

**SOLVING CONFLICTS
WITH TEACHERS,
PARENTS AND PEERS**

CREDITS

Executive Producer

Anson Schloat

Producers

Mike Ferejohn

John Young

Writers

Mike Ferejohn

Elizabeth Hoover

Consultants

Eva Feindler, PhD

Peter Read, PhD CSW

Teacher's Guide

Bonnie Denmark

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INTRODUCTION

No honest relationship can exist without some angry moments. “That’s not what I mean!” “You never listen to what I’m saying.” “I can’t believe you think that.” “Are you nuts?!” Whenever people live, work, or play together there is potential for conflict. That’s human nature. Conflicts arise because different people with different needs and desires find themselves in a situation where they want different things. But conflict is not necessarily bad. Sometimes it results in growth and changes for the better. It is how conflicts are managed, not their presence, that determines if they are destructive or constructive.

Wherever there are two human beings there are two different perspectives—we are not robots. At home, middle school students are beginning to question whether they should have to do things just “because I said so.” With teachers, there are misunderstandings and miscommunications. With schoolmates, disagreements arise over whom to sit by at lunch, when to talk and when to listen, and whose turn it is in a game.

Adolescence marks the beginning of abstract reasoning. At this age, family life can become turbulent as children start thinking for themselves. As middle school students begin flexing their new cognitive muscles, bargaining and negotiating become real options. In contrast, few preadolescents have the cognitive skills to understand *why* they can say “no”—the young child’s world is far too concrete.

It is one thing to argue with a peer; it is another to take on an authority figure. One of the most difficult problem areas for young teenagers is when they are in conflict with an adult. It can be scary to talk to an adult about a problem, but if left unresolved, these conflicts can lead to frustration, depression, and self-destructive decisions. Yet middle school students often have inadequate conflict management techniques.

Conflicts are often accompanied by poor communication. When this happens, people tend to strike out in a variety of ways. Middle school students may get angry, fight, or call names. It is important to acquire good reasoning skills during this critical period of cognitive development. It is equally important to keep emotions in check during stressful interactions and to respect feelings and opinions that are different from one’s own. Students can learn that even though they can’t control what other people do, they can decide how to deal with it. These and other elements are important in enhancing productive communication.

Learning to communicate well now in order to resolve conflicts peacefully will provide your students with a lifetime of benefits. The video *Solving Conflicts with Teachers, Parents, and Peers* shows middle school children that the road to resolution may involve applying a different set of skills in order to approach a conflict with a teacher, parent, or peer. The video depicts some common problems that can arise with peers and adults and shows both harmful and constructive strategies for managing these conflicts. It emphasizes “Rules of Fair Play” to apply when approaching conflicts. The video and the activities in this Teacher’s Resource Book will teach students how to communicate effectively and how to handle conflict in a variety of relationships.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After viewing the videotape *Solving Conflicts with Teachers, Parents, and Peers* and participating in class discussion and the activities described in this Teacher's Resource Book, your students will be able to:

- practice conflict management techniques
- develop confidence in their ability to communicate with others
- understand how poor communication leads to conflict and misunderstanding
- recognize faulty communication
- acquire skills to speak with adults confidently and politely when in a conflict situation
- learn guidelines for talking things out inoffensively, including the use of "I" messages
- apply the "Rules of Fair Play" to conflict situations
- accept that conflict can result in growth and change for the better
- acknowledge that other people have a right to their own opinions and feelings
- recognize the importance of hearing what the other person has to say
- learn to keep emotions in check in a conflict situation
- know that they are responsible for their own actions and reactions

Solving Conflicts with Teachers, Parents, and Peers

VIDEO SUMMARY

The video opens in a crowded hallway. The camera zooms by groups of kids, parents, and teachers, and we hear snippets of their conversations: “You never listen to what I’m saying!” “If you don’t finish that assignment, you’re going to fail this class!” “I get so mad when you do that!” “You take things too seriously.” “Can we talk about this, please?” “I don’t understand what you’re talking about.” “Leave me alone!”

The camera focuses on two friends in the midst of a discussion. Tara says, “I know I promised to go to the game with you, but Donna asked me if I wanted to go to the movies with her and, well, I have a right to change my mind.” Jenna’s face grows angry.

A graphic illustrates what conflict is. A line travels along on its own course when it hits another line going in the opposite direction. Something has to give since they both can’t continue without making a change in direction.

The scene shifts to interviews with young people who speak about conflict: “The worst thing in the world is when conflicts get out of hand.” “Fights are never any fun.” “It’s hard to talk about stuff when you’re mad. That’s why some people blow off problems instead of dealing with them.” “Some people lose control when they get mad. They think they have a right to do whatever they want.” “We can’t control what other people do, but we can decide how we deal with it.” “Working out conflicts makes you stronger in the end. It’s worth the work.”

The camera returns to the frozen image of Jenna’s mouth. The narrators list the “Rules of Fair Play” to help her get through this conflict, starting with what not to do. Jenna exemplifies each one.

