



Practical Parenting

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VIOLENCE PREVENTION: WHAT MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW

(Note: Viewers interested in this topic should also view the video
VIOLENCE PREVENTION: WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW)

PROGRAM SUMMARY

This program features examples of some of the kinds of confrontations experienced by schoolchildren in the middle grades and onward. Practical suggestions are offered on

- (1) ways to teach children how to try to diffuse aggression;
- (2) ways to teach children to practice "conflict resolution"; and
- (3) ways to set up a schoolwide effort to promote a student-directed program aimed at promoting schoolwide use of aggression diffusion and conflict resolution.

MAJOR MESSAGE

Violence seems to be on the increase worldwide, even among schoolchildren. Taking practical steps to teach techniques that help diffuse aggressive behavior or resolve problems or conflicts between students as young as ten or twelve would be useful. Statistics show that in recent years as many as 135,000 children annually have brought guns to school, and that some 150,00 children annually stay home from school in fear of violence. Violence has been shown to be all too often the "solution of choice."

Violence is a learned behavior, and can be **unlearned**: youngsters need to perceive and practice behaviors that can help resolve differences.

WHILE VIEWING

Several examples that feature an angry child confronting another child aggressively are shown in the video. Select the one that you can best relate to or understand, and be able to explain the problem to someone, along with

- (1) how the problem might end **badly** and
- (2) how the problem might end **peacefully** and **safely**.

KEY POINTS

In an angry confrontation between two young persons, the one confronted could try three things:

- (1) just walk away, simply ignoring the confronter (very hard for youngsters to do!);
- (2) begin to take a series of steps designed to "damp down" the anger and postpone discussion to a later time (called "mediating a problem, one to one"); and
- (3) try to arrange to meet with a third person who is skilled in mediation and can help resolve the two students' differences.

Here are some things a student should consider before "walking away" – the technique is called "PEACEFUL":

- (1) Put things in perspective ("Is this accusation silly, or serious?").
- (2) Empathize ("This guy's some upset...").
- (3) Ask yourself the obvious ("Is this person high?").
- (4) Consider options (...Can I walk away?Talk my way out?...Put off a discussion?...Say I'm sorry?").
- (5) Explain your proposed action – ("Right now, I'm just going to walk away").
- (6) Follow through with that action.
- (7) Use self-praise (Congratulate yourself for avoidance).
- (8) Learn from the experience.



TURN OVER →

REFLECTIONS

After thinking carefully about one of the confrontations (and its solution) shown in the video program, talk with a friend or a group about a problem between someone you knew in the past or know now, and someone else: was it resolved – and if so, how? (Describe both the **problem** and the **solution**.)



If “walking away” isn’t possible, consider “One to One Mediation” or “Peer Mediation”:

• Steps in “One to One Mediation”

The confronted student should:

- (1) Remain calm and try postponing further discussion at the moment.
- (2) Agree on a time and place to meet on the problem.
- (3) Begin the meeting discussion quietly.
- (4) Allow the confronter to express feelings.
- (5) Express own feelings, using “I” messages (**don’t say** “You make me angry when...._____”; **do say** “I feel ‘x’ when you ‘_____””).
- (6) Clarify understandings (make sure both of you really **hear** what the other is saying).
- (7) Share suggestions about what to do; try for compromise.
- (8) Try to reach agreement; comply with the terms decided on.

• Steps in “Peer Mediation” (This involves the systematic use of peer mediators trained in the steps of conflict resolution.) Before Peer Mediation can occur at a school, the school staff must have taken certain basic steps, as follows:

- (1) Recognized as a group that the school climate features numerous student conflicts.
- (2) Decided to set up a “Peer Mediation” system and outlined an appropriate process.
- (3) Identified and trained numerous students in “Peer Mediation” approaches to conflict resolution.
- (4) Activated, supported, and monitored the operation of the system, including student awareness of how to use it.

The goal of a schoolwide peer mediation/conflict resolution effort is to develop and guide a process that helps students devise successful solutions to interpersonal problems.

In a planned schoolwide conflict resolution system, trained student mediators (singly or in teams of two or more) are made available at specific times to other students desirous of settling a problem through peer mediation. An example of a meeting for such a purpose is featured in the video program.

Participation in this type of resolution at any level offers good practice in effective interpersonal problem-solving, important not only in student days but also in adult life.

The pressure in Middle School to perform and conform in certain ways is ever present, and students need to be armed with skills to diffuse aggression and work out differences. Schools would do well to teach some alternative ways to deal with conflict in this increasing violent world.

P - A - T - I - E - N - C - E

