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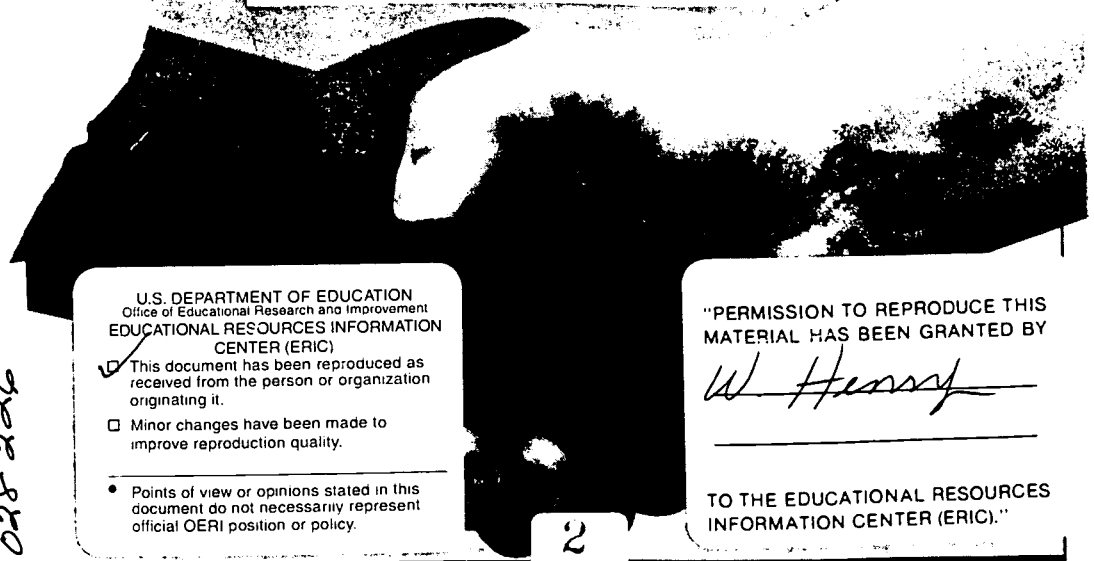
ABSTRACT

Although the issues of conflict and violence cannot be blamed on schools, schools are one of the most logical places to tackle problems associated with conflict. This booklet offers practical tips to help school leaders, staff, and students resolve their disputes peacefully. It focuses on student-versus-student and student-versus-teacher conflicts. Part 1 describes systemic strategies for teachers and staff that use peer mediators to incorporate conflict management into the curriculum. The second part offers discussion starters and scenarios targeted primarily at problem solving among middle and high school students. Part 3 offers strategies to mitigate conflicts between students and educators. The best conflict-resolution programs help individuals help themselves by teaching empathy, anger management, impulse control, and listening skills. A list of resource organizations is included. (LMI)

CONFLICT Resolution

LEARNING TO GET ALONG



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Why Conflict Resolution?

Every day, students, parents, educators, and others voice their concerns about the hostility that plagues our society. While schools remain one of the safest havens for many students, the threat of violence weighs heavy on students' minds and distracts them from getting the best education possible.

A 1994 Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher found that 44 percent of students surveyed said they had experienced angry scenes or confrontations during the previous month. One-fourth (24 percent) said they had engaged in physical fights.

Interestingly, the survey revealed that a majority of students see these hostile situations as inevitable. Fifty-two percent of students responded that "it's almost impossible to walk away from an angry scene or confrontation without fighting."

Echoing this data, one out of three students surveyed by the Association of California School Administrators in 1994 said they had been grabbed or shoved by someone "being mean." Other hostile behaviors cited by the students included cussing, put-downs, and verbal threats of physical harm.

Every day he would clutch his lunch tighter as he neared the pathway skirting the school ground. "Maybe he won't be there today," the little boy thought. "Maybe he'll leave me alone." Still, his breathing quickened as he rounded the corner. But this day, like almost every day, Juan felt a hand gripping his shoulder and knew it was happening again. "Give it up, nerd," a harsh, hissing voice like a snake whispered in his ear.

It all happened so quickly—one day the gang was hanging out like usual, out by the ramp leading down from the school's back entrance. Stephanie could always count on seeing her friends there. They were a tough bunch of boys and girls but that was what she wanted because she was tough, and needed some protection once in a while. It was a great place to hang out—secluded and quiet. Most teachers didn't dare bother them. Who would have thought the Barracudas would try to move in on them? All of a sudden it wasn't a game anymore. Someone had a gun—and now a boy was dead, so young, so like her in so many ways.

A matter of degree. Today, too, these conflicts go beyond fistfights in the schoolyard. In fact, according to violence expert B.Z. Friedlander of the University of Hartford, "What frightens most people...is the continual fear that minor differences among students, and their challenges to authority and control, can spark fast, high and dangerous escalation" of violence.

Protection From a Hostile World

Why the marked upsurge in violence, particularly among young people? There are no quick and easy answers. For one thing, many believe young

people today are not as free to socialize with each other as in other eras. Many young people today don't "play together" as in years past. Instead, they opt to involve themselves in solitary activities such as video games, television viewing, or talking for long hours on the telephone. Or, they seek affiliation with groups such as gangs that promise them a family-type closeness they may not find at home, and the lure of profits from the drug trade.

Mirroring society. Many disruptive students merely are mimicking their environment, home, or world. Conditions in the community such as unemployment, poverty, and violence often are cited as causes or indicators of conflict in schools.

Too often, as well, children are physically and emotionally abused, or witness other family members involved in abuse. They come to school feeling neglected, unfulfilled, and hopeless. A neglected or abused student often views being disruptive (or even violent) as a means to feel good or redeemed in some way. These children typically have low self-esteem and may feel the only way to make a difference is to be recognized, even if they are recognized for negative behavior. Schools can make a difference for students caught in this trap by understanding this need for attention.

Misbehavior often is a result of an overabundance of energy, too. The energy that compels a student to misbehave or constantly cause conflicts, however, is the same energy that could be re-channeled into worthwhile and positive actions. This is not an easy task by any

Practice What You Preach

Schools can be models for society at large. If they create environments and structures in which students, faculty, and staff routinely and effectively resolve their differences, they foster an expectation that it is normal and possible to talk through problems rather than fight. If they respond to diversity and conflict only with fear and force, schools teach that power is the right way to settle disputes. Actions speak louder than words.

— "Understanding Intergroup Conflict in Schools," Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030-4444

means. But it is one way to help students become good citizens; ones who use their heads instead of their tempers or fists to resolve the conflicts they'll face growing up.