- **Don’t be a bully**, which includes name calling (“You are such a pathetic jerk”), sarcasm (“I forgot you’re Queen of the Universe”), talking down to or insulting a person (“I guess that’s what I should have expected from such an immature little freak”), using threats (“What if I go tell Donna what a liar you are?”), and the classic bully moves of shouting, hitting, or throwing things.

In a series of interview clips, young people comment on bullies: “Nobody wants to hang out with a bully.” “People might be nice to a bully, but it’s just because they’re afraid.” “Someone who acts like a bully isn’t really grown up enough to handle things.”

- **Don’t pretend conflicts aren’t there when they clearly are.** People avoid conflicts by pretending they’re okay (“I don’t mind; I didn’t want to go to the game anyway”), taking one hundred percent of the blame (“I’m sorry, it was probably all my fault in the first place”), ignoring the problem (“Can we please forget it and just change the subject?”), or dealing with the problem in a backhanded, indirect way (“Then you won’t mind if I tell Donna you’re trying to date her boyfriend?”).

In interview segments, kids share their opinions: “If you avoid problems, they don’t go away; they just

VIDEO SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

get worse.” “The only way to make a problem go away is to face it.” “I had a fight with my brother and I knew we needed to talk. I was really dreading the subject, but after we talked and worked it out, it wasn’t such a big deal anymore.” “I have a friend who always apologizes for everything, even when it’s not her fault. I guess she doesn’t feel very good about herself.”

The camera returns to the freeze frame of Jenna. The narrators introduce things you should do in a conflict situation:

- **Take some time to chill out** since it’s hard to think straight when you’re feeling mad or hurt. Jenna takes a deep breath, “Can we talk about this at lunch? I’m not up to it right now.”

Interview clips with real kids highlight the importance of calming down. “If you’re really upset about something, you should calm down first. That way you’ll think better.” “I got really mad at my parents last week, so I took a walk. We talked about it later when I was more chilled.” “Even taking one deep breath can help.”

- **Put yourself in the other person’s shoes.** Ask yourself where the other person is coming from. How do you think he or she feels? (“Did Donna pressure you into going with her?”)

Again, young people express their views: “People always have their reasons for doing things. Maybe they had a bad day or they’re upset about something else.” “I had a friend who bit my head off one day and I totally didn’t understand why. Then I found out that his mom was really sick and in the hospital.”

- **Treat the other person the way you want to be treated.** You do this by listening to the other person and acknowledging his or her right to feel something even if you don’t agree with it (“So you’re saying Donna pressured you into saying yes to her and no to me, and you snapped at me because you feel guilty?”).

Interviews with students support the point: “If someone yells at you, you don’t feel like talking to them. It’s the same if you yell at someone.” “When someone says they understand me, it’s much easier to solve a conflict.” “Everyone has feelings.”

- **Always tell how you’re feeling.** If you’re mad or upset, say so: “It really hurt my feelings...and it seems like you don’t even care.” The two girls continue to talk and appear to be resolving the conflict.

Young people remark in interviews: “People can’t read your mind, so you have to explain how you feel.” “If you know you did something wrong, don’t be afraid to admit it. Everybody messes up sometimes.” “Telling people the truth is a way of respecting them even if they don’t always like what you’re saying.”

The next scene shows a dramatization on a school basketball court. One of the narrators claims, “The

VIDEO SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

most important part of working out conflicts is talking them over.” Two groups of students have a conflict over whose turn it is to use the basketball court. One kid begins yelling. The narrators list rules of “Talking Things Out” illustrated by the dramatization as follows:

- **Talk, don’t yell.** Keep your voice at a normal level. The kid who was yelling in the dramatization is now shown talking at a normal decibel level.

A boy in the other group says, “You are always hoggin’ the...” The image freezes.

- **Try using sentences that start with “I.”** Nobody likes being accused. When the image unfreezes, the boy says, “I was hoping we could maybe play some ball, too.”

Another kid exacerbates the problem by accusing the opposing group of being at the court for the whole time over the past weekend so no one else got a chance to play. He claims that there weren’t any courts in the whole city. The frame freezes and the narrators assert:

- **Get to the point, and try not to add extra details or exaggerate.** When the image unfreezes, the kid rephrases, “It seemed like you guys had the court last weekend.”

The boy being spoken to begins to respond, but someone in the other group interrupts him, leading to the next point:

- **Try not to interrupt,** even when you have something important to say or disagree with the other person. Try to wait until he or she is finished. The dramatization resumes, “I’m sorry I interrupted you.”

The first boy continues, “It may have seemed like we had the court all weekend, but we were only here for like two hours both afternoons.” The image freezes.

- **Really try to listen to what the other person is saying,** and let the person know you have heard him or her. When the image unfreezes, the kid responds, “So you’re saying...you guys were only here for a couple of hours both days?”
- **If you make a mistake, apologize.** People will respect you more for realizing you’re not perfect. As the dramatization continues, there is an apology and the two groups resolve their differences.

