

## Chapter 8 – Dealing with conflict



### Introduction

The illustration shows two young men engaged in a quarrel. They are sitting opposite each other at a table. One is waving a flag, the other is clenching his fist, baring his teeth. Their hair is raised, which gives the opponents a fierce, beast-like look. If this was all, then we would expect this conflict to escalate: the two men would soon get up and resort to physical violence. But there is a second element in the picture: the two men are shaking hands, as a sign of agreement and compromise. They are only talking – perhaps shouting at each other – but there is no violence.

The picture shows simultaneously what takes place successively in real life: if we stand up for our interests, opinions and values, we will sometimes get involved in conflict. To resolve such conflicts, we must be able and willing to find an agreement and also strike a compromise. Arguing first and marking the extremes, and then looking for an agreement and compromise, comprises a process of conflict like breathing in and breathing out.

The star-shaped floor may also be meaningful. We share one community – for example our planet, our family, our school. We have no other. Therefore we depend on each other and carrying out conflicts and resolving them must be governed by shared principles and rules. Conflict as such is nothing bad. Human rights produce a pluralism and competition of interests, which increases the likelihood of conflict. Good conflict resolution can lead to harmony, while the attempt to suppress conflict by authoritarian means or resolve it unfairly can lead to the disruption of a community.

Conflict resolution is, to a certain extent, a skill that can be taught. This is one focus of the exercises in this chapter; they provide the learner with tools, structured schemes of procedure, for conflict resolution and mediation. Secondly, fairness of conflict resolution is important, and this refers to the values and the culture of conflict behaviour. Ideally, a conflict should be overcome by a win-win situation. If that is not possible, care must be taken not to produce losers, but rather to find a compromise that maintains a balance in sharing benefits and disadvantages. Viewed from a wider perspective, the potential stakeholders include not only the opponents who are directly involved, but also the community and the environment as a whole.

## Exercise 8.1. – Win-win solutions

Educational objective	The students understand that a conflict can be resolved in different ways. The parties involved may be in the position of winners or losers, or may both have agreed to a compromise. No party should feel that they are a loser, as this may well lead to a new outbreak of conflict.
Resources	Blackboard or flipchart.

### Procedure

1. The teacher explains to the students that there can be three different types of solution to a conflict:

win – win	☺☺
win – lose	☺☹
lose – lose	☹☹

He/she illustrates these principles of conflict resolution on the blackboard or a flipchart.

**Win-win:** solutions which allow both parties to benefit

**Win-lose:** solutions in which only one party benefits at the expense of the other

**Lose-lose:** solutions in which neither party benefits.

2. The teacher gives examples of the different ways of conflict resolution:
 

A boy and a girl are quarrelling over a ball. An adult intervenes and makes them play together with the ball or gives them equal time to use it. They both benefit. If the adult gives the ball just to one of them, of course only one benefits. If the adult takes the ball away, since the children cannot agree, neither benefits.
3. In pairs or in groups the students explore their personal experience to find further examples of conflict. They may discuss their experience of conflict at home and at school and may move on to the larger conflicts involving groups of people and whole states.
4. The students analyse examples of conflict resolution, identifying them using the model presented above, asking which party will benefit from the solution. Who can find solutions that allow all/both parties to benefit?
5. Plenary session: students share the results of their analysis.

### Variation

After step 2, the students receive a case description of a conflict. In groups, they try to find a solution that avoids producing losers. If the conflict already has been resolved, the students can compare their solution with the one found in practice and the reactions that followed. This analysis follows the policy cycle model (see exercise 7.9).

## Exercise 8.2. – A structured approach to conflict resolution

<b>Educational objective</b>	The students learn a technique of conflict resolution. They understand that resolving conflicts depends to a certain degree on skills that can be learned.
<b>Resources</b>	Set of student handouts: “Resolution of conflicts in six stages”. Newspapers and magazines.

### Procedure

1. The teacher describes a situation of conflict to which there is no defined solution (example: one student makes fun of another student who comes from a foreign country and speaks with a strong accent).  
  
The situation may be presented by a role-play. The students discuss how to resolve the conflict. In doing so, they may anticipate parts of the model they will use in this lesson or ask questions that the model may provide an answer for.
2. The worksheet “Resolution of conflicts in six stages” is distributed to half the students, who study it in silence.  
  
