

ELEMENTS OF A MATURE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAM

As schools attempt to initiate and/or expand their violence prevention and conflict resolution programs, they are searching for a vision of what the result would look like for this change. The following six items are some examples of components that may well be part of a mature program.

1. Student Standards

The standards movement has influenced every aspect of education in California. Schools & districts will be turning their attention to the development, or in most cases, the refinement and promoting of student behavior standards. How students should behave to and from school and while they are at school will be discussion priorities for parent, school & community groups. Building those standards into parent/ home information & into classroom expectations will become more prominent.

In addition, your future programs will find business partners interested in the “soft skill” being developed by your students. The business community wants their future workforce to have the skills developed through effective conflict resolution programs. Good listening and communication skills will be essential to our present & future workforce.

All citizens can use their techniques to improve their interactions and participation in their neighborhoods and communities.

2. Parent Skills & Services

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of developing a conflict resolution program is to ensure continuity between school instruction and home enforcement. Conflict resolution training should be offered to all staff members, not just select a few. These skills provide the practical tools staff members need when dealing with students, other staff members especially, angry parents.

Ideally, schools should include parent volunteers to assist in the development and progression of a conflict resolution program. They can serve as valuable liaisons between home, school, and other parents and the community.

A good example of this is Oak Hill Elementary in Antelope, California. The main coordinator for the conflict resolution program is a parent volunteer who has successfully obtained community and parent support, not only for the program, but for the school in general. Recruiting and training parent volunteers

is an essential element for keeping parents informed and well connected to their child's school environment.

3. Classroom Connections

There is no argument that today's professionals are seeking employees that are well-versed in communication and listening skills and are able to solve problems quickly and efficiently. Conflict resolution builds and enhances these skills in our students. What about those students who never serve as peer mediators? There are universal curriculum connections surrounding conflict resolution that can be applied in every classroom.

The Center for Youth has developed conflict resolution curriculum for K-12 students. Key components of the curriculum include:

- Standard based to provide integration
- Goes beyond 'process' curriculum
- Allows for flexibility in teaching style, activities and time
- Practical use and activities

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continued

The most important step for moving toward and implementing a unified vision for conflict resolution is determining the best strategies through effective school and community collaboration.

4. School-wide Integration

No new programs/projects needed! The key to a successful, mature conflict resolution program is integrating conflict resolution into the existing school structure. Without effective integration, the program disappears as soon as the responsible teacher, parent or administrator moves on. If you are just beginning a program, consider training all classified personnel, parent volunteers, and other collaborative school organizations (i.e. Healthy Start). Other key areas for integration are: curriculum, student/parent handbooks, discipline policies, school rules and procedures, and school safety plans.

5. Student Leadership

Advocates for student empowerment are on the right track when involved with conflict resolution & violence prevention. Developing student leadership skills is a must if their buy-in and commitment to change and improvement is to occur. When training student peer mediators, be creative about other roles that your student leaders can play. Conflict managers can also serve as ambassadors for new students. School open-houses and back-to-school nights are powerful forums for students to demonstrate their conflict management skills to parents and community leaders. Experienced conflict managers become the trainers of new managers, and may aid in the expansion of conflict resolution programs throughout a district.

6. Assessment and Performance

Several years ago, The Center for Youth Citizenship (formerly the CLRE Center) worked with two national organizations on a model student performance & assessment activity. This activity showcase students demonstrating their skills in conflict resolution by role playing conflicts that may occur on their school campuses. It is an effective model to assess the abilities of peer mediators and provides a valuable community outreach model for your conflict resolution program. It also introduces school officials, parents and community leaders to the peer mediation process and the necessary communication, listening and problem- solving skills involved. Elementary, middle and high school students participate in this program.

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