In the next scene, narrators address conflicts between adults and kids. These are a little trickier. Adults should be better at helping you negotiate conflicts with them, but that’s not always the case. Teachers and parents are human beings, too. They make mistakes and have feelings just like everyone else. One of the narrators emphasizes that in a conflict situation, it’s important to recognize that teachers and parents have authority—it’s something that they have earned and worked for.

The next dramatization begins with Josh and his mother in the kitchen, putting away groceries. Josh’s

VIDEO SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

mother is saying, “I don’t want you going on this campout. You need to spend more time with us, your family.” Josh objects, but his mother insists that what she says goes since she’s the parent. Josh storms out and the frame freezes.

The narrator comments on the scene, “Just because adults are older and have authority doesn’t mean kids can’t or shouldn’t speak up for themselves. You do have a right to say how you feel, as long as you say it in a respectful way.”

Kids then relate their experiences having conflicts with adults: “Sometimes it’s weird when you have a problem with an adult. It can be scary to talk to them about it.” “My teacher was always picking on me in front of the class. I didn’t know what to do because she was the adult. Later, I talked to another teacher and she helped me work it out.”

The narrators state that all conflicts are easier to work out if you have some distance; one way to get distance is to work conflicts out on paper. The narrators note the following steps as Josh is shown in his bedroom, writing:

- **Identify the conflict:** Josh wants to go camping; his mother wants him to spend more time at home.
- **Identify possible solutions and results:** If Josh gave up the camping trip, his mom would be happy, but he’d feel sad and maybe even angry. If he went camping against his mother’s wishes, he’d feel better, but guilty. His mom, though, would be really mad. Maybe he could spend Friday night with his friends on the camping trip, and then Saturday afternoon use allowance money to take his family to the zoo; that might make his mom happy and he’d be pretty happy too.
- **To find the best choice, think about the results of each action.** Ask yourself if some of the conflict will still be there or if most of it will go away. The video pauses so viewers can answer the question: What choice would you make if you were Josh, and how do you think his mom will react?

Next, the narrators turn to the topic of conflicts between teachers and students. They remind students that teachers are there for them, so it’s worth trying to work things out.

In the dramatization that follows, Mr. Jones, a teacher, stops Shirley as students are filing out of the classroom and asks her why she almost failed the test. Shirley is embarrassed that some of the other kids might have heard. Mr. Jones also expresses concern that Shirley has fallen behind in her homework and asks if he needs to speak with her parents. Shirley protests, “No, you can’t!” Mr. Jones then asks Shirley what he should do.

The narrators encourage viewers to remember the skills that can be helpful in negotiating a compromise,

VIDEO SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

like taking some time out. Shirley asks Mr. Jones if she can speak with him after school. One narrator recaps tips for approaching a conflict: “Did you try putting yourself in the other person’s shoes? Were you listening to what they were saying? Did you express your feelings?” The other narrator prompts, “Have you thought about how you want the conflict to end? About the possible solutions?”

Real kids tell stories in which teachers listened to what they had to say and helped them resolve their conflicts.

We return to the dramatization. After school, Shirley tells Mr. Jones that she felt embarrassed that he stopped her to talk at the end of class when her friends were around. Mr. Jones apologizes. She goes on to say that she knows he just wants her to do well. She explains that her home situation is stressful because her father started a new job. She offers to stay after school for a couple weeks to catch up and asks that he give a chance for her grades to improve before calling her parents. Mr. Jones agrees to hold off calling Shirley’s parents for a week to see if the proposed solution works out.

Next, an NFL referee describes how negotiating conflicts is part of his everyday life.

The video closes with a review of conflict management techniques.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Conflict

*When conflict emerged
between me and my teachers
over grades I disputed or
the squeaky sound from my sneakers
we remained calm
in the school
we were cool and collected
because our sides might have
been different
but our lives were connected
and when my brothers and I
fought over who should wash the dishes
or finish the chores
sometime we'd hit each other with our fists
or slam each others hands in the doors
we played a game where
everyone scored
but nobody won
because when we used violence
someone always got hurt
and nothing got done
and when my father got so mad
that I thought dad would explode
I grabbed a book
and read in my room
until he got his feeling under control
so when conflict
gets so thick
that it's hard to see clear
take a second to reflect
until reason appears*

by Steven Coleman

Instructions: Write a brief essay, giving your reaction to this poem which was performed in the video. What is the message of the poem? Consider writing your own poem or collaborate with other students to write and/or perform a poem on popularity.

Name _____

SAYING WHAT YOU MEAN

ACTIVITY
2

Many of us use indirect language to express ourselves. You might ask another person, “Are you hungry?” when you really mean that *you* are hungry. Maybe you are suggesting that you and the other person go grab a bite to eat. Or maybe you are asking the person to make you a snack. This lack of being direct can lead to confusion. Some of it is harmless, but some miscommunication can lead to real problems.

