

WAGING PEACE

IN OUR

SCHOOLS

LINDA LANTIERI AND JANET PATTI

**WITH A FOREWORD BY
MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN**

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[*To the memory of*]
[*Patrick F. Daly,*]

principal of one of
the first schools
that gave birth
to our dream.

And to all
the young people,
parents, teachers,
and administrators
who are passionately
and courageously
waging peace
in our schools.

HOW TO WAGE PEACE:

THE SKILLS OF

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

WE WANT TO MOVE now to the real core of what we do—the concepts and skills of conflict resolution and diversity education. We will be shifting gears in the next two chapters to talk about the content of what we teach rather than the mechanics of how we teach it.

Not only are children today living in an increasingly violent society, they are also growing up in more diverse communities. Therefore, we at RCCP believe, we have a responsibility to teach children how to manage conflict nonviolently and to understand and value the pluralistic society they are living in. The following two chapters are meant as a mini-course in the ideas that are at the heart of our work.

Training Ourselves First

A woman came to Gandhi, asking him to give her ideas of ways to get her little boy to stop eating sugar because it was doing him harm. Gandhi gave a cryptic reply, "Please come back next week." The woman left puzzled but returned a week later, dutifully following Gandhi's instructions.

"Please don't eat sugar," Gandhi told the young fellow when he saw him, "It's not good for you." Then he joked with the boy a while, gave him a hug and sent him on his way. But the mother, unable to contain her curiosity,

lingered behind to ask, "Why didn't you say this last week when we came? Why did you make us come back?"

Gandhi smiled. "Last week," he said, "I too was eating sugar."

* Since the field of conflict resolution is a recent innovation in education, most adults we come in contact with need to be immersed in the concepts and skills of conflict resolution before they can even think about teaching this body of knowledge in the classroom.

Moreover, we recognize that this work differs from teaching a new math or social studies curriculum. With this work, the medium—who we are and who we become—is the message. And so our work with adults is often a fine balance between introspection and skill building. St. Francis of Assisi put it this way: "While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."

Conflict resolution requires inner work of subtlety and depth, a journey within. Like Gandhi in the story, we must struggle, change, and work on ourselves before we can offer authentic help to others. We present the following material on conflict resolution in that spirit.

Defining Conflict

In many of our RCCP classrooms, we do an activity called a conflict web. We write the word "conflict" on the board and draw a circle around it. We then ask students what comes to mind when they hear the word, and create a web by connecting their responses to the circled word. Even when we do this activity with adults, chances are high that most of the other words mentioned have negative connotations. One third-grade boy said, "Conflict is anything bad that could happen to you." Another student came up with the word "evil."

One of the first myths to dispel is that conflict is always bad. Conflict is actually a natural, normal part of life. The day we die we'll still have a list of conflicts yet to be resolved. Conflict is not bad in and of itself, yet for many

of us, especially young people, it has come to equal violence. This is an equation we have to break.

Conflict is part of living and growing. Like a stone-tumbler tumbling a raw stone, conflict has the potential of polishing us or breaking us. There is a lot of emotion connected to conflictual situations. Past experience has taught many of us that they can escalate, hurting us physically and emotionally; feelings sometimes come up that remind us of hurtful moments in our lives and in the lives of those we love. And so conflict can sometimes break us. But it can also be an opportunity for growth and change. It can polish us, make us better than we were before. Consider the Chinese way of writing the word "crisis": two characters make up the ideograph—one means danger and the other means opportunity. Conflict is a fact of life, sometimes destructive and bad, at other times constructive and good.

Too often we think that we have no control over the conflict in our lives, we feel helpless. But when we have the skills to assert ourselves in nonviolent ways, we begin to feel empowered, able to draw upon our past experiences to approach the situation differently. If we have been trained in conflict resolution skills, we can open up communication and confront conflict nonviolently. Resolving conflict creatively can be taught—it relies on a set of practical tools. Alberto, a senior at Schomburg Satellite Academy in the South Bronx, has incorporated these skills into his everyday life:

No one goes out in the morning looking for a fight, but things happen in split seconds. Conflict resolution teaches you how to use your mind more. How to step back from the situation and quickly analyze it before things get nasty. Your posture and eye contact should symbolize strength—that you can handle the situation. And that you want to handle it peacefully.