The other half of the class selects a report on a conflict from a newspaper or magazine. They may also draw on personal experience or first-hand knowledge.
3. The students form groups of four consisting of two students who have read the resolution of problems and two who have defined possible conflicts.
4. The students choose one conflict and test the ideas of conflict resolution.  
  
Two are adversaries, the other two act as mediators, using the sheet to find a solution.
5. Follow-up plenary session:
  - Which conflicts did you try to solve?
  - How did you try to solve them?
  - (How) did the model of conflict resolution help you?

### Variation

1. The students focus on a case study and compare their solutions.
2. Once students are familiar with the procedure it can be applied to conflicts actually occurring in class.

### Materials

(see next page)

### Student handout: resolution of conflicts in six stages

1. Identify needs. “What do you need (what exactly do you want?)”	Each person involved in the conflict should answer this question without accusing or blaming the other.
2. Define the problem. “What do you believe to be the problem in this case?”	The whole class can help to find an answer which meets the needs of those concerned. The adversaries must be able to accept the definition.
3. Seek a number of solutions. “Who can think of a possible way of solving the problem?”	All members of the class can contribute answers. These should be written down, without comment, judgment, or evaluation. The aim at this stage is to produce as many solutions as possible.
4. Evaluate solutions. “Would you be pleased with this solution?”	Each party in the conflict reviews the alternatives, explaining which are, or are not, acceptable.
5. Decide which solution is best. “Do you both accept this solution? Has the problem been solved?”	It must be clear that both parties accept the solution. Their efforts to find a solution should be appreciated.
6. See how the solution is applied. “Let us talk once more about this situation and make sure that the problem really has been solved.”	A plan should be set up to evaluate the solution. Depending on the nature of the conflict and the age of the adversaries, an evaluation may be carried out minutes or hours or a day later.

## Exercise 8.3. – Family and peer conflict

Educational objective	The students learn about solving conflicts in a structured manner.
Resources	Set of student handouts: “Resolution of conflicts in six stages” (see Exercise 8.2).

### Procedure

1. The students read the worksheet “Resolution of conflicts in six stages”.
2. The teacher lets the students come forward with examples of typical conflicts at home, in school or in the playground, for example:
  - At home:
    - The child wants to play, but the parents think he or she should study.
    - The child wants money for the cinema / a concert / a party / a picnic, but the parents have other expenses to take care of.
  - In the playground:
    - Boys and girls want to use the playground for different purposes.
    - Boys disturb girls while they are playing.
3. The students choose one conflict to work on and form groups of four to six.
4. Each group then divides into two, half of them taking the role of parents and half the role of children (or boys/girls).
 

First parents and children come together separately to work out their position. Then they meet with their opponents and start negotiations following the six stages.

After a given time negotiations stop and the groups get back into class.
5. The whole class feed back on their work in groups. What kind of solutions did they arrive at? Were there many different solutions?

### Variation

This exercise could also be done with a mediator, for example with one student taking the role of a grandparent who leads the conflicting parties through the negotiations.

## Exercise 8.4. – Brainstorming session on conflict and peace

Educational objectives	The students can define the concepts of conflict and peace. The students can explain which kinds of conflict can be resolved and which cannot.
Resources	Flipcharts and coloured markers.

### Procedure

1. The word “CONFLICT” is written on one of the sheets.  
The students receive two tasks for brainstorming.
  - a. They write down as many expressions or words referring to conflict as come to mind.
  - b. They add keywords referring to situations of conflict.
 This part is carried out in silence, without commenting.
2. When the students have run out of ideas, the word “PEACE” is written on the other sheet. Same procedure.
3. The class discuss the results.
4. A classification of the different types of conflict is developed with the teacher:
  - conflicts which *can* be resolved
  - conflicts which *cannot* be resolved.

Conflict resolution without losers (see Exercise 8.1) is very often only possible through compromise. This works, for example, when scarce resources need to be shared fairly. If the cake is small and every eater receives an equally small piece, I can accept the solution even if I stay hungry. But if a clash of values or religious beliefs is involved, compromise is hardly possible. And if a conflict is caused by ethnic or racial divisions, there is the danger of expulsion or physical extermination of the members of one party. The more rational the approach of the parties to a conflict is, the bigger the chance to resolve it by negotiation and compromise rather than by violence. Rational conflict resolution requires the parties to distinguish between the issue and the opponent and to respect the opponent’s human dignity in terms of human rights.