This exercise will give you practice in being direct. Reword each of the indirect statements and questions below so that they express the intended meaning more clearly.

Example: Are you hot?
Can you please turn up the air conditioner?

1. Are you finished eating those fries?

2. Are you busy Saturday night?

3. I’m washing my hair Saturday night.

4. Are you sure you need another hot fudge sundae?

5. Those brownies really smell good.

6. I sure would like another soda.

7. It’s crowded in here.

8. I wish I could go out to eat with you guys, but I don’t get my allowance until tomorrow.

Name _____

WORD JUMBLE

ACTIVITY
3A

Find the words in the letter jumble below. You will have to look up, down, diagonally, and backwards.

apologize
communication
compromise
conflict

disagree
fair
interrupt
listen

negotiate
opinion
respect
talk

B	E	S	U	L	I	S	T	E	N	E
Z	A	D	F	O	P	I	N	I	O	N
Q	P	G	Y	I	H	P	X	L	I	J
U	O	N	E	G	O	T	I	A	T	E
C	L	A	M	S	K	A	D	W	A	B
N	O	T	T	U	C	L	U	V	C	M
D	G	P	A	C	T	K	H	R	I	R
I	I	U	N	S	I	T	O	S	N	A
S	Z	R	I	A	F	L	T	N	U	C
A	E	R	S	O	N	U	F	E	M	I
G	K	E	L	R	D	P	I	N	M	E
R	B	T	C	E	P	S	E	R	O	Z
E	I	N	A	W	C	I	V	E	C	C
E	S	I	M	O	R	P	M	O	C	I

Now use each of the words in a sentence.

Name _____

“WORD JUMBLE” ANSWER KEY

ACTIVITY
3B

Find the words in the letter jumble below. You will have to look up, down, diagonally, and backwards.

apologize
communication
compromise
conflict

disagree
fair
interrupt
listen

negotiate
opinion
respect
talk

B	E	S	U	L	I	S	T	E	N	E
Z	A	D	F	O	P	I	N	I	O	N
Q	P	G	Y	I	H	P	X	L	I	J
U	O	N	E	G	O	T	I	A	T	E
C	L	A	M	S	K	A	D	W	A	B
N	O	T	T	U	C	L	U	V	C	M
D	G	P	A	C	T	K	H	R	I	R
I	I	U	N	S	I	T	O	S	N	A
S	Z	R	I	A	F	L	T	N	U	C
A	E	R	S	O	N	U	F	E	M	I
G	K	E	L	R	D	P	I	N	M	E
R	B	T	C	E	P	S	E	R	O	Z
E	I	N	A	W	C	I	V	E	C	C
E	S	I	M	O	R	P	M	O	C	I

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDSACTIVITY
4

Sometimes the words we say do not match our tone of voice and our actions, such as when we say “I am perfectly fine!” while screaming and throwing our arms in the air. Consider the passages below. In each case, follow the directions for using your body language and tone of voice to change the meaning of the *same* words.

1. I’ve decided to quit the team. The other players don’t seem to notice me. Why should I bother? I’m tired of trying so hard, and for what? We’ll just see how things go without me.
 - a. Read this in a way that shows you are feeling very sad about this.
 - b. Read this in a way that shows you are feeling very angry about this.➔ What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

2. I want you to stop picking on my brother. I understand that you are bigger and it’s tempting to pick on smaller people, but I think you know what I mean when I say it has to stop. I’m not kidding. I’ll be checking with my brother to make sure there are no more incidents.
 - a. Read this in an assertive and calm manner.
 - b. Read this in an aggressive and threatening manner.➔ What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

3. My life is just great. I have good friends, a nice house, and pretty cool parents. Who could complain in my situation? So what if no one has invited me to the spring dance? These are not the important things, right?
 - a. Read this in a sarcastic manner.
 - b. Read this in a sincere manner.➔ What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

4. My parents drive me crazy! They are always watching out for me. I never know whether to scream or cry. I guess I’m just lucky to have them.
 - a. Read this in an angry, frustrated manner.
 - b. Read this in a good-natured, humorous manner.➔ What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

USING “I” MESSAGES	ACTIVITY 5
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When we begin conversations by telling *the other* person what he or she did wrong (“*YOU never listen to me!*”), we are accusing and blaming that person, putting him or her on the defensive. Productive conversation is unlikely. On the other hand, if we start with “*I...*” instead of “*You...*,” we are saying how *we* feel and we are likely to get a much better response. “*I*” messages encourage cooperation.

Instructions: Read the passages below. In the space provided, rewrite each one so that it expresses the author’s feelings from an “I” perspective.

Example: “*You* promised to take me! *You* can’t do this to me! This makes *you* a liar.”

Rewrite: *I* am really disappointed. Not only was *I* looking forward to going, but *I* am also upset that you broke your promise to me.