In schools where conflicts are resolved peaceably by adults and student mediators, young people grow up seeing this way as the norm. The culture of the school reflects this active process; fights diminish, arguments become discussions, and kids feel emotionally and physically safe.

Approaches and Styles

Exploring our own histories allows us to understand why it is that we respond to conflict in the way that we do. In our work, adults and young people reflect upon the messages they received from the people who raised them:

“If he hits you, hit him back.”

“If you have nothing good to say, then don’t say anything at all.”

“I’m your mother, that’s why.”

Sometimes thinking about early days brings back laughter, sometimes sorrow and tears. Either way, we realize that these early messages are now echoed in our communications with colleagues, students, and loved ones.

Recently, Cassandra, a middle school teacher in New Jersey, was asked by her administrator to take on the organization of the school’s drug awareness week. Because she didn’t want to disappoint her principal, she accepted the responsibility even though she was overloaded with other projects. She was angry with herself for taking on the extra work, but instead of talking with her principal and expressing how she felt, she begrudgingly completed the project. She also got sick in the process. When someone in authority tells her to do something, Cassandra tends to respond as she did when she was told to do something as a child: grin and bear it.

Conflict styles are set when we are very young. We either live out those early messages or rebel against them. Training in conflict resolution equips us with the tools to start to change old patterns. As an ancient Chinese proverb tells us, “If we do not change direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.”

Roger Fisher and William Ury, authors of the bestseller *Getting to Yes*, were among the first to identify and analyze conflict styles. They outlined three distinct styles of negotiation: soft, hard, and principled.¹ Although most people employ a combination of all three, some of us “get stuck” in

one style or another, using that style all the time, even when it’s not appropriate.

For instance, a person who is locked into the “soft” negotiation style is usually intent on concentrating more on the quality of the relationship than on the problem; a soft negotiator puts a high stake on how others perceive his or her needs and is willing to let go of those needs for the sake of a relationship. This, of course, is not without cost. As Langston Hughes asks in the well-known poem, “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? . . . Or does it explode?” When people are locked into this style, their unmet needs build up and they eventually lash out at themselves or at someone else. They may also somatize their emotions and impair their health. Our dear friend and colleague Lindamichellebaron gets right to the point in the following poem:

Even weeds have needs, you know,
Don’t make me creep through cracks,
or race for space to grow.

Even weeds have needs, although,
I’ve been known to survive on dried up rain
and left over sun.

Even weeds have needs, you know,
And this weed needs a great big garden,
with a gardener who’s not afraid
to let me grow.²

At the other end of the spectrum is the “hard” negotiator, who aims to win no matter what the stakes. Hard negotiators often gravitate to career choices that affirm them in playing out such a style. A hard negotiator approaches conflict as a contest, one in which he or she wins and the other person loses; self-esteem is connected to seeing conflict as a contest to be won

at any cost. Hard negotiators are often so intent on proving their point by whatever means necessary that their relationships with other people suffer. One student from Phoenix Academy in New York City described his style this way: "I was the type that would yell, get overly emotional, and use physical violence in order to get my point across." Hard negotiators may win, but often they have no one to celebrate with them at the finish line.

Soft and hard negotiation styles are not solely the product of individual personality. Cultural and gender differences also influence negotiation techniques. In a tightly knit culture, for instance, the focus is usually on collective needs first, individual needs second—similar to a soft negotiation style. Loosely woven societies tend to focus on individual needs and sanction other styles, mainly hard negotiation.

The third approach—principled negotiation—is distinctly different, and it is upon this approach that conflict resolution as a discipline is based. In principled negotiation we "separate the people from the problem": we are hard on the problem but respectful of the people in the process. When he was in jail in South Africa, Gandhi "separated the person from the problem" by making sandals for the man responsible for imprisoning him,³ and during the struggle for India's independence, he sent Princess Elizabeth (later Queen of England) a beautiful tea cloth that he himself had woven.

The principled negotiator doesn't have a bottom line. Participants become problem-solvers. The goal is to reach a wise outcome efficiently and amicably. Principled negotiation supports both getting one's needs met and treating the other person with respect. This approach offers a strong possibility of a win-win solution.