How To Use This Booklet

This booklet does not attempt to solve the problems of society leading to hostile environments and situations. However, *Conflict Resolution* does offer practical tips to help school leaders, staff, and students resolve their disputes peacefully.

Conflict takes many forms. Some common types of conflict include the following:

- Student on student
- Student on teacher
- Teacher on student
- School staff vs. school staff
- Parent vs. educator.

This booklet concentrates on student vs. student and student vs. teacher. However, adults finding themselves in tense situations with other adults or students may find the tips included in this guide helpful in resolving differences.

This book is divided into three parts. The first is directed toward school leaders and staff, and looks at systemic strategies for dealing with conflict.

Part II, while targeted primarily at young people in middle and high schools,* may be used by educators, parents, staff, and others to help develop the interpersonal skills critical to conflict resolution. This section may be used separately by students themselves or as a teacher-or parent-guide. Here, the discussion starters *What Can I Do?* and scenarios are useful tools for spurring dialogue and sharing feelings. Activities give students thought-provoking and practical lessons in conflict-resolution skills. Incidentally, this material is intended for all types of students. Perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and others all perhaps may see themselves in these pages.

Part III deals with conflicts between students and educators, and is written for both.

Finally, educators, parents, and others may find the "Where To Turn" list at the end of this publication helpful in seeking information and resources for establishing conflict resolution programs within schools.

Educators or parents should read all parts of this book carefully and tailor their programs to their own needs.

* Many researchers and educators believe that to be effective, conflict resolution strategies should be taught as early as the elementary school years.

Why Schools Must Act

While the issues of conflict and violence cannot be blamed on schools, schools are one of the most logical places to tackle problems associated with conflict. Schools often serve as the hub of the community, mirroring society at large. They house a diverse student body, and diversity often causes conflict. They are in the business of teaching, and therefore have the resources and will to teach conflict resolution skills. They have access to community resources. And, unfortunately, many conflicts originate on school campuses.

The Whole-School Approach

To some extent, then, it is up to principals and other school leaders to establish a climate conducive to conflict resolution. The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution of the George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, recommends that schools launch a full-scale campaign in concert with other community and social service groups to make a real difference for young people. "If the school community hopes to do more than simply react to crises, it will be necessary to consider the multiplicity of causes and conditions that create conflict through a long-term assessment process that will help to generate both a plan of action and an environment in which everyone feels they have a stake in working things out," says their report, "Understanding Intergroup Conflict in Schools: Strategies and Resources."

For example, because strong links have been found between youth violence and factors such as family violence, poverty, and drugs, a proactive way to get to the heart of the matter would be for schools to work in partnership with social service agencies in addressing these issues.

Common tenets

A holistic approach to conflict resolution teaches the adults as well as the students in a school the causes of personal and group hostility and strategies for peaceful resolution. Schools working toward this type of climate:

- Stress that conflict, within reason, is a natural part of life.
- Support establishment of a conflict resolution program including training for adults.
- Take a multidimensional approach, incorporating lessons across and throughout the regular curriculum and offering mediation centers and/or counseling.
- Don't wait for conflicts to occur before teaching conflict resolution, but use a proactive approach.
- Consider conflict resolution to be a dynamic, ongoing part of school life, not a one-shot deal or fad.

What are schools doing?

Conflict resolution is becoming more and more prevalent in schools. According to the National Association for Mediation in Education, the number of schools teaching their students conflict resolution jumped 40 percent between 1991 and 1994. Today, approximately 5,000 elementary and secondary schools have programs devoted to conflict resolution, with peer mediation programs topping the list.

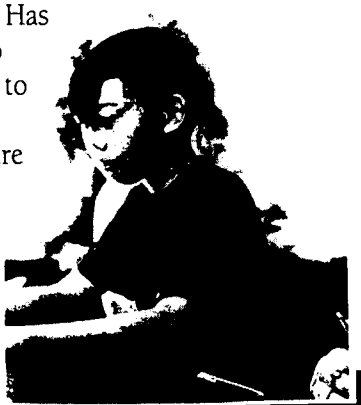
Most schools and districts take a multi-pronged approach, using programs or strategies including:

- Mediation/dispute resolution for students, faculty, administrators, and parents.
- Multicultural education.
- Commercial programs, such as Second Step (see sidebar, p. 10) or Street Law (described on p. 7).
- Parental and peer counseling.
- Police, social service, crisis management, and other representatives who come in to lecture or give field trips.
- Partnerships with businesses and community organizations.
- Incorporation of conflict resolution lessons into daily work and across subjects.

Assess the severity

Before beginning a targeted, whole-school or district approach, it is important to assess the current situation. The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution recommends that an assessment of conflict consider the following:

- **Patterns of behavior.** Student records such as attendance, discipline, teen pregnancy, dropouts and others may signal trends such as number and magnitude of incidents and disproportionate groups or grade levels involved.
- **Communication and relationships.** Do elements of the school community exhibit a lack of respect for one another? Is an absence of fairness regularly cited as a problem in the school? Do some groups decline to participate in school activities? Has there been a change in these patterns? Do people feel they have resources to call on to help them resolve problems?
- **Polarization among student groups.** Are students divided into social clusters?
- **Imbalances in the school community.** Are resources allocated unfairly between areas such as sports and academics? Are some constituencies under-represented in decision making?



- **Social and economic conditions in the wider community.** What is the level of unemployment? Are there wide class divisions? Are neighborhoods divided along racial or ethnic lines?

Information gathered through an assessment of this type will help schools gauge what areas are most in need of improvement and how serious a problem, if any, they face.

Once a thorough assessment has been made, a school or school system leader will want to work with others to plan a conflict resolution program tailored to specific needs revealed in the assessment. Keep in mind that any planning should involve the whole community — including parents. Only when schools and parents work together will any change for the better occur in terms of student discipline and conflict resolution.

The Elements of Conflict Resolution

Whether a custom-made or commercial conflict resolution program is chosen, and whether it targets adults, youth or young children, most programs try to teach individuals to become empowered to resolve conflicts using the following:

- Anger management
- Active listening
- Empathy
- Self-discipline
- An understanding of consequences
- Creative problem solving
- Non-violent expression of feelings, behaviors
- Appreciation of diversity of cultures, beliefs, races.

Conflict resolution gives the parties involved options to the "fight or flight" reactions typical of conflict. Learning negotiating techniques and the skills listed above is seen as an opportunity for personal growth, both for students and adults.