### Extension

The students illustrate different situations of peace and conflict through drawings or articles and photos from the press.

## Exercise 8.5. – The statues

Educational objective	The students are able to identify situations of oppression, to develop creativity in non-violent conflict resolution and to use body language as a means of expression.
Resources	None.

### Procedure

1. The students carry out the following preliminary exercises in pairs:
  - One student strikes a pose; the other has to imitate. They reverse roles.
  - One student places his hand a few centimetres from his/her partner's. When he/she moves his/her hand the other has to twist into whatever (uncomfortable) position is necessary to keep the same distance.

These exercises train students to take notice of each other.
2. In the plenary session, the students represent and discuss situations of oppression:
  - Two or more students agree on an idea and then form a group of statues to represent a situation of oppression (example: a kneeling child polishing the shoes of a seated rich man).
  - If a member of the audience thinks of a way of resolving the situation and making it more equal, he/she rearranges the actors according to his/her new model.

Ideally the exercise should be conducted in silence, to encourage the students to mime and develop expressiveness.
3. More actors may participate in the scene progressively.
4. The teacher reserves the last 10 to 15 minutes of the lesson for a follow-up plenary session. The students give feedback, and they may come forward with questions that can lead to further study.

### Variation

1. The same procedure is used to illustrate human and children's rights and instances of how they are violated.
2. The exercise may be resumed in situations of conflict and in real situations that invoke strong feelings.

## Exercise 8.6. – Punishment versus positive conflict resolution

<b>Educational objectives</b>	<p>The students are encouraged to accept the notion of law and of rules in a group.</p> <p>The students are able to accept differences and to take part in decision-making processes.</p> <p>They develop their creative potential in resolving conflicts.</p>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>Set of student handouts: “List of punishments”.</p>

### Procedure

1. The students brainstorm forms of punishment. This introduction to the lesson addresses them as experts, as they may draw on experience and observation. They may already add comments.  
The teacher distributes the handout “List of punishments” to the students, and they read it in silence.
2. The students discuss in small groups (three or four) which punishments make sense and which ones do not.
3. The groups share their results with the other groups (the jigsaw arrangement is useful here; see Exercise 5.3).
4. The students return to their groups and discuss which punishment, if any, should be imposed in the following situations:
  - A student arrives late at school.
  - A student has not done his homework.
  - A student disturbs work in class.
  - A student offends a classmate because of his/her ethnic origin or religious beliefs.
  - A male student molests a female student.
  - A student is violent in class/during break.
5. Plenary session: the students present their results.  
The follow-up discussion could deal with the following question: are there any alternatives to imposing a punishment (e.g. mediation between the wrong-doer and the victim)?

### Extension

The students act out a scene of positive, creative conflict resolution in class.

### Materials

(see next page)



## Student handout

### List of punishments

1. Writing a poem
2. Telling a fairy tale to little children
3. Presenting jokes and quizzes to the class
4. Ten push-ups for swearing
5. Standing in class after school as many minutes as you came in late in the morning
6. Standing up while writing
7. Preparing a lesson for the class
8. One hour of gardening
9. Cleaning the recreational area
10. Cleaning the classroom
11. To be dismissed from the lesson
12. Running round the school building ten times
13. Detention during break
14. Extra work in one of your weak subjects
15. Payment of a fine which contributes to cover general expenses
16. Writing an excuse
17. Further suggestions ...

## Exercise 8.7. – Minorities

<b>Educational objective</b>	The students understand that the sense of exclusion can be the result not only of the way other members of society see you, but also of the way members of your own group see you.
<b>Resources</b>	A set of positive cards and a set of negative cards for each group. Two flipchart sheets for each group, one bearing the word “FEELINGS” and the other the word “ACTIONS”. Marker pens.

### Procedure

At the beginning of the game, it is essential that the students have no idea of what they represent, otherwise they might immediately resort to preconceived ideas which would distort the course of the game.

The game is an example of careful and complex framing by the teacher. Within the strict framework, the students have great liberty to develop and express their ideas and experiences.

