

# Peaceful Conflict Resolution Toolkit

**With the right tools, conflicts can become powerful opportunities for peacemaking.**

Peace First believes that conflicts are a natural and healthy part of all relationships; however, responding to conflicts productively takes time, practice, and support. Through teaching and reinforcing the skills required to successfully resolve conflicts, educators can play a critical role in unleashing young people's natural talents as problem solvers.

## What is peaceful conflict resolution?

Peaceful conflict resolution is a process that engages young people in working together to de-escalate, resolve, and process their conflicts. Rather than aggressively confronting others or passively avoiding confrontation, young people:

- demonstrate **courage** by addressing conflicts directly and sharing their feelings and needs honestly;
- show **compassion** by listening to others' perspectives and empathizing with their experiences; and
- work **collaboratively** with others involved to process the conflict and make a plan for resolution.

Peace First offers concrete tools and resources that empower young people to resolve conflicts peacefully. Our online, cost-free collection of lessons, activities, and games supports educators in teaching the skills students need to prepare for conflicts before they emerge, de-escalate emotions in the midst of heated conflicts, and work together to process conflicts and solve problems as a team.

## How to use this toolkit

This toolkit introduces Peace First's approach to conflict resolution, and provides a variety of proactive strategies that can be used throughout the school day. We invite you to tailor these ideas to suit your individual setting and to best meet your students' needs.

Looking for more in-depth support? Set up a free phone consultation at [dac@peacefirst.org](mailto:dac@peacefirst.org).

## Use this guide to...

1. **Prepare Students to Successfully Respond to Conflict** ([page 2](#))
2. **Help Students De-escalate and Address Conflict** ([page 3](#))
3. **Process Conflict Through Group Meetings** ([page 6](#))

Find additional toolkits, lessons, activities and more at Peace First's **Digital Activity Center** <http://www.peacefirst.org/digitalactivitycenter/>.



# Prepare Students to Successfully Respond to Conflict

Peaceful conflict resolution begins with a strong understanding of self and one's emotions, and requires both the ability to cool down when emotions escalate and to communicate our feelings calmly and clearly with others.

However, managing and expressing our own emotions is only half of the equation. To resolve a conflict with others, we must also be able to listen actively, understand another's perspective, and work collaboratively to find solutions that will work for everyone involved.

Try these two simple activities to help your students prepare to respond peacefully and appropriately when conflicts arise. For a full list of Peace First lessons that address conflict resolution skills, see the [Appendix](#).

## Build students' self awareness with I-statements

Teach students to use I-statements to practice identifying and expressing emotions as a regular part of classroom interactions. Use the sentence frame "I felt \_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_" to help students clearly state their feelings, both in difficult moments and in times of joy and celebration. Acknowledge that all emotions are valid, and support students in handling strong emotions in safe, constructive ways.

Help your students expand their repertoire of reactions to feelings of anger or frustration by brainstorming together as a class. Ask students to list emotions that they find particularly challenging to deal with, or that often result in negative actions. Then brainstorm a list of effective strategies for managing these emotions: on a piece of chart paper, have students list healthy ways to cope when they feel angry, upset, or frustrated. If students have trouble coming up with ideas, provide some examples to get them started (i.e. asking for a moment to oneself, listening to music, counting backwards from ten, etc.). Post the chart paper on the classroom wall, and ask students to refer back to it when they are struggling to manage their emotions.

## Practice effective communication through play

Encourage students to practice effective communication skills with *Human Machine*. To play, divide students into groups of three to six. Assign each team a machine (television, blender, pencil sharpener, alarm clock, etc.). Players must work with their team to create the machine, using nothing but their bodies. All players must be a part of the machine. Take a few minutes for each team to present their machine to the class, and ask other players to guess each team's machine.

After each team has presented their machine, bring the class together to debrief. Ask, "What challenges came up when deciding how to build the machine? When have you experienced similar challenges when working as part of a team? How might the strategies you used in this game help you to communicate more effectively when you have a conflict with others?"