How To Beat Information Overload

While staying informed about conflict management programs and services is important, too much information can be confusing. So many districts and companies now are providing training, kits, research, techniques, and programs that school leaders may not know where to turn. Each school district is unique, as well, and has its own needs. A publication developed by the Department of Justice in cooperation with the Department of Education takes away some of the work by boiling down descriptions of many of the best products and services in one place. A handbook for superintendents, principals, and teachers, the guide is a helpful resource for those assessing their current program or hoping to institute a new one. "Conflict Resolution Programs in Schools: A Guide to Program Selection" was scheduled to be available by the 1995-96 school year.

For more information, contact DOJ, Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at (202) 307-5929.

Incorporating Conflict Management Into the Curriculum

Many schools incorporate conflict management into their regular K-12 curriculum in various ways. Some choose commercial programs such as Street Law, created by the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law. Street Law teaches students practical issues related to the law using mock trials, which simulate real-life courtroom cases with students playing the roles of judges, lawyers, jurors and other participants. "If you send these kids out into the world without teaching them law, it's as if you sent them out onto a basketball court without teaching them the rules of the game. Then you wonder why they're fouling out," said Lori Urogdy Eiler, a social studies teacher and Street Law instructor at Shaw High School in East Cleveland, Ohio (from "Street Law News," Vol. XII, No. 1: National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law, Washington, D.C.) The program, which has been in operation since 1975, has been so successful that it has fostered mock trial competitions between schools and even statewide. A companion program called "Working it Out," established in 1993 by NICEL and the National Crime Prevention Council uses the same role-play and scenario format to teach problem solving through mediation.

Other ways to bring conflict management lessons into the daily operations of schools include hosting speakers, such as a crisis intervention specialist who has "talked someone down from a ledge," a telephone hot line operator, or a representative from a community mediation program, according to NICEL's deputy director Judith Zimmer. She cautioned, however, that a one-shot approach such as an assembly is not effective. To really diffuse conflict, lessons must be incorporated throughout the school day and year, and must be intellectually compelling to students. Most importantly, she noted, any approach to conflict management must stress that "these are skills used by adults in the real world."

Peer Mediators

One of the most common strategies used by schools is to enlist students as peer mediators. Mediators are "go-betweens" who help people with differences work out their problems by looking for peaceful solutions. Many schools across the nation have started peer mediation groups to help students and peers work together to settle differences in a nonviolent way.

Traditionally, student problems are handled by guidance counselors, teachers, principals, or other school administrators. While school personnel still deal with fights or violence, many are training peer mediators to help resolve minor incidents, such as name calling and rumors —incidents that could escalate into more serious problems. Schools developing peer mediation programs hope they will foster a more easygoing, comfortable atmosphere for students to resolve problems among themselves.

A Word of Caution

As you're aware, it is important to keep in mind the individual nature of each conflict and the personalities involved. So, while some of the conflict resolution strategies outlined within this book will work for some, other students and staff may require stricter measures to change their behavior. Conflict resolution programs should not be viewed as a substitute for tough discipline codes, weapons sanctions, or alternatives for chronically violent students.

Set Straight on Bullies, a publication by the National School Safety Center, advises that while bullies need to be confronted, it should be done in private. "By challenging a bully in front of his peers, it actually may enhance his status and lead to further aggression. In paying attention to the victim, be aware of and prepared to respond to more bullying that may be provoked when the student is outside the protection of the teacher," the book says.

Caution should be exercised, too, in urging students to "tell on" one another or to step into a hostile situation to practice conflict resolution skills. Retribution or escalating violence are real possibilities that should be taken seriously. There can be no general rule for students to follow. In any case, any information passed on to principals or others in responsible positions should be treated with the utmost tact and confidentiality.

Linda Lantieri, founder of Resolving Conflict Creatively, a joint venture between the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility, advocates that because students respond to different personality types, "both the positive and negative leaders in a school have to be chosen as mediators in order for this to work well," and that a diversity of sex, race, and academic achievement also is important. Peer mediators also should be fair, well respected by the student body, and good communicators.

In seeking peer mediation, students must agree to be honest and work toward a solution. Ground rules should be established, such as, "Name calling and interrupting are not allowed." The mediators usually try to be nonjudgmental and lend an objective ear to help the parties work out something between themselves.

One peer mediator at a Virginia high school explained, "We just let [other students] talk first and let them get to the goal and figure things out before it gets to a fist fight."

When an agreement is reached, it usually is approved by school staff. After a couple of weeks, a follow-up meeting should be scheduled to make sure both parties are fulfilling the agreement.

Does Conflict Resolution Work?

Educators implementing such programs generally report a decrease in violent incidents, as well as recommendations and administrator paperwork for disciplinary action. In addition, such programs have been lauded as helping students be better communicators, listeners, and problem

solvers. As well, conflict resolution models core values including responsibility, respect, and an appreciation for diversity.

When Adults Have Conflicts

No conflict resolution strategies will succeed for students without being modeled and practiced by school employees, according to Frank Blechman, clinical faculty of the George Mason University Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Instead, adults within the school community must send the message that "The norm around here is we work it out," Blechman said. As stated earlier, not all conflict is bad. Some can lead to positive changes and results. But when conflict escalates, everyone, including adults, has preconceived ideas about how to handle things. Some of our behaviors can be roadblocks that keep us from moving toward peaceful resolutions to disputes.

While the following suggestions are directed to educators, the basic message applies to anyone:

- **Be honest.** If you disagree, say so. Don't wait to make negative remarks until after a meeting and a person who has expressed an opinion is out of earshot. If someone has asked for your input and you have serious concerns, be forthright and say them. That way, if he or she hears about your concern from someone else (and you can bet it will be told), it won't be distorted and it won't be anything you hadn't personally made known.
- **Don't take it personally.** A lot of times conflict arises because we take to heart, overreact, or take personally what's being said about our favorite program or project. We need to stop wearing our feelings on our sleeves, perceiving everything as a direct attack. More than likely, it isn't.
- **Keep it academic.** Often we may intend to say, "Certainly you haven't taken into consideration all of the facts," when we actually blurt out, "You're crazy!" This generally only heightens a tense, conflict-prone situation.
- **Be direct.** Give clear and specific directions, that way you'll receive clear and specific results.
- **Read the seeds.** We can all learn a thing or two about conflict resolution among our peers by referring to the seeds of conflict outlined in Part II of this book. The root causes and the better ways of handling conflict listed on these pages can help to reduce violence and promote mutual understandings and peace.
- **Follow the conflict management strategies outlined in this booklet.** Seek a peer counselor who can serve as an objective listener. Write down solutions and consequences before you act. Count to 10 backwards. Use what works for you, but consider the feelings of the other party as well.

The Second Step To Resolving Conflicts

Community tensions filter through the school walls of Whitworth Elementary, located in one of the toughest neighborhoods fringing Seattle, Washington. Bullet holes mar the school's exterior, while gangs prowl nearby.

