

Kids Solve Conflicts, Too!

by Dr. Rachel Goldberg

Well, if you've been a faithful reader of this column, you now know that there are better ways to solve your own conflicts than the classic smash-and-grab tactics we all learned in the schoolyard. As it turns out, kids are learning much better ways to deal with their conflicts in the schoolyard than we did in our time, too.

You can also teach your kids about better ways to solve conflicts. For instance, if you register in the Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) website, you can download lessons you can use at home with kids to understand anger (the Anger Suit) and then start to learn how to handle anger (Hanging up the Anger Suit). One of the really useful things people can do with kids over time is help them understand what they are feeling and why, (something a lot of adults are not good at), so they can make good choices and understand themselves.



Schools have also been using more and more conflict resolution, and teaching kids to understand their own conflicts, and how to solve them. Peer Mediation programs across the country teach kids not only to solve their own conflicts, but also to help other kids who are in conflict, have a high success rate, keep a lot of kids out of trouble, and reduce violence in schools.

The Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) works with schools all over Maryland, including supporting peer mediation programs, anti-bullying initiatives, conflict resolution training and anti-violence lessons. If you want to support or build programs in any group you are part of, you can find ESR and MACRO on the web.

Locally, Michele Ennis-Benn, Director of The Community Mediation Initiative (CMI) at the Center for Conflict Resolution, says, "We have worked with local schools and afforded the opportunity for students to be trained in conflict resolution and some have even gone on to be professionally trained volunteer mediators at CMI." CMI will also be doing workshops for adults and teens during mid-February and mid-March for the Promoting Peaceable Communities programs. If you or any kids you know want to know more, call CMI at **410-219-2873**, or write to **conflictresolution@salisbury.edu**.

What can you do with your kids? First of all, expect things that make sense for the age range. For instance, younger kids may not have the ability to understand or control their emotions, and may need an adult's help. However, even very young children can be asked to talk about how they feel and how they think the other person in the conflict feels.

Ennis-Benn suggests kids should know, "When you are angry or upset and full of blameworthy, accusatory language, wait for the person to finish speaking before you talk. If you don't, it will escalate the conflict." Kids can also be asked what they think a good solution would be. Once they

get in the habit of thinking about options, and are a little older, you can sit feuding kids down and simply ask them, "What do you think would be a fair way to solve this?" You'll be surprised at how often they come up with good answers, like sharing or turn taking.

Often adults feel like they can't trust kids to deal with conflict, but I've heard many stories from parents whose kids learn about conflict, and the kids end up learning a lot. Sometimes they can end up even helping with family conflicts at home!

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For training, facilitations, or help resolving a conflict, contact the Center for Conflict Resolution at Salisbury University at 410-219-2873.



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