[Visit Peace First's Digital Activity Center for the full directions.](#)



# Help Students De-Escalate and Address Conflict

Caring adults can play a critical role in teaching and modeling the skills of effective coping, anger management, active listening and compromise. By coaching students through a few quick de-escalation strategies, you can empower them to handle many day-to-day conflicts on their own. Try these simple tips to help your students successfully take control of their feelings, work through issues, and plan next steps during and after a conflict.

**Talk it through with students.** With so many competing demands on an educator’s time, it can be tempting to try to solve conflicts *for* students with a quick “Go apologize!” or “Just ignore him!” However, by taking just a few moments to coach students through a conflict, you can provide critical opportunities for them to strengthen their peacemaking skills. Use the grid below to help you get started:

## Quick Tips To Help Students De-Escalate and Address Conflicts:

- Help an upset student talk it through.
- Help students find words to express themselves.
- Offer quick resolution techniques.

### Prompts to Help Students Address Conflicts

Action	Sample Language	Why It’s Useful
Clearly name the student’s feelings.	“It looks like you’re feeling _____ right now.”	Helps student identify feelings; informs and reminds student that all feelings are valid (as long as they are handled appropriately).
Acknowledge that conflict is a <u>normal</u> part of friendship.	“He’s mad at you. That happens sometimes.”	Affirms that conflict happens and is a healthy part of life.
Ask questions to prompt empathetic thinking.	“Sounds like Sammy is pretty sad. Why do you think she might be feeling that way?”	Humanizes the other person in the conflict and emphasizes multiple perspectives; encourages students to empathize with one another.
Give students the language for resolving conflicts on their own.	“Tell Johnny how you’re feeling. Start with I feel ...”	Young students may need specific prompting to help them express themselves and their feelings in a healthy, respectful way. For older students, consider asking them how they could share their feelings with the other person (or people) involved in the conflict.
Prompt students to think about what they plan to do to fix the problem.	“It’s frustrating when that happens. Do you want to talk to him about it or do you want to let it go?”	Acknowledges feelings while prompting students to apply their problem-solving and peacemaking skills. Allows students to take ownership over how to deal with conflicts of varying magnitudes.

**Help them find their words.** Clear and peaceful communication is critical to diffusing conflict and prompting productive dialogue. Yet students, especially those who are younger, often need assistance finding appropriate ways to express their feelings and needs. Read through the sample prompts below, then try crafting your own to help your students practice peaceful communication in the midst of conflict.

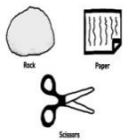


When Students Say...	Try Saying...	Goal
"He's touching my hair!"	"Tell him 'That's my hair. Please leave it alone.'"	Give students clear, assertive language for expressing their wants and needs.
"She pushed me!"	"Tell her, 'I feel mad when you push me. Please... ...stop." ...move back." ...give me some space." ...say excuse me.'"	Prompt students to practice I-messages to calmly and respectfully express their feelings.
"He cut in front of me!"	"Tell him, 'Excuse me, that's my spot.'" or "Tell him, 'I feel mad when you cut in front of me. Please find a different spot.'"	Encourage students to use direct, respectful language to independently address and resolve conflicts with peers.
"She took my toy!"	"You look pretty mad. Let's take three deep breaths, and then I will help you talk to her." After relaxation breaths say, "Tell her, 'I feel mad when you take my toy. Please ask before you take it.'"	Coach students through a multi-stage process for addressing conflict that includes: 1) identifying feelings, 2) cooling off, and 3) discussing feelings and needs with others.
"He said he's not my friend anymore!"	"He is your friend---he's just mad at you. Friends get mad at each other sometimes. Let's give him some space and then we can talk to him about what happened that made him angry."	Reframe hurtful language to emphasize feelings and actions; contextualize these feelings as a normal part of conflict and affirm students' ability to work through issues together.