Not surprisingly, Principal Susan McClosky observed that Whitworth's students were more aggressive than any she had previously worked with. Typical problems included fights, bad language, and children excluding each other from games and activities. McClosky and other staff members knew something had to be done.

In 1993, teachers began educating students about how to defuse anger and aggressiveness that could erupt into violence. Using a commercial program called Second Step and strategies developed by teachers and other staff, Whitworth students learn about empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management through in-class roll playing lessons.

Empathy skills allow students to identify and predict others' feelings and respond appropriately. The program teaches impulse control by exposing students to a repertoire of appropriate social behaviors. Students learn to manage their anger through stress reduction techniques, which are aimed at creating a healthy climate for solving problems.

Even students as young as 6 and 7 years old have learned anger management techniques. When faced with an anger-producing situation, some possible nonviolent steps students can take include counting backwards, taking deep breaths, thinking "nice" thoughts, and telling an adult.

When someone is angry, observed one Whitworth teacher, "Your brain kicks out and you need something else to kick in."

Whitworth's anti-violence plan does not rely solely on this commercial program, however. Students caught acting aggressively also are asked to develop a behavior plan, with the help of a teacher and guidance counselor. In their plans, students detail why they are being referred, what caused the problem, what the student can do to make it right, and what the consequences are.

In addition, the school has declared itself a "violence-free zone." Students bringing weapons to school are automatically expelled. Even toy weapons are taboo: students toting them receive a pink slip; those receiving four slips are suspended.

For more information on the Second Step program, including kits for older children, contact the Committee for Children, Client Services, 172 20th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122; (206) 322-5050 or (800) 634-4449.

Note: This is the student section of *Conflict Resolution: Learning To Get Along*. It can be used by students working individually or in groups, or as a parent or teacher guide.

Getting Along

Growing up, most of us receive contradictory messages about conflict from parents, teachers, friends, or peers. Most of us are taught that conflict is bad and to avoid it as long as possible. Yet, we also are told to defend ourselves—that only pushovers or weaklings let others bully them.

"Good children don't fight!"

"Don't let a bully push you around!"

It's no wonder that many people, especially young adults, know too little about resolving conflict. True, disagreements are a normal part of life, and not all conflicts are bad. But students, parents, educators—in fact, everyone—needs to understand ways to work toward peaceful resolutions when harassment, threats, physical violence, and other dangerous behaviors disrupt school life.

A Natural Part of Life

Conflict doesn't just happen. Words and actions — whether real or imagined — cause misunderstandings as well as verbal and physical fights. By the same token, resolution doesn't just happen, either. Solving conflicts peacefully takes work and a willingness to be open minded.

Conflict is a natural part of life. No one agrees or is agreeable all the time. Conflict resolution programs take this into consideration. As you learn the conflict resolution techniques given in this book and in your school program, keep in mind that no one is expecting you to never argue or fight again. That would be unrealistic. Instead, these techniques will help you diffuse situations as they arise and learn to manage your anger or violent feelings and behavior. While your school's superintendent, principal, teachers and other staff need to do all they can to provide you with conflict management skills and should model them themselves, only you can make them work for you. It is up to you, then, to empower yourself to use the skills that help you the most.

The important thing to keep in mind is that conflict is not inevitable. You do have options when angry feelings, either coming from you or someone else, are causing a situation to turn hostile or violent.

The Seeds of Conflict

Quite often, the behaviors listed below are the seeds from which full-scale conflict grows:

1. Gossip and rumors
2. Dirty Looks
3. Harassment
4. Jealousy
5. Invasion of privacy or turf
6. Arguments and disagreements
7. Diversity
8. Violence

Obviously, conflicts usually arise from a combination of causes. Many of these seeds are similar to one another and difficult to identify easily when they are occurring. For example, no clear lines exist between jealousy and disputes over turf and possessions—jealousy may cause these disputes. Throughout all is a thread of whether or not individuals feel they are being shown the proper respect. Violence is more a culmination of conflict, rather than a cause. However, this list is given as a foundation on which to build the various conflict resolution skills you may need.

The following sections describe each "seed" in more detail, and suggest ways for peacefully dealing with these types of conflict.

Gossip and Rumors

"Bad mouthing" someone behind his or her back, or just lying about an individual, are two examples of gossip. At the least, gossip is annoying and impolite. At worst, gossip can be so offensive and embarrassing that it actually destroys a person's welfare or livelihood.

Unfortunately for the victim, gossip usually is based on hearsay, not on easily verifiable facts or information. Occasionally, gossip contains a kernel of truth. But when rumors get spread to many people, each person typically adds to the story and distorts the original facts.

If you are the victim of gossip, you may become angry enough to fight. However, allowing yourself to be drawn into a verbal or physical conflict over gossip would only be stooping to the level of the "rumor spreaders." Remember, the important issue is that you know the truth.

"What Do I Do?"

- **Talk it out.** If someone you know fairly well is spreading gossip about you, confront him or her. Nothing is wrong with confrontation, as long as it's done civilly without threats or accusations. Ask the person or individuals why they are spreading damaging or false rumors about you, but don't be surprised if you end up with little explanation. When confronting someone, use "I statements" to express how the gossip made you feel, instead of making the conflict worse by using insults to make your point. For example, you might say something like, "I get angry and embarrassed when you tell people I said things that just aren't true," instead of "Spreading rumors about me is really low. You're a jerk."
- **Explain or refrain.** If the gossip being spread about you is untrue, you might choose to set the record straight by telling the facts. In some cases however— if the rumor spreaders won't listen to you or a neutral third party — you'd be better off to try and ignore not only the rumor, but the people spreading it.
- **Take the higher ground.** If gossip pertains to someone else, don't encourage the rumor by saying, "I heard so-and-so is..." to anybody else. Doing so only makes you part of the problem.
- **Defend your honor.** If the rumor involves you academically — someone is wrongly accusing you of cheating on exams or having someone else write your term papers — go to your teacher. This is a case when ignoring the situation may harm your school career. Tell your teacher what you've heard and explain how important it is to you that he or she not believe the rumors.
- **Enlist the help of a peer mediator.** If you have a peer mediation program at your school, this may be a good time to seek an objective party. If you don't have such a program, ask your guidance counselor or principal to consider starting one. These students listen to problems between other students and help them find mutually satisfactory resolutions by facilitating discussions.

What Do You Think?

Scenario: *Danielle and Kina are eighth-grade classmates. One day, Danielle told another classmate that Kina cheated on a language arts test. Soon, almost everyone in their class heard the rumor, and several students began to tease Kina.*

Now, every time Danielle and Kina are near each other, they call each other names and sometimes push and shove.

