

Peace in our world • Peace in our nation • Peace in our neighborhoods • Peace in our homes • Peace in our hearts

Conflict Education

Live in harmony with one another. **Romans 12: 16**

Can you think of times when you avoided or failed to understand a confrontation or conflict? This *Peace Points* can help us explore and address conflicts between individuals (in the home, school, congregation, workplace) and on larger levels (community, culture, international). Youth or family ministry can be just the place to expand our insight and skill on transforming conflict. (see Group leader tips, over.)

Here's a good starting point: Conflict is a part of life. The challenge is to develop the perspectives and skills that help us respond to conflict as an opportunity to learn, to grow, to encourage constructive change. This works best when we are able to foster safety, respect, honesty, and cooperation.

"Peace Points" is a resource series from Lutheran Peace Fellowship that offers practical ideas and helpful tips to encourage youth and adult groups in their peacemaking and justice seeking.

What is Conflict?

It helps to see conflict not just in the moment of a clash, but as a process. Most conflict has its origin in unmet needs of one or more of the parties. Conflict may be caused or fed by mistrust, fear, poor communication, and misunderstandings. If the problem is not addressed promptly it can easily escalate.

Responding to Conflict

An important part of conflict transformation is learning to step back, seeking to understand, and choosing to respond in a constructive manner before it becomes more serious. These insights help us address conflicts nonviolently:

Prevention

- * Broadly share conflict education skills to help more people deal with conflict effectively.
- * Aid early intervention by fostering a climate of trust, belonging, safety, and consensus.
- * Explore any structural injustice that might contribute to conflict but isn't being addressed.
- * Promote respect and cooperation in order to diminish the likelihood or impact of conflict. (see Rom. 12:14-18)

Constructive Approaches — It helps to separate and address all three aspects of a conflict:

- ◆ **Persons:** Recognize that each person involved has their own viewpoint, a need for respect, and emotions that can be intense. If there is a power imbalance, it should be recognized — it may help to empower the "underdog." (see I Cor. 12:20ff)
- ◆ **Process:** Avoid the pull to use guilt or blame to justify your perspective: "you made me angry..."; learn to use "I" statements that convey observations, feelings, and needs without blame or demand. (see Matt. 7:1-5). Use the insights of Nonviolent Communication, over.
- ◆ **Problem:** Conflicts are harder to solve when the focus is on stances or positions. Learn to focus instead on needs; learn to express yours and hear the needs of others. Look for win/win solutions which meet the needs of both parties. (see Rom. 14:10-13)

Consider visualization techniques, role-play, puppets, etc. to enable participants to step back and see beyond their own viewpoint; to see the emotional as well as the rational side of the conflict.

Mediation

Mediation by a third party can be used at any time. It may be the best alternative when the parties involved have failed to resolve the conflict on their own or when violence or communication breakdown has prevented them from doing so. (see Matt. 18:15-20)

Lutheran Peace Fellowship (LPF) is a growing community of Lutherans across the U.S. and around the globe, responding to the gospel call to be peacemakers and justice seekers. Founded in 1941, LPF offers a wide variety of resources, training, expertise, and encouragement.

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Steps for Win/Win problem-solving

Common sense suggests that **you** don't have to lose for **me** to win. Unfortunately, our culture fosters habits that tend to be competitive rather than cooperative. Most of us need to make an extra effort at building trust and empathy and avoiding "win/lose" habits. Here's how:

- 1. Identify the problem**—Listen with an open mind. Look for the facts with honesty and without pre-judging or blaming; listen like a journalist or counselor.
- 2. Identify the feelings**—Listen carefully without judging, blaming or demanding. Speak for yourself without blaming or criticizing. It works better to use "I" messages.
- 3. Identify unmet needs**—And note: it helps not to mix in requests in these first three steps.
- 4. Brainstorm solutions**—Encourage conversation that is spontaneous and creative. Think of a variety of options, without evaluating; express them as requests, not demands.
- 5. Choose a solution**—Evaluate the options and choose one that everyone feels good about.
- 6. Agree to act**—Schedule a time to evaluate how well the problem is being resolved. End with a positive gesture like a handshake, smile, or hug. Implement your plan.