1. You’re such a busybody! You don’t know how to mind your own business. You’re always trying to run my life.

Rewrite: _____

2. You never let me do anything by myself! You treat me like a baby. You hover over me constantly. Do you really think I’m that helpless?

Rewrite: _____

3. You make me feel like giving up. You never have anything positive to say. You should learn to be more supportive.

Rewrite: _____

4. You’re always interrupting me. You never let me finish anything I have to say. You’re so rude!

Rewrite: _____

Name _____

EVALUATING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

ACTIVITY
6A

Read the scenario below and answer the questions that follow.

Borrowed Earrings

Jane and Carol, two friends, are walking to school together.

Jane: *(Thinking to herself, "I am determined to get Carol to give me back the earrings she borrowed. I will just be direct about it.")* Carol, when can I get my earrings back?

Carol: Oh gosh, I completely forgot about them. Sorry. It's just that I have been so upset about this whole thing with David. I still can't believe he said that to Frank. Did Maria tell you what happened?

Jane: Yes. I spoke with her last night. I wouldn't worry about it too much. I'm sure it will be fine. *(Pauses)* Do you think I could stop by later and pick up my earrings?

Carol: I hope you're right. I mean, what will people think about me? I just can't stop thinking about it. Do you think you could talk to Frank for me today?

Jane: *(Feeling like she just doesn't know how to be more direct, sighs)* Sure.

Questions:

- 1) Did Jane make clear to Carol what she wanted? Was she successful in getting what she wanted?
- 2) Which girl seems to be in better control of her emotions?
- 3) Who seems to be the better listener, Jane or Carol?
- 4) Did Jane give up too easily?
- 5) What should Jane have said to Carol in order to get her earrings back?

Suggested Answers**Questions:**

- 1) Did Jane make clear to Carol what she wanted? Was she successful in getting what she wanted?

Jane made it clear that she wanted to get her earrings back, but she wasn't successful in getting them.

- 2) Which girl seems to be in better control of her emotions?

Jane's emotions seem stable, but Carol seems too upset to communicate well.

- 3) Who seems to be the better listener, Jane or Carol?

Judging by Jane's responses to Carol, she is listening, but Carol is not—she is too wrapped up in her own problems.

- 4) Did Jane give up too easily?

Yes, Jane is giving up too easily. Jane can be sympathetic to her friend's problem, but she still has to get her needs met. She went into the conversation determined to get her earrings back, but she abandoned her goal.

- 5) What should Jane have said to Carol in order to get her earrings back?

Jane needs to ask Carol if she has heard her request for the earrings. She could say, “Carol, I know you are upset and I'd be happy to talk about this. But can you please just tell me first if I can come get my earrings after school today?”

Instructions:

Complete the dialogue below. Make sure that Tom gets his point across while remaining polite and in control of his emotions. Perhaps Tom can suggest a compromise that will be acceptable to the coach *and* the team. Refer to Fact Sheets 1, 2, and 3 for some basic principles to keep in mind.

Background:

Coach Rivers has led his school's team to many victories. Many people think he is a great coach, but Tom thinks he is a jerk. It is the students who work hard; the coach just got lucky. The team works well together and everyone manages to get along. Coach has called an extra practice this weekend. The team is annoyed because they are doing well and don't see the need for it. More importantly, there is a big barbecue planned at a friend's house and most of the team was planning on going. Tom, the team captain, has been asked to talk to the coach about canceling this practice. They are about to begin Friday afternoon practice. Coach is in his office. Tom knows this is the only good opportunity he'll have to talk to him.

Dialogue:

Tom: *(Knocks on Coach's door)*

Coach: Come in!

Tom: *(Politely)* May I talk to you for a minute?

Coach: *(Doesn't look up from whatever he is reading)* Speak.

Tom: Some of us are wondering if we could get you to consider canceling tomorrow's extra practice...

Coach: *(Looks up now, doesn't say anything)*

Tom: *(Continues quickly)* It's just that...I mean...we are doing well this season and we have some plans... and we thought that, uh....

Coach: *(Quiet volume but menacing tone)* You boys think you know how to run a team now? Is that it? You gonna tell me how to do my job?

Now you complete the dialogue.

INTERPRETING NONVERBAL MESSAGES

Many nonverbal messages are ambiguous. We may scratch our heads, raise our eyebrows, or shift in our seats. Sometimes these gestures mean something, and sometimes they don't. Regardless of what we may intend our gestures to say, others often misinterpret them. How good are you at identifying underlying messages?

Part 1: For each of the situations below, choose the response that is closest to how you would interpret the body language described.