Some points to discuss

Students: Take some time to think about each of the following questions. Jot down notes to yourself in a journal or notebook or in the space pro-

vided and refer to your comments from time to time to remind yourself of how to handle these situations.

Teachers/parents: Ask students these questions as discussion starters on noncombative ways to deal with gossip and rumors.

1. What are some peaceful ways Danielle and Kina could solve this problem? (For example, "They could go to a peer mediation counselor.")

2. Do you think Kina should confront Danielle? Why or why not?

3. What could Kina say to Danielle that would demonstrate the conflict resolution skill of using "I" statements?

4. If you were in Danielle and Kina's class and someone told you this rumor, what would you do?

Dirty Looks

As harsh as it sounds, you must realize that not everyone in life is going to like you — and some of these people won't have a valid reason for disliking you. When someone stares or looks at you in an unusual way, however, it's not always a sign that he or she doesn't like you, nor is it necessarily meant to be annoying. The person staring may be thinking about something else and not even realize he or she is doing anything out of the ordinary. Even if someone is intentionally tossing dirty looks your way, keep in mind you may be misinterpreting his or her signals. For example:

- The other person is having a bad day and is taking it out on other students.
- A harmless habit of yours, such as twirling your hair or clearing your throat during class, drives someone else crazy.
- The other person is holding a grudge against you for something you inadvertently did, such as taking his or her seat on the bus or cutting in the cafeteria line.

"What Do I Do?"

- First, "check yourself!" Are you the reason dirty looks and other negative behavior is being directed at you? Maybe you're part of a clique or carry yourself in a manner that's considered "snobbish." Do you unintentionally send out unfriendly signals to others, such as maintaining a harsh facial expression or standing with your arms tightly crossed against your chest?
- Realize that dirty looks can't hurt you — they never have and never will!
- Throw the person giving you the dirty looks off guard by simply smiling back.
- Be open with the person, perhaps by saying something like "I have the feeling you're upset about something. Is it something I did?" This might trigger a conversation to help you both change the situation from negative to positive. On the other hand, that same person might insist he or she doesn't know what you're talking about, perhaps realizing the reason is silly or petty.

Harassment

Harassment includes insults, threats, giving someone an unfriendly gesture, picking on another person, sexual harassment, and name calling.

People who harass others, often referred to as "bullies," often started displaying this behavior at an early age. Perhaps pestering or intimidating others was the only way they found to get attention. Bullies are basically nonlisteners, with a history of past conflicts and few problem-solving skills. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are bigger and stronger and use violence (or the threat of it) to get their way. Others play "mind games" to intimidate by taking advantage of feelings or sensitivities.

To some extent, bullies should be taken seriously. While in years past bullies typically worked alone and used their own "might" to harass, today's bullies could potentially have a gang behind them to back up their threats or be carrying a weapon. This is not to say that victims have no rights.

"What Do I Do?"

- Understand you have a right to live without fear and harassment. If you're being harassed, there are people who can help, such as a teacher, parent, guidance or peer counselor, or other third party.
- If threatened, let the person know you're not afraid to tell an adult or other authority if he or she tries to harm you. However, sometimes you might feel telling an adult will make you more

open to harm. In that case, suggests a group of high school students from Newport News, Virginia, a victim of threats might want to respond with one of these statements and then walk away:

"I don't plan to get suspended over someone like you — so just leave me alone."

"This is so stupid! I've got better things to do than stand in this hall and fight you!"

"All we're going to do is end up hurting each other, and I don't have time for that."

Activity

Try these strategies for settling differences. You may use this method as a peer mediator or just for yourself with another person.

When working on settling a dispute, ask the person you are quarreling with to agree to some ground rules:

First person:

- Give your version of the problem using "I" statements. Don't attack the other person. It will only make the other individual angry and defensive.
- Stand back and listen. Don't interrupt when the other person is speaking.

Second person:

- To show that you were listening, repeat the first person's story as you understand it. Then, give your version of the story.

Peer mediator:

- Facilitate the discussion, but do not try to solve it yourself. Make sure the individuals follow the ground rules; try to keep them from interrupting or insulting each other; and let them talk it out. There's a good chance they will work it out by themselves.

Group:

- Try to come up with a plan for keeping the conflict resolved that meets everyone's needs. Write the plan down! Make sure it includes steps that will be taken if either party doesn't uphold the rules. If the same or a similar conflict arises, revisit the peer mediator or follow the first steps again. Few conflicts are ever tied up completely the first time.

Jealousy

Sometimes people act hateful because they are simply envious of you. You might have better grades or a steady boyfriend or girlfriend. Someone else might see you as cuter, more popular, or a better athlete, or think that you have nicer clothes or other material possessions. Jealous people say unkind things to hurt your feelings, making school life very unpleasant.

While jealousy has been given humorous names such as "the green-eyed monster," jealousy can cause serious conflicts that might even be deadly. For example, a young man in Washington, D.C., shot and killed a perfect stranger on an escalator in a crowded shopping mall for looking at his girlfriend in a way he didn't like. While this is an extreme example, jealousy often ignites conflicts between people.

People who are jealous usually are insecure and have very little self-esteem. If you find people are constantly jealous of you, ask yourself whether or not you could be partly to blame. Maybe you've been bragging, ignoring people, or acting like you're "too good" for them. If so, alter your behavior and see if the situation improves.

In the long run, however, no matter how hard you try to be friends with jealous people, they'll only resent you because they don't feel good about themselves. Try to ignore them and their nasty remarks.

"What Do I Do?"

- Realize that jealousy is the result of a personal "hang-up" someone else has — and not the result of something wrong with you.
- Try to ignore the unpleasant words or incidents caused by jealous people. Even though other people's jealousy is not your problem, you may have to deal with its consequences. Responding to or encouraging jealousy will only intensify the conflict and possibly lead to fights or violence. Of course, if you feel someone's jealousy is jeopardizing your personal safety, you should consider telling a parent or other adult.

Activity

Look through a newspaper or magazine for an article about a person you find interesting, or think about someone you know. Then list reasons someone might be jealous of this person. Do you think these are valid reasons to be jealous? What are some things you have that this person doesn't have?

I chose an article about _____. Here are four reasons I might be jealous of him or her:

(Ex.: She has her own car.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Here are some things I have that that person doesn't have:

(Ex.: My parents are still together; hers are divorced.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(Note that the purpose of this is not to make you gloat about what you have, but to see that we all have some things we wish for. In some ways we might be better off than those we envy.)

