

Two–Minute Tips

This Week’s Topic: Conflict Resolution

Interpersonal conflict is an opportunity to build important skills that can make a tremendous impact on a young person’s life. But young people can only build those skills if they are given the opportunity to participate productively in the process of conflict resolution.¹ Often, due to personal discomfort with emotions or feelings or being tight on time, adults provide directives or impose solutions when there is a conflict within the program. This approach doesn’t build capacity in our young people. We serve them best by seeking their input when they experience conflicts. Our ability to step back and use open-ended questions gives them the chance to build skills and increase their capacity to resolve present and future conflicts independently.¹

Practice Tips

Here are a few quick tips to encourage constructive conflict resolution.

Allow Time to Cool Off in Conflicts and Altercations

One or both participants might need time to self-regulate and cool off before they’re able to talk with you and each other about the conflict and possible solutions. You can help facilitate this by saying, “Before we begin to resolve this conflict, I want you both to take a couple of deep breaths to cool off. I’ll take some too, so that I’m calm and ready to support you”.²

Stay Neutral and Check Your Bias

Regardless of what you saw or heard, your history with either participant, or your personal thoughts, both young people deserve a neutral mediator who isn’t showing favoritism towards either participant or jumping to conclusions.

Gather Their Input

Calmly ask for details of what happened so you can support the participants to identify the area of disagreement and the most effective solution. Ask, “What happened?”. Don’t make assumptions, even if you witnessed the altercation. Allow each person a chance to explain their perspective. One participant might be more talkative or feel defensive. Allow all participants equal time to share their perspective.

Ask for Possible Solutions and Choose One Together

This may be hard for some participants at first. If so, it’s okay to prompt. Try to be patient as they work it out. If they struggle, then offer a suggestion. Ask, “So how can we resolve this?” If one participant disagrees with the suggestion of another, ask “Okay, I hear that won’t work for you; what’s another possible solution that would work better for you?”. Make sure both participants agree on the solution.

Follow Up

Check back to see if the solution was successful. If not, both participants may need to brainstorm another solution. If this is the case you could say, “That was a good effort, but it seems like the first solution didn’t work out as expected. Let’s think again about how to solve this problem. Sometimes we have to test a few ideas to find one that works.”

Tips in Action!

[Watch](#) staff at Launch at Maple Elementary facilitate a constructive conflict resolution discussion.

Want more two-minute tips?

Check out:

<https://depts.washington.edu/cqel/expand-ed-learning-opportunities/>

There you will find the latest tip, an archive of past tips, and a discussion board to connect with peers!

¹Ohio State University. (2018, September). *Teaching children to resolve conflict*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press? (or can you provide a URL?)

²Crowe, C. (2009, February). *Coaching children in handling everyday conflicts*. Retrieved from <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/coaching-children-in-handling-everyday-conflicts/>

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