The model used by the Alternatives to Violence Project (see figure 1) offers an outline of possible responses to conflict and another way at looking at response styles.⁴

As shown, we can attempt to avoid conflict, diffuse it, or confront it. When we confront conflict, we have a choice of doing it violently or nonviolently. At times, we are unable to see creative alternatives because we are

RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

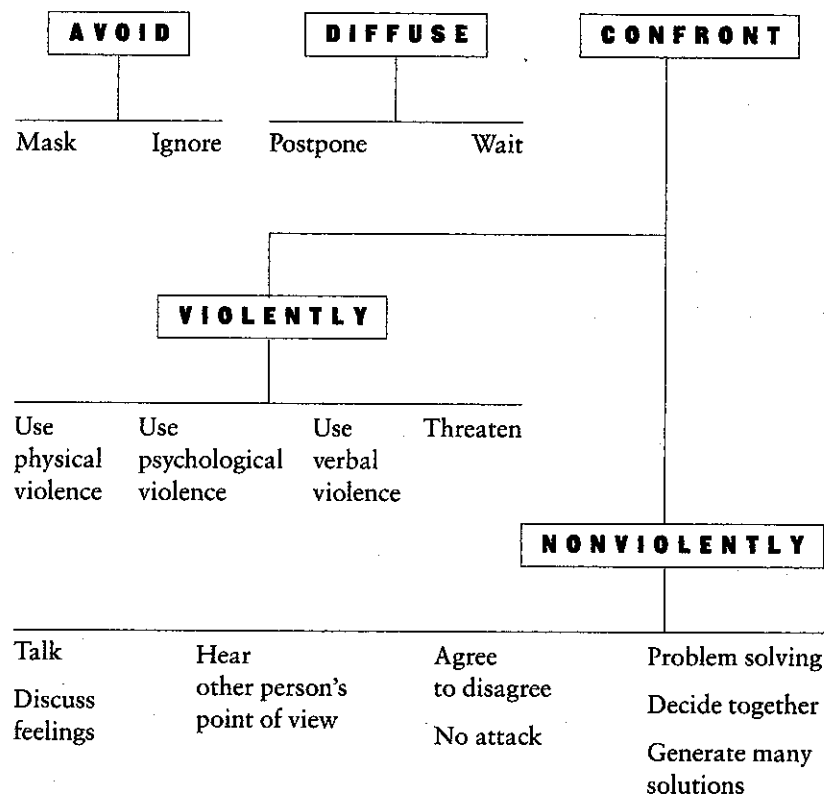


Figure 1

*Simulation
Role Play
Potential*

locked into a particular style. The secret is to free ourselves enough to take charge of our responses.

For instance, avoidance may be an appropriate response to certain conflict situations. Imagine that while walking down a dark, empty city street someone approaches you with apparently harmful intentions; you might decide to enter the next building in order to avoid your pursuer. However, soft negotiators tend to overuse avoidance. In fact, soft negotiators don't choose avoidance, avoidance chooses them. One of our RCCP teachers decided to get a transfer to another school because she was upset with the way her colleagues were treating her, but when asked several weeks later how her new placement was working out, she described a situation much like the previous one. Because soft negotiators try to avoid conflict, they often fail to develop concrete skills to handle problems effectively. Instead they repeat old patterns.

Hard negotiators tend to approach conflict by threatening, intimidating, and even by using physical abuse at times. Hard negotiators put up lots of roadblocks in their communication with others. This causes emotional distance and decreases the ability to actually solve problems. Psychologist Thomas Gordon identifies these roadblocks to communication as "the Dirty Dozen":

- [1] *Criticizing*: "Don't blame anyone else for this. You got yourself into this mess."
- [2] *Name-calling*: "What an idiot!" "Just like a woman." "You men are all alike, totally insensitive."
- [3] *Diagnosing*: "I know exactly why you're doing this—to make me angry."
- [4] *Praising evaluatively*: "You're such a good boy. I know you'll do your homework."
- [5] *Ordering*: "Clean up your room right now." "Why? Because I said so."