Invasion of Privacy or Turf

When someone invades our privacy, even unintentionally, we feel violated. And when invasion of privacy is intentional, it bothers us even more. Almost everyone has personal things we don't want others, especially people we're not well acquainted with, to know. For example, suppose a good friend gave out your unlisted telephone number without your permission. Reading someone's personal mail, taking an "unauthorized peep" at a student's exam score, going into a classmate's book bag without permission, or telling a secret that someone asked you not to share are other privacy invasions.

With gangs and peer groups forming stronger and stronger bonds today, invasion of turf is another conflict-breeding activity. Whether gangs invade the territory claimed by another gang or an individual takes over the personal property of another, young people feel very strongly about this.

"What Do I Do?"

- Respect other people's privacy and space as if they were your own.
- Unless a secret told to you is something immoral or could possibly cause harm, KEEP THE SECRET!
- If someone invades your privacy and it makes you angry, try to think of the reasons behind it. If you are completely trustworthy, confront the person calmly and use "I" statements to express how it made you feel.

- If you are possessive of an area of turf, consider whether others might not have a right to the space as well. Do you really own it? Is it worth getting hurt, or hurting others over? Think of the serious consequences of gang warfare. One day you will be out of school and that particular area won't mean anything to you. Is it worth the possible harm to yourself or others?

Activity

The three scenes below deal with possible invasions of privacy. Read each of them and discuss with classmates or friends whether or not you feel someone's privacy was invaded. Be prepared to explain your opinion and what, if anything, could be done to prevent it.

Scenario 1. *Someone tells your teacher you have a toy pistol in your locker, which is against school policy. Your teacher then walks you to your locker, insisting that you open it for inspection.*

Scenario 2. *You return home from school and find your sister in your room searching through your desk drawer. When you ask what's she doing, she replies, "I can't find the phone book. By the way, I see you got a nice letter from your pen pal."*

Scenario 3. *While your teacher is giving the class a lecture on the Civil War, you decide to write a very lengthy note to your buddy in the next row. As you pass it along, your teacher intercepts it and begins to read it...aloud!*

Discuss some non-violent ways to deal with these situations. List them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Arguments and Disagreements

Arguments are verbal exchanges between two or more people that stem from a number of reasons. Misunderstandings, personality clashes, jealousy, turf, rude behavior and not respecting others are some typical causes. Arguments frequently start over something minor or silly (someone takes the last piece of pizza in the cafeteria or looks at someone else's boyfriend), but they can still lead to "name calling," fighting, and violence.

Arch Lustberg, an expert in public speaking, says people are "too quick to fire off the mouth before taking aim with the mind." Remember, while it's all right to disagree with someone, a mature person understands how to disagree without being threatening. All differences can't be settled, since we all have our own feelings, opinions, and experiences. A rational person is able to say, "I was wrong," "I misunderstood you," "That's just the way I

feel," or the all-important "I'm sorry." And when a mature person is proven right, he or she doesn't need to say, "I told you so..."

"What Do I Do?"

- Understand it is not necessary to win every argument! If you feel an argument is going nowhere, give in, tell the other person you want to end the discussion on this particular subject, or walk away.
- If the argument is escalating or getting more threatening, walk away and cool down. Try counting backwards from 10. The more you argue, the angrier you become — and you can't make smart decisions when you're angry. Chances are you won't change each others' minds by continuing to argue.
- Stop and ask yourself, "Is this issue really worth arguing about?"
- If you think the argument is worth it, at least try to see the other person's side. Listen to the other arguments and put yourself in your opponent's position. Are there special circumstances that make him or her feel this strongly? For example, an insensitive remark about overweight people may hit a nerve with someone who is struggling to lose weight.
- Talk to a peer mediator. (See tip under "Jealousy.")
- Learn to be an active listener (see below).

Active listening. When you are arguing with someone, try this active listening technique. Repeat back to them what you thought they said, and respond to their feelings. For example, if someone said to you, "Hey, you stepped on my foot!" try, "I know you're mad because you think I stepped on your foot on purpose, but I didn't. It was an accident." By repeating what they said, you are letting them know that while you may not agree, you at least respect them enough to listen to what they have to say. Another part of active listening is to ask questions to clarify what the other person means.

Active listening is an important component of "We Can Work It Out," a mediation program taught in schools by the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law and the National Crime Prevention Council. According to these groups, active listening is important because:

- It gives you a better understanding of the problem.
- It makes people feel you want to resolve the issue.
- It gives you an opportunity to listen for possible areas of agreement.
- It cuts down on further conflicts.

(*We Can Work It Out! Problem Solving Through Mediation,*" was published for NICEL and NCPC by Social Studies School Service, 10200 Jefferson Boulevard, P.O. Box 802, Culver City, CA 90232-0802.)

Activity

(**Students/teachers/parents:** This activity may be initiated by anyone to spur further discussion.)

Disagreements often lead to arguments and fights because the people involved have not learned how to solve problems creatively.

Think about an argument you had recently that seemed out of control or went unresolved. Or, look through a newspaper or magazine for an article about a family-related problem involving disagreements. (Examples might include divorces and custody battles for children, conflicts stemming from a family member's drug or alcohol abuse, or a violent crime.) Then, using the problem-solving steps below, complete this exercise:

A. Describe the problem(s).

_____
_____
_____
_____

B. List three possible solutions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Describe the solution you would choose.

_____
_____
_____

D. List the pros (+) and cons (-) of your solution.

+	-
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

E. Discuss your solution. Do others agree with you? Why or why not?

Diversity

Just as immigration, technology, and communications advances have made the world "smaller" and more global, today's classrooms have become more diverse. While diversity (e.g. ethnic or religious) can build understanding between people, inevitably it causes tension as people struggle to understand each other's different outlooks.

While high school students tend to be quite open-minded and unbiased, most students feel caught in a bind between wanting to be fair and

responding to prejudices within society, according to R. David Addams, director of the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution.

Then again, diversity is a complex subject, and sometimes it's not clear how one should behave toward others who are different in some ways. For example, some people think it's wrong to bring up cultural differences between people of different nationalities, while others think it's only natural to talk about one's cultural background and wrong to believe everyone is exactly the same. Sometimes you have to decide for yourself, given the situation, tone of voice used, and personalities involved.

What Do I Do?

- When thinking about diversity, consider this: Just as some people seem different to you (skin color, religion, culture, etc.) you are just as "different" to them. Imagine yourself as the only one of your "kind" in a group and think how you would feel.
- Next, think of how many things you actually have in common with others.
- Look around the cafeteria or campus and see if groups are clustered together. Try sitting with a group other than the one you normally sit with (without appearing threatening or nosy). Get to know others.

Activity

Complete the chart below and discuss your responses with others, either in a class, with your parents, or with friends.

