, I stepped on his foot.")
3. "M" for MOCCASSINS – Force each party to put themselves in the other person's SHOES. (Leon: "I can understand why he got angry when I called him stupid. I just thought his answer to Ms. Jacobs' question was really dumb. But it'd make me mad if someone called me stupid too."...Joaquin: "I was really mad when he called me stupid but I guess I shouldn't have stepped on his foot. That wasn't right.")
4. "P" for PLAN – Require both parties to make a PLAN for how they would handle the conflict differently next time. (Leon: "Next time, I'll keep my comments to myself if someone gives a stupid answer." Joaquin: "Next time, I won't hurt people if they hurt my feelings. I'll just tell them if they said something that wasn't right or if it made me mad.")

She knew she would have to teach the policy step-by-step and then actively set standards and expectations about the process for it to have any power. She also knew the acronym wouldn't have any meaning if it wasn't backed up with action that the students respected and considered legitimate. At first the students resisted the policy, and she felt like she was forcing it on them, but very quickly they came to appreciate the consistent structure it offered, and soon students were directing other students through the policy ("VOMP it you two!"). While conflicts continued to arise, she felt that she was giving her students valuable experience with conflict resolution.