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Conflict Resolution Fact Sheet for Teens

Introduction

Too often, minor disagreements lead to serious violence among teens. In fact, one national survey found that 33 percent of high school students said they had been in a physical fight within the past year (CDC 2004). Conflicts and disagreements are a part of life, but they do not have to end in violence. This fact sheet discusses how teens can work through disagreements without resorting to fighting.

What is conflict resolution?

Conflict resolution is about teaching people new ways to work through and resolve disputes that don't involve violence. Many schools and community groups offer conflict resolution programs for teens.

How does conflict resolution work?

Most conflict resolution programs follow a series of steps that include (Crawford and Bodine 1996):

1. **Setting ground rules.** Agree to work together and set rules such as no name-calling, blaming, yelling or interrupting.
2. **Listening.** Let each person describe their point of view without interruption. The point is to understand what a person wants and why they want it.
3. **Finding common interests.** Establish facts and issues that everyone can agree on and determine what is important to each person.
4. **Brainstorming possible solutions to the problem.** List all options without judging them or feeling that they must be carried out. Try to think of solutions where everyone gains something.
5. **Discussing each person's view of the proposed solutions.** Negotiate and try to reach a compromise that is acceptable to everyone involved.

Types of conflict resolution programs (Crawford and Bodine 1996)

- **Conflict resolution training programs** are often taught as separate courses in schools and communities.
- **Peer mediation programs** teach teens to serve as mediators and resolve conflicts among their peers.
- **Peaceable classrooms and schools** incorporate conflict resolution into classroom teaching and throughout the school environment.
- **Community mediation centers** train community volunteers to provide mediation services to youth and adults. Some centers may also train youth to become mediators.

Stop youth violence before it starts

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6. **Reaching an agreement.** Each person should state his or her interpretation of the agreement. Try writing the agreement down and checking back at a later time to see how it is working.

What you can do

Learn ways to resolve conflicts peacefully and encourage your friends to do the same. Find out about conflict resolution programs in your school or community.

In addition (Schwartz 1995):

- Figure out what methods work for you to control your anger (see the *Anger Management Fact Sheet for Teens* at www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/anger.asp).
- Talk to an adult you trust if you feel intensely angry, fearful or anxious.
- Do not carry weapons or associate with people who do. Weapons escalate conflicts and increase the chances of serious harm. It is also illegal for a teen to carry a handgun; you can be arrested and charged with a crime.
- Avoid or be cautious in places or situations where conflicts tend to arise, such as crowded hallways, bathrooms, or unsupervised places in a school.
- Reject taunts for a fight and find a compromise to a dispute rather than resorting to violence.
- Decide on your options for handling a problem when conflict arises, such as talking the problem out calmly, staying away from certain people, or getting others involved to settle a dispute, such as a teacher, peer mediator, or counselor.
- Understand that retaliation (getting back at someone in a violent way) is not an effective way to respond to teasing, insults, rough play, and offensive touching (pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, kicking or hitting) (Crawford and Bodine 2001).

Helpful links

BAM! Guide to Getting Along

www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_conflict.html

BAM! Body and Mind is an online destination for kids ages 9-13 that provides information they need for making healthy lifestyle choices.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Want To Resolve a Dispute? Try Mediation

www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/178999.pdf

This Youth in Action Bulletin describes how young people can create a mediation program to help prevent violence in their community.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

References

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