Acceptable Behavior (Example: Asking someone with an accent about their nationality)	**Unacceptable Behavior** (Example: Racist jokes)

Violence

But what if jealousy, dirty looks, invasion of privacy and other infringements lead to violence? Almost everyone has heard, read about, or experienced the increasing violence in our society today. Fighting, compounded by a lack of skill in resolving conflicts and the presence of weapons, is a constant concern, especially in schools where students and staff are trying to teach and learn. The likelihood that your personal safety may be threatened at some point is very real.

Fighting is not a socially accepted way of handling conflict, doesn't prove anything, and also can cause serious physical harm to the individuals involved.

Unfortunately, some kids grow up thinking that fighting is the best way to settle differences. The root of this belief could be their environment or peer pressure. Regardless of the reason, these young people must come to grips with the fact that fighting will never solve a problem or change anybody's mind.

People who like to fight often think it will get them respect. Movies depict violent "heroes" and "villains" that are glamorized by actors admired by young people.

In the real world, violent people cause nothing but harm and sorrow. People might fear their actions, but they certainly don't respect them. After all, it takes no brain power to hit someone. But figuring out how to settle disputes peacefully takes a lot of "smarts."

Armed and Dangerous

If anyone — including a friend — shows you a gun, knife, switchblade, or other weapon, you are in a life-threatening situation. Even if the person holding the gun doesn't intend to pull the trigger, he or she could still accidently shoot you.

- If someone has a gun or weapon, quietly walk out of the room — it's the safest and easiest option you have.
- If the person insists you stay in the room, speak calmly to him or her. Say you're scared, and ask that the gun be put away.
- Assume the gun is loaded — even if the gun-toting individual says it isn't. He or she may be lying or simply wrong.
- Do not attack the gun holder. And don't threaten the person by saying, "You'd better put that gun away or else." This might be just the stimulus needed to fire.
- Do not ignore the person. Your behavior might provoke the individual to do something even more drastic to get your attention.

"What Do I Do?"

- The moment you're threatened, consider telling someone: a teacher, guidance counselor, or the principal (see sidebar above, however).
- Find out if your school has established a peer mediation group and take advantage of this resource. If your school doesn't have one, talk to a teacher or advisor about starting one.
- Never let yourself get "bullied" or drawn into a physical fight. You've got nothing to gain and everything to lose.
  In most schools, if a student, even after being hit, strikes back, both students are suspended or disciplined in some other way. Of course, being hit and not striking back is not an easy thing to do...but it is the smart thing to do.
- If you are involved in a fight, be prepared to explain the facts, honestly and completely, to school authorities.

Activity

Keep a journal on conflict, suggests Judith Zimmer, deputy director of the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law. Here are some things you might write about:

- What kinds of behavior does your community consider acceptable? Is violence ever tolerated?
- Note incidents of hostile and violent behavior you observe, both in reality and on television and the movies. How were situations resolved or not resolved? Be sure to jot down any solutions that seemed to suit you, particularly. Everyone has a different style, some people are more confrontational than others; some are more diplomatic.
- How do violent situations make you feel, both as an observer or as an involved party? If you "started it," how do you feel later?
- Include in your journal any articles from newspapers and magazines.

Is It Smart To Tell?

Yes, you know you're supposed to tell an adult or other authority figure if someone threatens or hurts you. But what if telling might actually put you in more danger? And what will your peers think if you "rat" on someone? No book or adult can tell you what to do in potentially dangerous situations. You should trust your instincts and use common sense when dealing with a violent person.

What Do You Think?

Scenario: *On the way to his third-period class, Ben comes up to Steve and announces he's going to beat him senseless the next day. "Yeah, right!" Steve says and heads to class. The next day however, Ben makes good on his threat and shoves Steve from behind. Shocked and embarrassed, Steve spins around and tries to knock Ben out. Other students passing by begin to watch and egg the two on, and a full-scale fight soon begins.*

The principal breaks up the two students and takes them to the office. Both students get suspended for three days. When they return to school, a cloud of antagonism still hangs over them. One word from either could provoke a rematch between the two.

Discuss this incident with your classmates and teacher. What could Steve have done to solve this conflict more productively? Was Steve right to try and hit Ben back? Why or why not? Do hitting, shoving, and other physical acts ever solve problems? What can Steve and Ben do when they return to school to solve their conflict?

List possible solutions here:

Conflict in the Classroom

Today, despite stricter rules on physical contact, more conflicts between students and staff are occurring on school campuses. Disruptive classroom behavior, such as acting up in class, excessive talking, and not listening to the teacher are just three common types of classroom misbehavior that often cause conflicts between students and teachers. Sometimes, conflicts even become so hostile that students physically attack teachers or other educators. When this happens, everyone suffers.

How do these conflicts start? From the students' point of view, they might think a teacher is unfair, mean, or simply boring and feel justified to act up. Or, a student may just be a clown. However, in some ways this is a "chicken or the egg" issue. Teachers and other school employees often say that students initiate bad feelings through poor behavior.

Whatever the case, acting up in class gets you nowhere but in trouble, and wastes valuable learning time. Conflict with adults in a school building has serious consequences, too, such as suspension or expulsion. Disrupting class also annoys other students.

"What Do I Do?"

To the student:

- If you have a joke or a story to tell a friend, wait until after class. Whispering or talking in class is rude.
- If you have a problem with a teacher, save your complaint for a calm discussion after class. If it's not resolved to either individual's satisfaction, ask to talk to a peer mediator or guidance counselor.

To the teacher:

- Make it a practice to call on all students routinely, not just the "good" students. Often, those who disrupt your class are bright. In fact, they may be acting up because they have a need to have their voices heard that isn't being answered.
- Don't let students get away with talking out of turn or other rude behavior in class, but try not to draw too much attention to the disrupters. It may be just what they are looking for. Instead, tell them to stop and to see you after class or school, when you can have a calm discussion with them.

Activity

This exercise will help improve your interactions with other students, teachers, and peers. Read the three scenarios below, along with the suggested "right" action following each of them, and discuss them and their consequences with your classmates.

Scenario 1. *Mrs. Prentiss asks Kalin to name the capital of New York. Kalin stares at the teacher and just shrugs her shoulders.*

Although it seems nonaggressive, Kalin's behavior is disruptive. Her indifferent attitude and failure to respond wastes time because the teacher has to stop and prod Kalin or find someone else to answer the question. Kalin's actions also could prompt more disruptive behavior by causing other students to snicker, make snide comments, or mimic her behavior.

To the student: First, you should respond whenever a teacher or anyone asks you a question. If Kalin wasn't sure about the capital of New York, she should have just stated that politely. Shrugging and refusing to answer gives the impression that she doesn't care, which may not be accurate. More importantly, Kalin should remember class participation is part of an effective classroom environment. Her actions showed disrespect for the teacher and for learning.