**Resolve it quickly.** Whenever possible, it is important to encourage students to decide for themselves how they will work through a conflict or issue. However, sometimes minor conflicts are best solved with a quick resolution. When students are stuck in a simple disagreement on the playground or in the classroom, suggest one of the following techniques.



*Coin toss.* Have students define what each sign of coin means. One student flips the coin, while the other reads the coin. Students work collaboratively to come to a “neutral” decision.



*Rock, paper, scissors.* Rock, paper, scissors is an easy way to resolve conflict. Have students set parameters around “best out of” and when to reveal choice---i.e., after 1-2-3 or rock-paper-scissors, or on shoot.



*Cool off.* Before you talk things out, take a few moments to calm down. Walk away and play another game, or participate in another activity.



# Process Conflict Through Group Meetings

*It's Peace First time and your students have just returned from recess—bursting with emotion. A heated argument occurred between a small group of students on the playground, and now the conflict is on everyone's mind.*

Moments like these provide students with powerful opportunities to apply their peacemaking skills to real-world settings. Use the tips provided here to guide you in facilitating effective group meetings that will enable young people to process emotions, communicate needs, and re-build relationships after a conflict has occurred.

## What is a classroom meeting?

A classroom meeting is a time when students and adults meet together (usually in a circle) to share feelings, air concerns, build relationships and resolve conflicts in a peaceful way. It is similar in format to a community dialogue, in that it provides a safe space for individuals to listen intently to multiple perspectives, feel heard, and find common ground. It also resembles a structured mediation, in that it allows individuals to “share their side” of the story and express feelings in an honest, productive way.

## Why have classroom meetings?

**Classroom meetings promote peacemaking in action** by providing students with opportunities to apply the skills they have learned in Peace First to real-life conflicts. Classroom meetings require students to listen actively, use I-statements, consider multiple perspectives, and seek peaceful solutions. Thus, they provide students with a safe, structured setting to “try on” their newly-formed peacemaking skills, while still receiving guidance and feedback from their classroom teacher and/or AmeriCorps teacher.

**Classroom meetings promote peacemaker values** such as equality, inclusion, and collaboration. Because the emphasis is on collaborative problem solving, rather than on teacher-directed disciplinary action, classroom meetings show students that they have a role to play in building a safe, peaceful classroom community. Students also learn that individuals can work together to find creative solutions to complex problems that address the needs of all parties. Through resolving conflicts collaboratively with both peers and adults, students see that all individuals, regardless of age or background, can be powerful peacemakers in their communities.

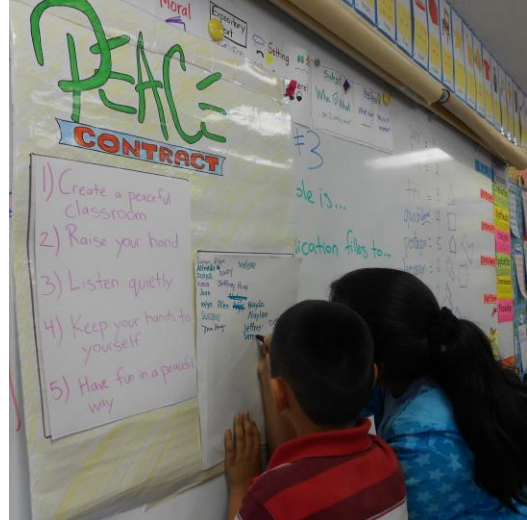
### Quick Tips for Processing Conflict Through Group Meetings:

- Establish ground rules with students.
- Serve as a facilitator and model.
- Ask effective probing questions.
- Identify and acknowledge feelings.
- Praise successes and progress.