- In math class, the teacher announces there will be a pop quiz. Sally looks over at her friend Joe and raises her eyebrows. Sally is saying:
 - I didn't expect this! I'm not going to know a single answer!
 - Can you believe what's happening?
 - I told you she had something planned!
 - This teacher has to be kidding!
- When Della goes to get some ice cream at the local parlor, the male clerk behind the counter smiles at her. The clerk is saying:
 - You're cute.
 - I like my job.
 - Welcome to Al's Ice Cream Parlor.
 - I recognize you.
- Tino approaches Aisha to talk about their upcoming social studies test. Aisha doesn't look at Tino in the face when she talks to him. Instead, she looks down at her nails and twirls her hair the whole time. Aisha is saying:
 - I'm really nervous about this test.
 - Don't you think my hair is pretty?
 - I have a crush on you.
 - I'm so shy that it's painful to talk to you.
- Carl and Tiana often talk on the bus after school. One day Carl starts talking about his favorite book. Tiana says she's never read it. The next day, Carl brings her a copy wrapped in gift paper. Carl is saying:
 - I want to become more than friends.
 - I value our friendship.
 - I'm looking forward to discussing this book with you.
 - You really need to read more.

INTERPRETING NONVERBAL MESSAGES (CONTINUED)ACTIVITY
8

Part 2: When you have finished choosing your own response for each of the situations, use the space below to tally your classmates' responses.

	Number of students choosing A	Number of students choosing B	Number of students choosing C	Number of students choosing D
Situation 1				
Situation 2				
Situation 3				
Situation 4				

Part 3: Discuss the answers to the questions below.

1. In general, do you consider yourself to be good at interpreting other people's nonverbal messages?
2. Were you surprised by the number of students who chose different answers from yours?
3. Can you think of other nonverbal gestures that can be interpreted in more than one way?
4. Can you think of a situation in which someone else was convinced that one of your gestures had a meaning you didn't intend? Did you resolve the misunderstanding?

COMMUNICATING AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

It is natural to speak differently to a child than to a peer, and differently to your friends than to your teacher. The following exercise will help you understand how communication can be influenced by the person to whom you are speaking. COMPLETE IT IN THE ORDER GIVEN.

Dialogue:

A: Do you have the homework sheets I gave you at the end of school yesterday?

B: No. I forgot them. Sorry.

A: Sorry?! What kind of excuse is that?

B: Not a very good one, I guess.

A: You can say that again. Now what do you suggest we do?

- a) **Role Play One:** Two volunteers from class are to read the dialogue above out loud. This is an interaction between *two friends*. Be realistic in the emotional tone and body language you might use in this situation.
- b) **Role Play Two:** Two volunteers are to read the dialogue out loud. This is an interaction between a *teacher (A)* and *student (B)*. Be realistic in the emotional tone and body language you might use in this situation.
- c) **Discussion:** By now it is obvious that the exact same dialogue can sound quite different when it is used with different people. Consider the following:
1. How is the conversation different if A and B are friends? If A and B are teacher and student? Why did it change?
 2. Were there differences in body language? What were they? What did those gestures communicate?
- d) **A New Ending:** Go back to the dialogue and invent an ending for each of the scenarios. Keep in mind that in both cases the friend and the teacher are equally interested in getting those homework sheets as soon as possible. Will differences in whom you are talking to influence how the conversation ends?
- e) **Questions:**
1. Were the body language and tone of voice different in the two scenarios?
 2. Did the outcome change as a result of whom the person was speaking to?
 3. Did the difference in who *Person A* was help or hinder a positive outcome? Why?

Name _____

ESSAY QUOTES

ACTIVITY

10

Instructions: Choose one of the quotations below, and explain how it relates to conflict resolution. Use examples from your own life to support your opinion where possible.

1. “If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together in the same world at peace.”

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt

2. “The best way I know how to defeat an enemy is to make him my friend.”

—Abraham Lincoln

3. “If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.”

— Nelson Mandela

4. “The more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in our troubled world.”

— Etty Hillesum

5. “Peace is a journey of a thousand miles and it must be taken one step at a time.”

—Lyndon B. Johnson

USE YOUR SKILLS AND WORK IT OUT

Use the principles of good communication outlined in Fact Sheets 3 and 5 to bring about a positive outcome in the role plays below. The goal of each participant is to get as many needs met as possible. Think clearly about what your main goal is, and be sure to be a good listener. You may change the gender of the characters to suit your class's needs.

1. a. Tanya is well-known for her excellent babysitting skills. She is also known as hardworking and conscientious. She has decided that she will take this coming weekend off. She has a lot of schoolwork to do and would like to have some time to spend with friends. No matter who calls, she's just going to say no.
b. Mrs. Rojas has an opportunity to get away for a rare weekend with her husband. Her sister has volunteered to take her two children overnight. Now, if Tanya will agree to watch them during the days this weekend, she can finally get some much needed time away with her husband. Tanya has always been so flexible. Mrs. Rojas is feeling very optimistic as she dials Tanya's phone number.