1. The students form groups of four to six (preferably not more).
2. Each group receives a set of positive cards, a marker pen and the two sheets of flipchart paper. The teacher asks them to appoint a writer to record the group’s comments and reactions on the flipcharts. Alternatively, all group members record their own reactions.
3. The teacher tells the students that they will not represent themselves during the exercise, but will act as members of a minority group. For the moment, they should enquire who they are, but also consider the messages on the cards as describing them and their situation.
4. In turn, the students read one of the cards out to the other members of the group. When they have read all six cards, they write their answers to the question, “How do you feel as a member of this group?” on the “FEELINGS” sheet.
5. The teacher distributes the six negative cards to each group, and they repeat step 4.
6. The teacher asks the students to answer the following question, “What would you do if you were in a similar situation?” The answers are to be written on the “ACTIONS” sheet. The students should bear in mind that they are still the same group who expressed their feelings on the first sheet. Perhaps something they have felt or written on that sheet might help them decide how to act.
7. Plenary session:
  - Each group present their feelings as set out on the sheet headed “FEELINGS” to the rest of the class.
  - When all the groups have completed Part I, the teacher asks them to present their suggestions on their “ACTIONS” sheet. The class should identify constructive actions and acts of violence and differences between and within groups.
8. The teacher asks the students how they worked in the group and whether they encountered any problems while doing the exercise (co-operation, leadership, etc.), and what they think they have learned from the exercise: about themselves, their reactions and the group. Can they establish a relationship between the minority group which they represented and other groups they might know?
9. Lastly, the teacher tells the students that the group they represented is the group of Tinkers, otherwise known as Roma or Gypsies.

## Extension

The students compare their ideas with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.<sup>8</sup> The students can also explore whether the situation described seems to correspond to that in their own country, what measures are taken by the authorities to deal with the problem and which of the measures they have suggested follow the convention.

## Materials

### Set of positive and negative cards

<p>Our houses are unlike those of other people. They are special and we are very fond of them. We like to keep our traditions.</p> <p>We have many skills. We do all kinds of manual and craft work. Our work is a major contribution to the country we live in.</p> <p>In the past, our people performed many brave acts. We like to remember our history.</p> <p>We are very independent. We prefer to look after ourselves. We do not owe anything to anybody.</p> <p>We like getting together and telling stories and singing songs. We think this is very important to enjoy life.</p> <p>We try to live near our family and friends. We look after the old people in our community very well. We adore our children.</p>	<p>Television programmes and the press do not tell the truth about us. They say that we are a problem. They do not let us tell our part of the story.</p> <p>Some people treat us badly and give us bad names. Sometimes we are attacked without reason. Thousands of our people were murdered abroad, not very long ago.</p> <p>We never have running water, our refuse is rarely collected.</p> <p>Some doctors do not want to treat us when we are sick. It is difficult for us to receive social security benefits.</p> <p>People do not want us in their neighbourhood. Some people do not want to give us a job because of what we are.</p> <p>Sometimes we have problems with the police and the municipal authorities because of the place we happen to be at.</p>
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8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1963. The text is accessible via the Internet.

## Exercise 8.8. – Images of war and peace

<b>Educational objectives</b>	The students can define aspects of war and peace. The students develop the skill of reading images. The students are able to express their personal ideas and feelings about war and peace.
<b>Resources</b>	A pool of pictures (including photos, cartoons, advertisements, etc.).

### Procedure

1. Some photographs are displayed to the students. Ideally the photos are hung up on the wall around the classroom or in a well-lit corridor. The students should be able to view the pictures as in an exhibition.
2. The students receive the opportunity to react spontaneously. Which images represent peace – or war? The teacher does not press a student to comment. At the end of this introductory step, he/she points out if the students have agreed in their comments or not. Differences of perception are not discussed further.
3. The students select a photograph that appeals to them particularly. They should be able to view it closely if they wish. In silence, they answer the following questions in writing:
  - What do you see (description)?
  - What are your thoughts (reflection and imagination)?
  - What are your feelings (emotions)?
4. In groups of four the students select images and form pairs of contrasts. They may include some of the photos they have studied in step 3, but they may also choose other photos.
5. The students present their selections in the plenary and give reasons for their choice. If time is running out, each group should present at least one pair of contrasts.
6. Reflection. The students express their feelings and thoughts. They may ask questions about the situations referred to in the photos, and these questions could lead to further study.

### Extension

The same subject can be studied in literature and painting.

The class organises an exhibition on the themes.

## Dealing with conflict



Illustration from Chapter 8

Democracy and Human Rights Education – Volume VI

Teaching democracy

*A collection of models for democratic citizenship and human rights education*