To the teacher: Perhaps Kalin is embarrassed or doesn't want to appear dumb in front of her classmates for giving an incorrect answer. She probably felt it would be more acceptable to shrug and present an "I don't care" attitude.

A bit of positive prodding might encourage Kalin to respond. For example, you could give her three capitals to choose from or allow her to tell the class something else she does know about New York.

Scenario 2. *Robert hates Spanish class. He sits in the last row, doodles in a notebook, tells jokes to other students, and does not participate or complete assignments.*

Failure to complete or turn in schoolwork is irresponsible. If you have a problem with a teacher or class, disruptive behavior only compounds the problem.

To the student: Robert needs to take positive action to resolve his conflict with the Spanish class rather than taking out his frustrations on the teacher and other students. What doesn't he like about Spanish? Is he confused? Does he have trouble pronouncing words? If so, there's nothing wrong with asking questions and seeking help. Some students may find it less embarrassing to ask for help outside of class.

As a student, you need to be responsible for your actions. You don't just get grades, you earn them. If Robert fails his Spanish class, he can't blame the teacher. He simply didn't make any effort to learn or do better.

To the teacher: If Robert's behavior is tolerated, it will continue and spread to other students. Make sure other students understand that not

participating and distracting others is unacceptable in your classroom. If Robert does not respond to efforts to involve him in the class, you may need to seek disciplinary action.

Scenario 3. *Buddy's math teacher has just finished a review of prime and composite numbers. The review was done quickly because the test is tomorrow. Buddy does not understand what a prime number is. He throws his math book on the floor. When the teacher asks Buddy what the problem is, he responds, "I hate this class!" and runs out the door.*

Clearly, Buddy and his teacher have a conflict. Blowing up or walking out on a problem may make us feel better for a few minutes, but it doesn't provide any long-term answers. Buddy only succeeded in disrupting the class — and he'll still be tested on the material.

To the student: Even though he's confused, Buddy doesn't have the right to excuse himself from class. A less disruptive approach would have been for him to go to his teacher after class and ask if the teacher would go over the chapter after school. Perhaps the school also has a peer tutoring program he could join. Of course, Buddy also shouldn't have waited until the day before a test to seek help.

To the teacher: Buddy needs to cool down. Alert the principal or appropriate person that he has left your class, but don't confront him immediately.

After class, you might call Buddy in to discuss his behavior. A one-on-one conversation is preferable because Buddy won't feel as much of a need to "show off" in front of an audience of his classmates. Explain to Buddy that asking questions about something he doesn't understand is acceptable, but that the type of behavior he displayed is definitely unacceptable. Instead, let Buddy know what options are available for additional help in the future.

Conclusion

Because conflict is a part of life, knowing how to resolve conflicts peacefully is a skill that is always useful. When practiced throughout a school, conflict resolution can break the bully-victim cycle, help children see other alternatives to violence and gang-activity, and foster better understanding overall.

The best conflict resolution programs help individuals help themselves. Empathy, anger management, impulse control, and listening skills, after all, are qualities that start with an open and willing mind. With practice, however, those who learn these skills can use them for a lifetime of better relationships.

Where To Turn

Committee for Children
172 20th Ave.
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 322–5050
(800) 634–4449
Second Step conflict resolution curriculum for preschool through grade 8

Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
633 Indiana Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20531
(202) 307–5929
Publishes *Conflict Resolution in Schools*

Harvard Negotiation Project
500 Pound Hall
1563 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-1684
Research and curriculum for teaching conflict resolution in schools

Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 22030-4444
(703) 993-1300
Resource guide, "Understanding Intergroup Conflict in Schools"

Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution
505 8th Avenue
New York, NY 10018
(212) 643-2900
Cultural diversity courses

International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution
Teachers College at Columbia University
525 W. 120th St., Box 53
New York, NY 10027
(212) 678-3402
Academic courses, training, research on conflict resolution in schools and communities

National Association for Mediation in Education
c/o Mediation Project
425 Amity St.
Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 545-2462

National Crime Prevention Council
733 15th St. NW
Ste. 540
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 466-6272
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National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law
711 G St. SE
Washington, DC 20003-2861
(202) 546-6644
"Street Law," a law-related education program; training and materials in law and conflict resolution/mediation

National School Safety Center
16830 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200
Encino, CA 94136
(805) 373–9977

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program
163 Third Ave., #103
New York, NY 10003
(212) 387-0225
Pioneer school-based conflict resolution program dealing directly with racial and ethnic conflict

Society for Prevention of Violence
3109 Mayfield Rd., Room 205
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118
(216) 371-5545

U.S. Mediation and Conciliation Service
2100 K St. NW
7th Floor
Washington, DC 20427
(202) 606-5445

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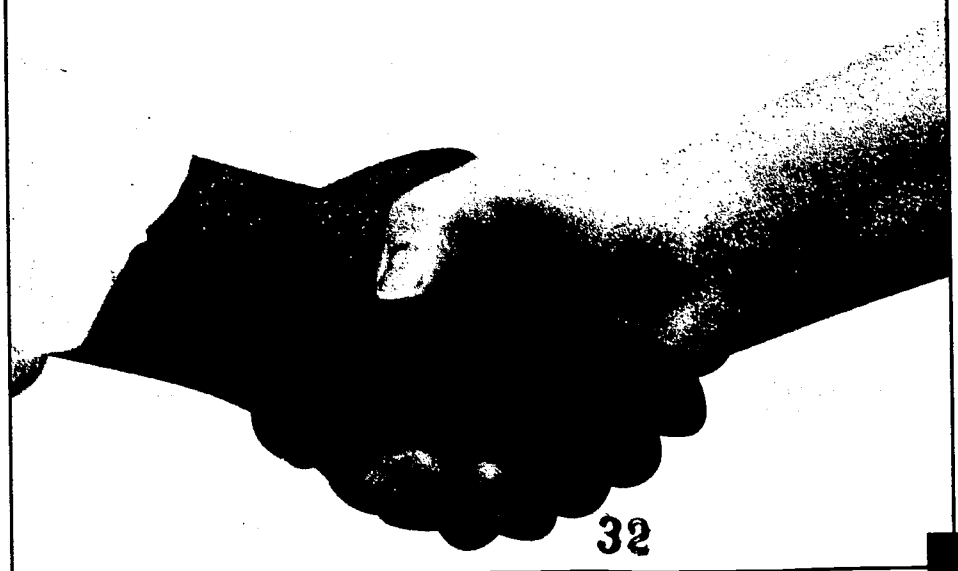

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