- [6] *Threatening*: "Stop arguing with your brother or I'll cut off both your allowances."
- [7] *Moralizing*: "You shouldn't leave your husband—think what will happen to the children."
- [8] *Excessive/Inappropriate Questioning*: "Are you sure that you did it?"
- [9] *Advising*: "If I were you, I'd never talk to her again."
- [10] *Diverting*: "You think that's bad? Let me tell you what happened to me."
- [11] *Logical Argument*: "Let's face it. If you'd been on time we wouldn't be eating cold food."
- [12] *Reassuring*: "Don't worry, tomorrow you'll be laughing about this whole mess."⁵

These are all examples of interpersonal responses that tend to close down communication. Whether they occur in one interpersonal act or in more systemic forms, we know that each such response breeds another like it.

William Kreidler uses the image of an escalator to describe every behavior in a conflict situation as either stepping up or stepping down.⁶ Every step up the "conflict escalator" has feelings that accompany it. As the conflict intensifies, so do the feelings. And no one gets on the escalator empty-handed. We always have the baggage we bring to the conflict. This baggage can be filled with lots of things. First, there's our past experience with the people and issues involved. Then, there are all the feelings about the specific conflict itself, as well as the "mood of the day" and issues of diversity and cultural perspective. All of these may move us either up or down the conflict escalator and affect the outcome.

The higher we go on the escalator, the closer we come to violence, and the harder it is to come down. And yet it is possible to descend the escalator at any time. This is what the skills and awarenesses of nonviolent confrontation are about. In fact, in any situation, even a potentially violent one, if our

next act can be one which is positive and assertive, then we have the possibility of descending the conflict escalator.

One strategy William Kridler offers to help us approach a conflict in this way is called CAPS, an acronym based on the following steps:

- > **Cool Off:** Take some deep breaths, acknowledge your feelings.
- > **Agree to Work It Out:** Show a willingness to solve the problem by not escalating it further and letting the other disputant know you are ready to discuss the issues involved.
- > **Point of View on the Problem:** Using "I" statements, give your points of view.
- > **Solve the problem:** Brainstorm solutions, decide how to implement a win-win solution.⁷

Several years ago, before I (Linda) could have verbalized them easily, it seems that I had somehow already internalized these steps. Faced with a life-and-death situation, I intuitively did the things we teach.

It was about 6:00 P.M. on a warm May evening. I was walking along 99th Street between 1st and 2nd avenues in New York City's East Harlem. I had walked these familiar blocks many times during my years as a teacher and an administrator at Community School District 4. The street was desolate, lined with the remnants of deserted buildings. The thought did occur to me that it might not be safe to be walking this way right now, but my intuition didn't kick in soon enough. Before I knew it I was surrounded by three young men, about thirteen or fourteen years old. One of the boys reached into his pocket and took out a knife with a shiny four-inch blade. As all three pressed closer to me, the young man with the knife said, "Give me your purse. Now."

Inwardly panicked, I took some deep breaths and found myself saying, "I'm feeling a little uncomfortable. You know, guys, you're a little into my

space. I'm wondering if you could step back a little bit?" I waited cautiously. I glanced down and was shocked to see three sets of sneakers take three steps back. "Thank you," I said. "Now I want to hear what you just said to me, but to tell you the truth I'm a little nervous about that knife. I'm wondering if you could put it away?"

I waited for what felt like an eternity and then watched the knife slip into a pocket. The boys and I were working it out.

I quickly reached into my purse and took out a twenty-dollar bill, realizing that this was no time to ignore such a request. I was glad I had it. But how to stay neutral—not take sides?—was what went racing through my mind. I caught the eye of the young man with the knife in his pocket and asked, "Who should I give it to?" "Me" was his response. I looked over at the other two guys and asked if they were in agreement. One of them said, "We could cash it at the corner at the bodega." My God, I thought, we're actually problem-solving together.

"Great," I said, as I handed the first boy my twenty. I focused on all three and said, "Now here's what's going to happen. I'm going to stay right here while you walk away." They looked quite puzzled. The script had changed. Without a word, they started to slowly walk away, glancing back at me as I managed to keep my two feet firmly planted, although my knees began to quiver.

Then I saw the power of nonviolence in action. They began to run away from me. My response had so disarmed them that *they* felt in danger. This moment is etched in my memory. I call upon it whenever I need to remember the power we possess when we use the skills of nonviolence. Even in a potentially dangerous situation, the opportunity to go down the conflict escalator always exists.