## When are classroom meetings held?

**Classroom meetings can occur regularly** on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis as a designated time for building relationships, sharing concerns and addressing conflicts. Some classrooms will have a weekly “concerns and appreciations” circle, where students use I-statements to highlight both positive and negative interactions they have had with classmates and teachers over the course of the week. Other classrooms may have daily “check-in” and “check-out” times at the start and end of the day to share feelings, “highs and lows,” appreciations, and/or briefly describe events that have occurred outside of the classroom.



**Classroom meetings can be held “in the moment”** as a response to a significant event that requires immediate attention and discussion. For example, a teacher may call students together for a classroom meeting when students come back angry and unsettled after a heated argument at recess, or when students forget or neglect to follow established classroom procedures and an unsafe situation occurs.

**Classroom meetings can be held to address a recurring issue** that either the teacher or students have observed. For example, if students have noticed that the lunch tables are left messy on a regular basis, they may call a classroom meeting to brainstorm strategies for keeping the lunchroom clean.



### Sample Format for Regularly-Scheduled Classroom Meetings

- Whole Group Check-In
- Teambuilding game (if time permits)
- Concerns
- Appreciations
- Break/Cheer

### Sample Format for Problem-Solving Classroom Meetings

- State the issue clearly and specifically, without calling out individuals.
- State how the issue made/makes you feel, and invite students to share observations and feelings using I-statements.
- Invite students to brainstorm possible solutions (Accept and acknowledge all ideas – this is not the time to evaluate).
- Ask probing questions to explore students’ ideas further (“What might that look like?” “How might we do that?” “What would we need in order to try that out?”).
- Discuss proposed solutions.
- Work toward consensus around what students would like to try.
- Establish an action plan (strategy/strategies to implement, next steps, time frame).
- Decide on a time to regroup, revisit, and reassess.
- Thank students for their time, effort, and peacemaking skills.

## Tips for Effective Classroom Meetings:

**Establish ground rules together.** What expectations will the group uphold during classroom meetings? Examples may include: active listening, using I-statements, attacking the problem (not the person), etc. Involve students in setting ground rules whenever possible.

**Participate as a facilitator and a group member,** rather than as a teacher or judge. Empower students to resolve conflicts and address problems collaboratively by keeping your own suggestions and advice to a minimum.

**Model, model, model.** If you want students to listen to each other, stay calm, and use I-statements, make sure you are doing all these things, too! Avoid judgment, extended commentary, and advice that will prevent students from listening openly to one another and taking ownership in the problem-solving process.



**Ask probing “what” and “how” questions, but avoid “why” questions.** Many comments that sound silly on the surface are excellent ideas in the making. Ask questions that validate and clarify students’ ideas, such as “That sounds really interesting. Can you tell us a little more about what that might look like?” or “Sounds like you’re really hurt right now. Can you tell us more about what happened that made you feel this way?” Such questions encourage students to take risks by participating actively, and model embracing new and diverse ideas. Conversely, “why” questions, such as “Why would you do that?” or “Why are you acting like this?” often feel judgmental and shut down participation and risk-taking.

**Emphasize, identify, and acknowledge feelings.** This may mean restating students’ you-statements into I-statements that emphasize feelings (e.g. when a student says, “I hate him! He’s such a jerk!” you respond by saying, “Wow, it sounds like you’re really angry right now. Do you need a moment to calm down, or are you ready to tell us a little more about what happened that made you so angry?”

**Don’t push apologies.** Teachers often rush to get students to “say sorry,” even when it is clear that students do not feel remorse for their actions. Encourage students to explore what apologies really mean and to use them when they really mean them. Rather than rushing to apologies, encourage students to restate one another’s feelings, and to acknowledge one another’s perspectives through statements such as “I hear you,” or “I understand where you’re coming from.”

**Praise, praise, praise.** Remember that resolving conflicts peacefully is a complex and challenging process that requires time, patience, courage, and risk. Praise progress. Praise baby steps. Praise and acknowledge students for taking risks, being honest, listening to one another, and trying out new ideas.



