

CONFLICT RESOLUTION, CAN IT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE CLASSROOM:

Conflict Resolution Strategies for Classroom Teachers

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Abstract

This article discusses conflicts and provides five resolutions for teachers on managing negative behaviors within the classroom. Acknowledging and implementing conflict resolution strategies in the classroom enables every student to fully participate in the learning process.

Conflicts can occur at home between family members, at the workplace between colleagues, at school between classmates, and literally anywhere humans are involved. No one likes dealing with conflict, but conflicts can be solved easier when conflict resolution skills are applied.

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann found that there were five main styles of conflict resolution ("Conflict Resolution", 2012). The first identified style was a competitive style. People who tend to lean toward this style usually are use to operating from a position of power. This style is useful in emergency situations ("Conflict Resolution", 2012). The second identified style was a collaborative style. With this style, a person acknowledges that all parties involved are important, and they realize the importance of cooperation ("Conflict Resolution", 2012). The third identified style was a compromising style. With this style a person intends to try and help everyone be partially satisfied. Everyone is expected to make some form of a sacrifice ("Conflict Resolution", 2012). The fourth style is an accommodating style. With this style a person has a goal of meeting other people's needs at the expense of their own happiness. This style is usually not the style that gives the best outcomes ("Conflict Resolution", 2012). The fifth style is an avoiding style. People who favor this style avoid conflict altogether. This is a weak approach and usually does not produce favorable results ("Conflict Resolution", 2012).

Conflicts are especially prevalent in schools across the map. Usually as students get older they tend to learn how to solve conflicts on their own; however, younger students usually need the help of their teacher (Dayton, 2012). Elementary aged students most likely will not have the skills to appropriately solve conflicts in an affective manner. Teachers should be positive role models and explain the school's rules to the students, as well as expectations (Dayton, 2012). Having a school community to practice mutual respect is important for a positive environment to be established. At the beginning of

the school year it is also important to make the students feel like they are part of a team (Dayton, 2012). Classroom team building activities are important because conflicts are less likely to occur when students feel part of a team. If a conflict does arise, it is important for teachers to act as a mediator (Dayton, 2012). Students will then be able to tell their side of the story while the mediator maintains a positive environment. The teacher may suggest options for the conflict and the students will hopefully be able to compromise. The teacher should continue to follow up with the students to make sure that the solution worked (Dayton, 2012).

Sometimes students experience conflicts that happened outside of the classroom, but students bring them into the classroom. Teachers should talk to each student individually before making a prediction of what happened (Pearce, 2012). Students should be prepared to apologize. Teachers should explain that this is a big step to resolving conflict. The students should also be prepared to own up to their mistakes (Pearce, 2012). This is another important step to resolving the conflict. Having students write a report or do journaling about conflict resolution is important too (Pearce, 2012). It is affective for students to write about how to solve conflicts peacefully and how they have solved conflicts in the past (Pearce, 2012).

Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete teach that four simple steps are involved in solving classroom conflict. These steps should be included in the discussion of appropriate social CONFLICT RESOLUTION 4 behavior during the first weeks of school (Denton and Kriete, 2000). The first step is simply to walk away and count to ten. This will allow time for all parties involved to calm down. The second step is giving the students time to explain the situation (Denton and Kriete, 2000). Students are encouraged to use I-statements. This is so they can own up to their own feelings and emotions. The third step is to discuss the situation and resolving the issue. The fourth step is acknowledging that the situation has been resolved with a handshake (Denton and Kriete, 2000).

By acknowledging conflict resolution, every learner can feel safe and the goal of learning can be accomplished (Crawford and Bodine, 2012). Diversity in schools will be more embraced. Behaviors such as vandalism, suspension, and violence will decrease (Crawford and Bodine, 2012). School climates will improve by going through the problem solving process. Conflict resolution promotes practicing skills in critical thinking and problem solving (Crawford and Bodine, 2012).

Critical thinking and problem solving are basic problem solving skills that can translate to any kind of problem. By learning to see others point of view, one learns to exist in a multicultural world and learns to be more accepting of others (Crawford and Bodine, 2012). Conflict resolution is a skill one can use in all situations in life. It is important to introduce conflict resolution in elementary school, so students will carry these skills with them the rest of their lives.

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