I remember another example of this power in action, one with even wider implications. There was a time a few years ago in New York City when wearing a sheepskin coat could be deadly. There were several incidents of kids being held up by other kids and getting shot when they refused to give up

But you
still got robbed

their coats. Around this time, Raymond, a mediator in a local high school, got off the subway at a stop in East Harlem and found himself surrounded by three guys who demanded he give up his jacket. Instead of resisting, Raymond looked at the three boys and said, "This is incredible—I was just getting ready to do that." As he unzipped his coat, he asked his assailants who he should give it to. One of the young men took the coat and all three began to run.

If it had ended there, it would have been only a partial vindication of conflict resolution, since although Raymond had used his skills to de-escalate a potentially violent situation, he'd still lost his coat. But when Raymond got back to his school, a teacher had the insight to expand the lesson in emotional learning; he called a group of students together so that Raymond could share his story and express his rage. Within moments, one of the other young people asked, "How much was that coat?" Raymond responded, "It was \$119." "Well," said another student, "there are ninety-two seniors in this school—that's a little over a dollar each." In about three days' time they collected enough money to replace the coat. Raymond learned an important lesson. He was rewarded by his peers for using his conflict resolution skills in a potentially deadly situation to control anger and express it in a more appropriate place.

We liken these skills in nonviolent conflict resolution to training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation: when we know CPR, there are very few times when we'd hesitate to help in time of need. I have a childhood memory of my Uncle Angelo, who saved someone's life one day with his CPR training. One minute he was on his way to his niece's wedding, dressed up in fine clothes; the next minute he was down on his knees on the grimy city pavement, working feverishly to save a stranger's life. When we have skills in nonviolent conflict resolution, we too are always on duty. Sometimes calling upon these skills can mean the difference between living and dying. When I need another level of conviction in the power of creative nonviolence, I think of another true story.

Sara, an eighty-three-year-old woman who lived alone in a log cabin in rural Virginia, turned on her radio one day and was frightened to hear that three inmates had just escaped from the maximum security prison less than a mile from her home. Each of the convicts was described in utmost detail, in hopes of alerting the community. Just as the announcer had finished the description of the third convict, the doorbell rang. Sara opened the door and there stood the three inmates. Her first words to them were, "You guys look like you need breakfast and I can make a good one." Moments later they were eating her grits, bacon, and eggs as she chatted with them, never sure of what their next move would be. After they had finished eating, they unexpectedly hugged her, thanked her, and quietly left. Several hours later they were apprehended. To this day they probably wonder what power took hold of them that would cause them to stop and have breakfast in the middle of an escape.

From India's struggle for independence to our own civil rights movement of the 1960s to Sara's breakfast table, our society yearns for this power to come forth again. Gandhi's belief was that humankind can get beyond violence only through creative nonviolence: "Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred." Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl put it this way: "Everything can be taken from us but one thing, which is the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Win-Win Negotiation

There are many, more ordinary, conflict situations where win-win solutions—those that meet the underlying interests and needs of all parties involved—can be achieved. Too often we assume that one side must win and the other must lose, or that both must give up something and thus neither will get what they need or want.

This happens because conflict is seen as a contest. In a contest, one person

wins and the other person loses. Some conflicts do end that way—in what is called a win-lose resolution. And of course it's possible that neither person will get what he or she wants, in which case the result is called a lose-lose resolution. But it is also possible that both parties can get what they want or need in the situation, resulting in a win-win resolution to the conflict. This is the type of resolution we emphasize in our work.

A parable frequently told to illustrate this approach involves two sisters who both want the only orange in the kitchen. "I need the orange," says one. "You can't have it," argues the other. "I saw it first."

If one sister gets the orange and the other doesn't, we have a win-lose resolution. In a lose-lose outcome, during a fight over the orange both sisters get hurt. (An apparent compromise—dividing the orange in half—also turns out to be a lose-lose situation in this case because neither of the two parties gets enough of what she needs.)

