

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 in 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 a challenge, an opportunity to learn and grow. This works best when we are able to foster a climate of trust, safety, respect, and cooperation.

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 worsen.

Responding to Conflict

An important part of conflict transformation is learning to step back, understand what is going on, and respond in a constructive manner before it become a crisis. Here are insights for addressing 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 cause 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)

Analysis and Negotiation—It helps to separate and address all three aspects of a conflict:

" **Persons:** Recognize that all persons involved have differing perspectives, emotions that can be intense, and a need for respect. If there is a power imbalance, it should be recognized and may require empowering the "underdog." (see I Cor. 12:20ff)

" **Process:** Avoid "you" messages that so often speak to others in a negative way; learn to use "I" messages that convey observations, feelings, and needs without blaming or demanding. (Matt. 7:1-5). Use the insights and resources 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 possible solutions which would meet the needs of both parties. (see Rom. 14:10-13)

Use visualization techniques (role-play, puppets...) to enable participants to see both the emotional and rational sides of conflict. This can help the parties to step back and see various perspectives on the issue.

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)

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

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 helps to use "I" messages.
- 3. Identify unmet needs**—And 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

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:

(speaking)

(listening)

Honestly expressing how I am without blaming or criticizing:

1. Observations
(not evaluations)

Empathically receiving how you are without hearing blame or criticism:

1. The concrete actions I am observing (seeing, hearing, remembering) that are contributing (or not) to my well-being:

1. The concrete actions you are observing (seeing, hearing, remembering) that are contributing (or not) to your well-being:

"When I (hear you say...see...)"

"When you (see, hear)..."

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

2. Feelings
(not judgments)

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

"I feel..."

"do you feel..."

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

3. Needs
(not requests)

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

"because I am (needing)..."

"because you are (needing)..."

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

4. Requests
(not demands)

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

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:

"and would you be willing to...?"

"and would you like me to...?"

Nonviolent communication is simple—show love in listening and in speaking—and it works. For most of us, though, it's an effort to change old habits and learn new skills. But what a difference it makes when we use the expressions in bold italics! We connect more deeply, understand much better, feel more powerful, and discover what it means to be a Christian in conflict.

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

Resources

Help Increase the Peace Program Manual: very fine activity-based program for youth with a wide variety of skill-building exercises and materials (AFSC, www.afsc.org)

Nonviolent Communication, Marshall Rosenberg: clearly written and insightful manual with many useful examples (Puddle Dancer) see www.cnvc.org for resources and workshops

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

When You Disagree... manual and audio tapes for 10-session class on conflict resolution for churches (Mennonite Conciliation Service)

Peacemaking in the Real World and From Violence to Wholeness: Workshops, training, resources from LPF: www.LutheranPeace.org

Peacemaker Training Institutes and Nonviolence Training available from the FOR: www.forusa.org

Other helpful books: *Free the Children, Getting to Yes, Making Peace With Conflict...* and links: www.nicr.ca and www.nonviolence.org/links

Group leader tips

1. Begin with prayer and introduce the topic with a few insights from page one.
2. Explore 1 or 2 examples of conflicts, 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. 2:1-4, Gal. 6:1-5, Matt. 18:15-22, Rom. 14:10-12; talk about how Win/Win and nonviolent communication (NVC) can help us apply these biblical truths.
4. Use a second session to practice Win/Win and NVC skills. (Use these insights later to 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, Peace Worship, Just War, and Reclaim the Season... Single copy free by mail, or at: www.LutheranPeace.org

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