2. a. Julio does not want to go to his aunt's party this weekend. His cousins are much younger than he is, and he is always bored to death. His younger sister has a great time playing with the little kids. His parents love hanging out with his aunt and uncle. No one seems to notice that he has nothing to do for hours. It's not fair that he should have to spend his whole Sunday there. These relatives live close enough that their families visit regularly. Julio has made up his mind that he is not going. He wants to hang out with his buddies instead.
b. Marcia (Julio's mother) is really looking forward to Sunday. She loves these pleasant family gatherings. She is grateful her sister lives so close. It's important to her that her children grow up knowing that they have caring family around them. Particularly now that Julio is a teenager, Marcia is glad to have him regularly exposed to her sister and brother-in-law. They are great people who could be another source of support for him as copes with middle school and high school. No matter how crazy the family schedule gets, she is determined to keep her commitment to these gatherings.

ANOTHER WAY TO WORK THROUGH CONFLICT

ACTIVITY
12

Sometimes it's helpful to work a conflict out on paper so you can be more objective as you consider the problem. **For this activity, choose one of the situations below and follow the model on Fact Sheet 4 to arrive at the best solution.**

Situations:

- You are expecting an important call, but your older sister is constantly on the phone and ignores the “call waiting” beep.
- A bully threatens to beat you up after school.
- Your parents grounded you for two weeks and took away TV privileges because you came home late from a party. You think the punishment is unfair.
- Your parents won't let you go to a school dance.

1. Identify the conflict.

2. Think of possible solutions.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

3. Think of the result of each possible solution.

Result of solution a) → _____

Result of solution b) → _____

Result of solution c) → _____

4. Decide what the best choice is based on the results for each solution you could think of. Did you propose a “win-win” solution? Will this resolve most of the conflict?

The best solution seems to be _____ because _____

FACT SHEETS

We can't control what other people do, but we can decide how we respond. Stick to the "Rules of Fair Play" to help you work through conflicts successfully.

1. **Don't be a bully.** People who act like bullies aren't grown up enough to handle things. Bullying includes:
 - a. name calling: *You're such a loser.*
 - b. sarcasm: *I forgot you're Queen of the Universe.*
 - c. talking down to or insulting a person: *I guess that's what I should have expected from such an immature little brat.*
 - d. threats: *What if I go tell Donna what a liar you are?*
 - e. shouting
 - f. hitting and throwing things

2. **Don't pretend conflicts aren't there when they clearly are.** If you avoid problems, they don't go away; they just get worse. The only way to make a problem go away is to face it. People avoid conflicts by:
 - a. pretending they're okay: *Oh, I don't mind. I didn't really want to go anyway.*
 - b. taking one hundred percent of the blame: *I'm sorry. It was probably all my fault in the first place.*
 - c. ignoring the problem: *Can we please forget it and just change the subject?*
 - d. dealing with the problem in an indirect, sneaky way like gossiping about the other person: *Guess what? Tara flunked the science test.*

3. **Take some time to chill out.** It's hard to think when you're feeling mad or hurt. Take a walk or ask for some time: *Can we talk about this at lunch? I'm not up to it right now.* If you have to deal with the problem when it happens, at least take a deep breath.

4. **Put yourself in the other person's shoes.** Ask yourself where the other person is coming from. How do you think he or she feels? People have their reasons for doing things. Maybe they had a bad day or are upset about something else.

5. **Treat the person the way you want to be treated.** You do this by listening to what the other person is saying and acknowledging his or her right to feel something even if you don't agree with it.

6. **Tell how you're feeling:** *It hurts my feelings. It seems like you don't even care.*

The most important part of resolving a conflict is talking it over. Keep the following guidelines in mind as you talk things out:

- **Talk, don't yell.** Keep your voice at a normal level.
- **Don't say "always" and "never."** A statement with these words is rarely true and it puts the other person on the defensive: *"I don't like how you're always hogging the phone."*
- **Try using sentences that start with "I."** Nobody likes being accused. Instead of saying, *"YOU'RE so rude,"* say, *"I feel angry when the phone is tied up when I'm expecting an important call."* Instead of *"YOU make me so mad,"* say, *"I feel angry when you borrow my things without asking because then they're not there when I need them. I'd appreciate it if you asked first."*
- **Stick with your point and don't exaggerate.** Keep your complaint limited to the immediate event. Don't drag up past grudges.
- **Don't interrupt.** Even when you have something important to say or you disagree with the other person, try to wait until he or she is finished.
- **Really try to listen to what the other person is saying,** and let the person know you have heard him or her. When you are upset or feel as if you are being attacked, don't concentrate only on what you think. Show your respect for the person by listening to the other side and considering the person's point of view.
- **If you make a mistake, apologize.** People will respect you more for realizing you're not perfect.
- **Avoid dramatic statements** like *"Forget the whole thing then!"* Consider the big picture. One or two conflicts do not necessarily mean a whole project or relationship must come to an end.