In our story, however, the sisters stop arguing long enough to explore the situation, and they find they can work out a win-win solution: both can get what they need from a single orange, since (as they discover) one sister wants to eat the orange, while the other needs the peel to flavor the icing on a cake.⁸

In a conflict situation it's important to make the distinction between needs and positions. A position is a statement of what a person wants. It represents just one way in which the person's needs can be met. Needs or interests are short-term, but frequently represent concerns underlying a position. When we are able to separate positions and demands from actual needs, then we can achieve win-win solutions. In the case of the orange, the sisters were able to separate the demand "I've got to have the orange" from their real needs, allowing both of them to get what they needed.

The win-win approach to negotiation helps identify and separate needs and positions, making the distinction between what we say we want and our reasons for wanting it.

It's important to note that good communication is essential in moving from positions to considering underlying interests; it provides room for brainstorming possible solutions and eliminating those that are unaccept-

able to either party. And our values come into play here as well. Deeply held beliefs—religious, ideological, or cultural—must also be understood and taken into account. These values are so firmly rooted that they seldom change in a negotiation.

In win-win negotiation, we choose the solution that will meet the interests of everyone. It's not necessarily our first choice, but it's one we can all live with. It makes us feel like all parties are winners.

In win-win negotiation, a cooperative climate is created, and this allows for a reframing of the situation: both parties ask the question, What kind of agreement would allow both of us to get important needs met? Furthermore, in our program we teach that a win-win negotiation always ends with the parties deciding on how the solution they have chosen will be carried out—what first steps need to be taken, who will do what, and when they will do it.

In summary, the win-win negotiation process as we teach it in schools involves the following steps:

- [1] *Identify positions and interests. When you negotiate, "positions" are what you say you want, "interests" are the reasons you want it.*
- [2] *Present and listen. Say what your positions and interests are. Listen to what the person you're negotiating with says about his or her positions and interests. Try not to call people names. Try to be specific. Use active listening to move from positions to interests.*
- [3] *Brainstorm possible solutions. Think of all the possible ways to solve the problem. Try to think of many. Write them down. Don't say if the ideas are good or bad (that will happen next).*
- [4] *Eliminate solutions that are unacceptable. Read over all the ideas. Draw a line through any idea that either of you doesn't like.*
- [5] *Choose a solution that will meet the interests of everybody involved. Read the ideas that are left on your list. Choose the idea or ideas that will meet everyone's interests. You want to help everyone feel like a winner.*

Activity
↓
Use real
life
situations

[6] *Make a plan to take action. Once you choose a solution, decide how you will make sure it happens. Decide what the first steps will be. Decide who will do what and when they will do it.*⁹

In our experience, people generally feel they've gained from going through these steps; however, many cultural and gender differences come into play as we learn to negotiate well. For example, some of us tend to minimize—even withhold—negative feedback, while others are equally able to give and receive both negative and positive feedback. Some of us can talk about conflict anywhere, others need a quiet, casual, private space. For some of us, timing is very important; for others, sooner is better. Some of us require a lot of thinking before we speak, while others think out loud and express gut feelings early on in a conversation. This means that although two parties might be totally committed to a negotiation, many other factors need also to be taken into consideration. As we try for win-win solutions, we can keep in mind some words of wisdom from Henry David Thoreau: "Thaw with her gentle persuasion is more powerful than Thor with his hammer. The one melts, the other breaks."

While the win-win approach can be helpful in many situations, resolution of a conflict is not always possible. Sometimes the best strategy in a conflict-laden situation may be one that simply prevents the outbreak of physical violence or the rupture of a relationship. In any case, the primary goal is to be creative and resourceful in the face of conflict.

Active Listening

The practice of creative response to conflict entails more than a collection of isolated skills, but acquiring specific skills helps us develop a systematic way of thinking about how to handle conflict.

Communication is an essential part of conflict resolution. In fact, the process is described in shorthand terms as "talking things through." You cannot resolve a problem you don't understand, and you can't understand the problem until you have complete, accurate information. People involved in a con-

flict situation need to be able to talk about concerns and feelings, to speak about what they would like to change, and to discuss what they feel they need. Clear communication is a necessary tool for getting to the bottom of conflicts and finding satisfactory solutions; unclear communication may itself be the cause of conflict.

