

Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

Lesson title:

Resolving Conflicts

Grade level:

6-8

Subject Area:

Health

Duration:

Two class periods

Objectives:

Students will do the following:

1. Examine different kinds of hurtful behavior
2. Develop strategies for dealing with hurtful behavior
3. Work with their peers to create an environment in which students treat each other respectfully

Materials:

- Index cards
- Paper and pencils
- Newsprint and markers
- Computer with Internet access (optional)

Procedures:

1. Begin the lesson by asking students to take an index card and describe one hurtful incident that has happened to them. To make sure students in the class don't recognize themselves in the descriptions, tell students to try to keep the descriptions as general as possible. For example, instead of writing, "I was very hurt when I wasn't invited to the Valentine's Day party," have them write, "I felt very hurt when I was not invited to a party with many of my friends." Make sure that students do *not* put their names on their index cards.
2. Collect the index cards and read through the examples. While there will be much variation in the examples given, the types of behavior that students write about will probably include the following:
 - a. Verbal harassment, such as name-calling regarding a physical attribute (size, weight, wearing glasses) or taunting about a particular behavior (doesn't like sports or the perceived "teacher's pet")
 - b. Gossip, such as spreading rumors about a person
 - c. Exclusion from a desirable party, group, or activity

d. Unwanted physical contact

There may be examples that do not fit into these categories. Set them aside and see if there is a common thread among them.

3. Divide the students into four groups. Have each group focus on one category described in step 2: verbal harassment, gossip, exclusion, or unwanted physical contact. If possible, give each group examples of behavior from those on the index cards. If there are no examples for a category, help students think of specific examples.
4. Give each group any cards for its category. Ask students to pick one situation from the examples. Then have each group brainstorm ways to handle that situation. If students need help coming up with ideas, suggest the following strategies:
 - a. *Verbal or physical aggression.* Avoid the person or persons who exhibit this behavior.
 - b. *Gossip.* Consider confronting the person or persons who started the rumor. Bring an impartial person along to act as a moderator during the discussion. This technique is the basis of peer mediation. For more information about this strategy, students can visit the Web site <http://education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v2i3/peer.html>.
 - c. *Unpleasant behaviors.* Consider forming a committee to confront those engaged in such behaviors. The committee could present guidelines for acceptable ways to behave in school.
 - d. *All categories.* Find a trusted adult with whom to discuss these issues. This adult could help students in a variety of ways. He or she could determine whether it is necessary to involve parents, serve as a sounding board to bounce off any hurt feelings, suggest ways to deal with a problem, or bring in the principal or other authorities to help resolve particularly difficult situations.
 - e. Another way to deal with hurt feelings due to exclusion is for students to write the person a letter explaining their feelings. Sometimes it is easier to start a dialogue on paper because the individual is not being confronted directly, and both parties can take time to think about their responses without dealing with the other person's immediate reaction, such as anger or defensiveness.
5. After students have had a chance to brainstorm strategies, tell them to develop skits dramatizing the hurtful situation and ways to resolve it. Give each group between 15 and 20 minutes to develop a skit.
6. During the next class period, have each group present its skit. After all the groups have presented their skits, make a class list of strategies that students suggested. The list may be organized as follows:

Coping Strategies

Verbal Harassment
Physical
Contact

Gossip

Exclusion

Unwanted

1. Stay away from the person.	1. Confront the person.	1. Talk to an adult.	1. Stay away from the person.
2. Talk to an adult.	2. Write the person a letter.	2. Find other friends.	2. Talk to an adult.

- Use the class list of coping strategies as the basis for a class contract entitled *Ways to Resolve Conflicts in Our Class*. Select a few students to write a contract. Make sure it includes the behaviors that students agree *not* to exhibit, such as name-calling, excluding classmates, and physical aggressions. Then tell students to include the strategies they developed. Ask those students to circulate the contract to the other students in the class and ask for their suggestions. Have the students responsible for writing the contract incorporate all students' suggestions and circulate a final copy to each student in the class.
- Ask students to sign the contract, which is a way to indicate their support of its principles. If a conflict does arise, remind students to refer to their contracts for ways to resolve the problem. The contract will remind students of unacceptable behaviors and provide them with agreed-upon ways of dealing with problematic situations.

Discussion Questions:

- How could you apply the ideas in the class contract to situations that may arise at home? Do you think a contract is a useful way of dealing with conflict with your parents or siblings? What would you include in a family contract?
- What would you do if someone in your class brought in a penknife or another dangerous object? What would you do to protect yourself and your classmates?
- Think of additional categories of hurtful behavior that were not discussed in class. How would you handle these situations? Keep a list of ideas to add to your class contract.

Evaluation:

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' skills in brainstorming creative ways to deal with problems and in presenting their ideas in an interesting and dramatic way, as well as their involvement in classroom discussions:

Three points: demonstrated highly creative problem-solving strategies; gave a clear and persuasive presentation to the class; participated actively in developing a class contract.

Two points: demonstrated somewhat creative problem-solving strategies; gave a persuasive presentation to the class; participated moderately in developing a class contract.

One point: demonstrated weak problem-solving strategies; gave an accurate but mildly persuasive presentation to the class; participated minimally in developing a class contract.

Extension:

Tracking Conflicts and Resolutions

Throughout the school year, have your students keep a record of how many times your class needed to use a strategy to resolve a conflict and which strategy they used. The record can be a written log or a graph. Ask students whether they notice any trends or patterns of when conflicts arise. For example, do they occur most often in the beginning of the school year, right before vacations, or near the end of the year? If students do notice any trends, have them think of what they can do at those times to prevent conflict. For example, in the beginning of the school year, having a “Welcome Back to School” picnic for their homeroom class may provide a way for students to get to know each other and dispel some of the anxiety that students feel about the new year.

Suggested Reading:

Coping with Weapons and Violence at School and on Your Streets (Coping series)

Maryann Miller. Rosen Publishing Group, 1999.

Written for teens, this well-researched book explores issues surrounding threats to student safety, including bullying, fights, and gun violence at school. All aspects of these issues are covered, from the question of why people are violent, to topics such as violence in the media, gang violence, weapon availability, violent families, and how to find solutions to these problems. Tips for personal safety and a list of helpful organizations are included.

School Violence (Contemporary Issues Companion series)

Bryan J. Grapes, editor. Greenhaven Press, 2000.

Each chapter in this exemplary book from Greenhaven Press presents a collection of essays with differing viewpoints, offering a broad perspective of current views on school violence. The chapters cover the nature and causes of school violence and include personal narratives and information on how to prevent violence. The range of positions presented in this book provides many perspectives on this hot topic.

Vocabulary:

conflict

Definition: Struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, wishes, or external or internal demands.

Context: **Conflicts** often develop at lunch or recess, when students are less supervised and rowdy students have an opportunity to provoke others.

peer mediation

Definition: A recognized way to deal with conflict whereby students are trained to act as a moderator in discussions between other students trying to work out their differences.

Context: **Peer mediation** works because students are able to connect with their peers in ways that adults cannot.

resolution

Definition: The act of solving a problem.

Context: Students may have difficulty finding a **resolution** to the problem of one child continually making fun of another.

strategy

Definition: A careful plan or method.

Context: Developing a successful **strategy** for dealing with conflict can go a long way toward creating a peaceful environment in school.

Academic Standards:

The following standards are from the American Association for Health Education for students in grades six through eight:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting and decision-making skills to enhance health.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

This lesson plan adheres to the standards set forth in the *National Science Education Standards*, in particular the category Science in Personal and Social Perspectives.

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This lesson was created in consultation with Shauna Felton, middle school health teacher.

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