



Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings

Donna Crawford, Richard Bodine

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Safe and orderly environments in our Nation's schools are essential to promoting high standards for learning and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. No teacher should ever fear to walk into a classroom, and no child should ever stay home from school because he or she is afraid. Too often, however, young people face conflicts before, during, and after school. They are subjected to bullying, teasing, and senseless, sometimes fatal, disputes over clothing and other possessions. Many of these conflicts either begin at school, or they are brought into school from the home or the community. A growing body of evidence suggests that we are not powerless to prevent these destructive behaviors. We can intervene successfully to prevent conflicts from escalating into violent acts by providing young people with the knowledge and skills needed to settle disputes peacefully. Conflict resolution education can help bring about significant reductions in suspensions, disciplinary referrals, academic disruptions, playground fights, and family and sibling disputes. It is important to understand that conflict resolution education is a critical component of comprehensive, community-based efforts to prevent violence and reduce crime. Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings was developed for educators, juvenile justice practitioners, and others in youth-serving organizations to heighten awareness of conflict resolution education and its potential to help settle disputes peacefully in a variety of settings. A joint project of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education, this Guide provides background information on conflict resolution education; an overview of four widely used, promising, and effective approaches; and guidance on how to initiate and implement conflict resolution education programs in various settings. As adults, we cannot solve young people's problems for them. We can, however, provide them with the knowledge, skills, and encouragement to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner, using words instead of fists or weapons. Conflict resolution education includes negotiation, mediation, and consensus decision making, which allow all parties involved to explore peaceful solutions to a conflict. When these problem-solving processes to conflict and strife become a way of life, young people begin to value getting along instead of getting even or getting their way. We urge you to help make our schools and our communities safer places. We invite you to use this Guide as a means of working with your schools, community organizations, and other youth-serving and juvenile justice settings to give our youth the skills, techniques, and tools they need to learn and to resolve disputes in a safe and nonviolent environment. This Guide was developed through a collaboration of the Departments of Justice and Education to advance the development of conflict resolution education programs in schools, youth-serving organizations, and community and juvenile justice settings. It is designed to be a reference tool that offers both basic information and the experience of experts in the field of conflict resolution to assist educators and other youth-serving professionals in building effective conflict resolution education programs. The Guide is based on a shared vision that youth of all ages can learn to deal constructively with conflict and live in civil association with one another. Its goal is to build the capacity of educators in a variety of youth-serving settings to understand and act on the knowledge that conflict resolution skills are essential to successful relationships in all facets of our lives.

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