We can think about the process in terms of senders and receivers. Senders observe something using their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. They process this information by comparing and contrasting it with previous experiences and information, and evaluating it according to their beliefs and needs; they can then encode a message and transmit it through speech and body language. Receivers take in messages and decode them, sorting out and interpreting them according to their own experiences, beliefs, and needs. Thus, messages received also pass through perceptual filters. A Haitian proverb says it this way: "We see from where we stand." || ★

In order to improve communication it's helpful to have receiving as well as sending skills at our disposal. In fact, the technique of *active listening*, also known as empathic listening, is one of the most important skills needed to de-escalate conflict. (Yet in a typical conflict situation, listening is often the last thing we do.)

Active listening is really listening with the heart. In and of itself it is a gift—a priceless gift that can be given freely to help heal and reconcile differences. It helps us defuse anger and hostility and gain information.

Active listening requires us to put our lives—our thoughts, feelings, values—on hold. Not an easy feat when we all have unprocessed feelings, unfinished projects, unresolved concerns, and deeply held values that must be set aside in order to redirect our attention to the other person. Active listening requires that we clear a mental and emotional space and allow the speaker to fill that space. At this point the listener is able to go beyond accepting differences to offer the speaker full freedom to be who he or she is.

The active listener is able to walk a mile in the speaker's shoes. In that walking, we offer the gift of empathy as we make ourselves available and present. To do that—to walk in someone else's shoes—we've got to be bare-foot first. We don't want to turn our desire to listen into speaking ourselves,

interrupting the speaker to tell our own stories; we don't want to advise or judge or go on mental side-trips to plan what we're going to say next. To really listen with one's heart, mind, and soul is to be able to fully engage ourselves not in what we are thinking or feeling but rather in what it is like for the other person.

For Faydra, a teacher in New Orleans, listening has gained a new dimension: "I try to be more sensitive with my kids. When I really stop and listen, I see why some of them hurt. And even when I'm frustrated, I step back and look at it from a different perspective. This has helped me to give them the benefit of the doubt. . . . And I see behavior changing in them and in me."

Active listening is useful in a variety of situations. Active listening can help two parties get a sense of how each views a situation as well as the feelings surrounding it. Active listening can shed light on a conflict by clarifying issues and concerns. It is also helpful in regulating emotion, especially when strong feelings are being expressed.

There are several active listening techniques we can use to help the other person to talk. Added to our repertoire, they provide us with a range and depth in our ability to actively listen. Some of these techniques are

- > paraphrasing,
- > clarifying,
- > reflection,
- > encouragement,
- > summary, and
- > validation.

Most of us are familiar with the simplest form of active listening: repeating back the information expressed, or *paraphrasing*. This practice may

seem artificial at times, especially when we don't have other techniques at hand. I recall an incident an RCCP teacher related to us after we had first introduced her to the idea of active listening. When her husband picked her up after the initial training session, she proceeded to repeat back word for word everything he was saying. After a while, in exasperation, the husband declared, "Aren't you listening? That's what I just said!" Clearly, the teacher needed to expand her "tool chest" of techniques.

Another way to actively listen is *clarification*. Clarification, a way of acquiring information, generally presents itself in the form of questions:

- > What did you mean when you said that?
- > When did this begin?
- > How long have you been feeling this?

Clarification can be particularly helpful in getting details and building a more complete version of the issue presented. Many years ago, when I was teaching fifth grade, clarification once helped me get through a teacher's nightmare—a child's disclosure of sexual abuse.

Ten-year-old Tanya came to me one day at the end of class and said that she wanted to talk to me about something personal. She sat down next to me, stared out the window, and began to tell me that her uncle had made her feel very uncomfortable the previous night. I didn't know what to do with my own anger at what this vulnerable young person was revealing to me, so I began asking clarifying questions, which helped both Tanya and me get through the difficult moment: When did it happen? How long has this been going on? Who was in the house? What did he do? I realized that active listening was not only helping me to be there for Tanya, it was also allowing me to think on my feet about what I should say and do next. I was glad that asking these difficult questions helped Tanya relate her story. In hearing her answers, I was able to be more fully present as well.

I feel obliged, however, to offer a cautionary note about using clarifica-

tion. Adults especially love using this technique in talking to young people, but questioning can feel too confrontational when answers are expected instantaneously. The key to using clarification is to accompany it with other active listening techniques.