# Using the Peace First Curriculum to Build Conflict Resolution Skills



Peace First's Peacemaker Skills Curriculum provides multiple opportunities for students to practice the skills needed to effectively respond to and address conflicts. Specific skills are introduced and reinforced at different grade levels; however, most lessons can be easily tailored to meet the needs of students at any age. Use the guide below to find out when and how Peace First teaches peaceful conflict resolution skills across the curriculum. Access these lessons and more at [www.peacefirst.org/digitalactivitycenter](http://www.peacefirst.org/digitalactivitycenter).

## Conflict Resolution Skills in the Peace First Curriculum

Skill/Related Topic	Grade	What do students do?
Identifying and coping with your feelings	Grade 1 Lesson 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice identifying and naming their feelings</li> <li>Match feeling words to the corresponding facial representation</li> <li>Identify emotional triggers ("when x happens, I feel y")</li> </ul>
	Grade 1 Lesson 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify situations or events that make them feel angry</li> <li>Understand that anger is a feeling that presents itself in varying degrees</li> <li>Identify strategies that help them cool down, cope with anger better</li> </ul>
Active Listening	Grade 2 Lesson 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify qualities of a good listener by practicing listening skills</li> <li>Understand how listening affects their friendships</li> </ul>
Understanding others' perspectives	Grade 4 Lesson 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize their own feelings</li> <li>Understand and identify the effects or impact of exclusion through developing empathy for others</li> <li>Write a paragraph based on a scenario in which they take the perspective of an excluded person</li> </ul>



Conflict  
vocabulary  
from the Peace First  
curriculum

### Conflict Resolution Skills in the Peace First Curriculum

Skill/Related Topic	Grade	What do students do?
Being aware of your own reactions to conflict (and whether they are helpful/harmful)	Grade 5 Lesson 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain in their own words what conflict responses are and how some can be helpful while others can be harmful</li> <li>Determine their own conflict responses and how they affect the way they deal with conflicts</li> <li>Identify the difference between helpful and harmful conflict responses and articulate why peacemakers should strive to turn unproductive responses into helpful ones</li> </ul>
Understanding how your own and others' actions can escalate or de-escalate a conflict	Grade 5 Lesson 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain in their own words what conflict responses are and how some can be helpful while others can be harmful</li> <li>Determine their own conflict responses</li> <li>Identify the difference between helpful and harmful conflict responses and articulate why peacemakers should strive to turn unproductive responses into helpful ones</li> </ul>
Coping with conflict	Grade 5 Lesson 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List choices for responding to conflict that will escalate or de-escalate the situation</li> <li>Evaluate the risks and benefits of these choices</li> <li>Identify the feelings associated with conflict</li> <li>Describe strategies for coping with feelings during conflicts</li> </ul>



### Conflict Resolution Skills in the Peace First Curriculum

Skill/Related Topic	Grade	What do students do?
Brainstorm possible resolutions/ choices using ABCD for problem-solving	Grade 3 Lessons 8 & 9 Grade 5 Lesson 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the steps in the ABCD method</li> <li>Understand how to apply the ABCD method to decision making</li> <li>Use the ABCD method to solve simple and complex tasks</li> <li>Document the use of the ABCD method orally and in writing</li> <li>Identify the importance of clear communication in making decisions collaboratively</li> </ul>
Understanding how your own and others' actions can escalate or de-escalate a conflict	Grade 5 Lesson 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List the potential positive and negative consequences of de-escalating a conflict</li> <li>Practice behaviors to de-escalate a conflict</li> <li>Practice coping with strong feelings that arise during conflicts</li> <li>Identify de-escalation strategies that also allow one to save face during a conflict</li> </ul>
Exploring "win-win" solutions	Grade 5 Lesson 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distinguish among the outcomes of conflict using the win-win framework</li> <li>Describe the advantages and disadvantages of each outcome</li> <li>Demonstrate the skills of win-win</li> <li>Use words to express what they need and want</li> </ul>