Adapted from *Help Increase the Peace Program Manual*, American Friends Service Committee, www.afsc.org

Nonviolent Communication can help

Nonviolent Communication is based on the idea that conflict is caused by unmet needs and can be resolved in a cooperative rather than aggressive manner. We feel much better and are more successful when we rely on empathy and honesty rather than fear, blame, or guilt. We avoid language that triggers mistrust or resentment... We discover the power of compassion.

Most efforts to resolve conflict get stuck when, through habit, the parties jump to blaming and making demands. Nonviolent Communication, in contrast, seeks to build respect, safety, and consensus. It shows love by seeking out observations, feelings, and needs of others... and by expressing our own clearly and thoughtfully. Once these are clear, solutions begin to emerge; it is most helpful to express them as requests, which fosters empathy in others:

(in speaking)

Honestly expressing how I am without blaming or criticizing:

1. The concrete actions I observe (see, hear, remember...) that contribute (or not) to my well-being:

"When I see (hear you say) _"

2. How I am feeling in relation to these actions:

"I feel _"

3. The needs, values, desires, expectations... that underlie my feelings:

"I am needing _"

Clearly requesting that which would enrich my life without making any demand.

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:

"Would you be willing to _?"

(in listening)

Empathically receiving how you are without hearing blame or criticism:

1. The concrete actions you observe (see, hear, remember...) that contribute (or not) to your well-being:

"When you see (hear) _?"

2. How are you feeling in relation to these actions:

"Do you feel _?"

3. The needs, values, desires, expectations... that underlie your feelings:

"Are you needing _?"

Empathically receiving that which would enrich your life without hearing any demand:

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:

"Would you like me to _?"

Nonviolent communication makes sense — show love in listening and in speaking — and it works. For most of us, though, it takes an extra effort to change old habits and learn new skills. But what a difference it makes! We connect more deeply, understand more clearly, feel more powerful, and discover what it can mean to be a Christian when there is conflict.

Adapted from *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg. See www.cnvc.org

Resources

How to Be a Bridge in a World Full of Walls and *Peacemaking in the Real World* workshops, trainings, and resources from Lutheran Peace Fellowship: www.LutheranPeace.org

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg: an insightful, clearly written manual with many useful examples; see www.cnvc.org for other superb resources and workshops

Help Increase the Peace manual and program for youth with a wide variety of skill-building exercises and materials (www.afsc.org)

Families Creating a Circle of Peace, Call to Peace, other resources and curricula: www.ipj-ppj.org

Other useful trainings: *Alternatives to Violence* (www.avp.org); *Peacemaker Training Institute* and *Nonviolence Training* (www.forusa.org); *When You Disagree* (www.menrolink.org)

Other helpful manuals: *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, *Making Peace With Conflict*, *Free the Children*, *Getting to Yes...*

Group leader tips

1. Begin with prayer and introduce the topic with a few insights from page one.
2. Share several examples of conflicts; pick 1 or 2 go through the steps of Win/Win problem-solving; use Nonviolent Communication to build respect, trust, and empathy. It may help to switch sides to gain perspective.
3. Read a few texts, e.g. Rom. 2:1, Gal. 6:1-2, Matt. 18:15-22; talk about how Win/Win and nonviolent communication (NVC) can help us apply these biblical truths in our lives.
4. Use a second session to practice Win/Win and NVC skills. (These insights can also help explore conflict between groups or countries.)

Preparation: Make copies of the left hand side of this page (or the whole resource) for participants. Bring several examples of conflicts; practice using Win/Win and NVC beforehand.

LPF's **Peace Points** resources include

Peace Points Starters, *What Is Christian Peacemaking? Hosting a Hunger Awareness Meal*, *Wall of Hope*, *Peace Worship*, *It's Time to Talk*, *Just War*, and *Reclaim the Season...*

Single copy **free** by mail, or at: www.LutheranPeace.org

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