Conflicts between adults and kids are a little trickier. Whether it's a parent or a teacher, adults should be better at helping you negotiate conflicts with them, although that's not always the case. When approaching an adult, remember:

- Adults have authority. It's something they have worked for and earned. It's important to recognize this in any situation where conflict occurs.
- You have the right to say how you feel, as long as you say it in a respectful way.
- Teachers and parents are human. They make mistakes and have feelings like everyone else.
- Match the level of language with the person you're speaking to. You will probably address a teacher or another adult more formally than you would your friends.
- If you wish to disagree, do it diplomatically. You can say something like, "I see what you mean, but have you ever thought of..."
- Be willing to compromise.
- Listen to the other's point of view without being defensive, and think before you speak.
- Try putting yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Try to stay calm no matter what to keep the discussion open.
- Think about how you want the conflict to end. What are possible solutions?
- Sometimes it helps to talk to another adult. For example, if you have a problem with a teacher, you may wish to talk to another teacher about it.

All conflicts, regardless of whom they're with, are easier to work out if you have a little distance. One way to get some distance is by working it out on paper. Look at the following example of how to work through a conflict on paper.

1. Identify the conflict.

I want to go camping. Mom wants me to spend more time with the family.

2. Think of possible solutions.

a) *I could give up the camping trip.*

b) *I could go camping anyway.*

c) *Maybe I could spend Friday night with my friends on the camping trip and do something special with my family on Saturday like taking them to the zoo.*

3. Think of the result of each possible solution.

a) *I could give up the camping trip.*

Result → Mom would be happy, but I'd be sad and maybe even angry.

b) *I could go camping anyway.*

Result → I'd have fun but maybe feel guilty. Mom would be mad and maybe feel let down.

c) *Maybe I could spend Friday night with my friends on the camping trip and do something special with my family on Saturday like taking them to the zoo.*

Result → That would make Mom happy. I'd feel good about myself too because I wouldn't feel guilty and I'd still get to spend time with my friends.

4. Decide what the best choice is based on the results for each solution you could think of. Did you propose a "win-win" solution? Will most of the conflict go away with this solution?

The best solution seems to be c) because then even though we won't get exactly what we want, it seems to be a good compromise where we each give up a little and get something, too.

Step 1: Know what you want to say.

Most of us talk to one another without a moment's thought. However, if you experience any of problems listed on Fact Sheet 6, it helps to take some time to consider what it is you want to say. You may even wish to rehearse it out loud to help you to see where your thoughts and words are not clear.

Step 2: Be aware of your emotions and body language.

Strong emotions can prevent you from thinking clearly and communicating effectively. It is a good idea to avoid conversations in these circumstances. However, if this is not possible, at least take a moment for yourself before you speak to help you keep control of your comments.

The other important part of this step is to recognize your body language. Two types of body language can be particularly problematic because people will become offended or go on the defensive. They are:

*Body Language that Says,
"I'm not paying attention"*

- not making eye contact
- looking around
- doing other things while talking
- examining your hands and fingers

Aggressive Body Language

- pointing fingers
- stomping your feet
- gesturing wildly
- standing very close to the person

Step 3: Be a good listener.

Most of us get so caught up in what we want to say that we don't really listen to the other person. As soon as we sense conflict, we begin formulating our next point. To avoid a breakdown of communication, let the other person know that you are listening and that you understand. Just say, "Let me see if I understand what you are saying to me. I heard you say... Is that right?" This does not mean you have to agree. You just have to demonstrate that you accurately heard what was said.

Step 4: Know how and when to compromise.

Compromise implies a sense of fairness. Both parties believe that they have given a little but that they have also received something in return. In many situations, we cannot get exactly what we want. It is important to prioritize your needs so you can enter into a compromise with a clear sense of what you are willing to give up and what you are not.

Sometimes a compromise cannot be reached. You may be asked to do something that you do not want to do or that seems ethically, morally, or legally wrong. In these cases, there is no compromise, but you do not have to end conflicts in anger. It is acceptable to "agree to disagree" in a calm manner.

SIGNS OF FAULTY COMMUNICATION

FACT
SHEET
6

You need to work on improving your communication skills if:

- People often tell you that you are not making sense.
- People often ask you to repeat yourself: “Can you say that again? I don’t think I understand what you mean.”
- You have difficulty following conversations and find yourself looking for ways to ask people to repeat themselves.
- You often feel that you have “given in” or been “taken advantage of.”
- You never seem able to compromise.
- Frequently, you do not get your point across in conversation.
- Although you feel you have expressed your points, after your conversation you realize the other person has not had a chance to express his/hers.
- You get flustered during important conversations and miss important information.
- You realize you have not been listening but instead trying to organize your own thoughts and responses.
- You feel people are talking “too fast” and you can’t keep up.
- People often tell you to slow down: “You’re way ahead of us!”
- When conflicts emerge, you engage in trying to “win”—and lose perspective regarding the issue.

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Internet Sites:

Compassionate Conflict Resolution

www.cnvc.org/nvc.htm

Communication: Key to Resolving Conflicts

www.motiv8.com/personal/conflict.html

Confronting Conflict with Communication

www.bydesigntrng.com/news5.htm

Parentalk Newsletter: Adolescents and Communication Barriers

www.tnpc.com/parentalk/adolescence/teens2.html