There are times when one's culture and forms of expression dictate much subtler forms of active listening. Our Lakota friend David Whitehorse, professor at California State University at San Marcos, tells us that, traditionally, one should never expect an immediate answer from a Lakota person: "When a Lakota is asked a question, the reflective nature of the native thought process is to seek wisdom before responding. This may require asking guidance from the powers associated with the four directions, from above, and from below. The Lakota pattern (and other similar native patterns) is to think and feel one's way through the question and its broader sociocultural implications. Only when one senses and understands these relationships does one provide an answer." This, David Whitehorse adds, "is in contrast with the Euro-American trial-and-error method, where the answer is often provided [by] 'raw data' without understanding the larger context for the question and perhaps the question itself."

Reflection is similar to paraphrasing, but in this active listening technique we focus on the underlying feelings the speaker is experiencing. With reflection, we try to echo back the feelings behind the statements. We might simply venture, "You seem pretty upset about this," for instance, when the speaker clearly wants to identify his or her feelings and needs help to move from a statement of fact to the emotions beneath it. When we "reflect" carefully, the listener often expresses a sigh of relief that we have listened beyond the words to hear what was coming from the heart. It's helpful to ask if you are accurately reflecting the feeling: "You seem very sad about it. Is that true?"

It is best to use reflection sparingly, however. The difficulty with its overuse with young people especially is that adults tend to identify feelings for children, without giving them a chance to do it for themselves. It is equally important to help young people name their feelings and develop their own

repertoire of feeling words. We all need a degree of trust and rapport before we are ready to allow our feelings to be identified. We've all been in the situation where we say to someone, "You seem really angry," and he or she unequivocally denies it; the speaker wasn't ready for the listener's evaluation of his or her feelings.

Active listeners can also listen by encouraging and validating. In *encouraging*, we simply say any phrase that lets the person know we are ready and willing to listen: "Go on, tell me more." A simple but effective phrase for delving into a deeper level of a problem is "Anything else?" In a conflict situation, our first way of describing the issue usually exposes its surface; asking "Anything else?" can reveal what is really happening underneath.

Validation is a form of active listening that proves effective in a variety of situations. With this technique, we let the person know that we appreciate and respect their sharing. We acknowledge the value of talking and show our appreciation for being part of the sharing as well. For those whose cultures favor minimizing or even withholding difficult feelings, validation is essential, especially when sharing a painful memory or an angry feeling. We can acknowledge their effort by saying, "I know this is difficult for you and I'm glad we're talking about it." Validation is helpful in situations where disclosure is not customary for the speaker, but the person nevertheless has a desire to break through his or her own cultural or individual reticence. In our diversity work, when we ask people to share stories about times they have witnessed or experienced prejudice, we often use validation to support them through the painful moment and help them continue.

I remember one of those moments, when I was conducting a training in the Iñupiat village of Barrow, Alaska. The participant was talking about his experience of prejudice in front of the group. Visibly overwhelmed with grief, Bill made frequent pauses until he finally dropped the microphone and became silent. It was clear to me that part of him wanted to let the hurt out and another part felt very uncomfortable doing that in front of two hundred people. Bill would have probably felt more comfortable doing this sharing in an intimate space, perhaps sitting around a fire at home. He said the words

“I can’t go on” and the room stood still. No one moved or spoke for what seemed like a long time. Then one of the Native Alaskan women, a village elder, stood up and said, “You’ve got to go on with this story. It must be told. It’s our story.” One by one, others stood up to validate his experience in this way. Bill picked up the microphone and through his tears managed to finish his story. In so doing, just as he himself had been validated by the group, he also validated many other Iñupiat people in the room.

Finally, another way to actively listen is to *summarize*—to voice the main ideas or themes the speaker expresses in order to review them as well as to acknowledge that we have heard everything that was said. It is helpful to summarize when we have little time available to let the person know we are listening. A child may come home from school and start to unwind by telling a string of stories about his or her day, and a parent might say, “So you’ve had a really full day today, and spent lots of time with your friends.” Summarizing is also useful in situations when we are in the role of third-party intermediary and two disputants are almost to the point of being able to talk to each other directly. Summarizing helps the dialogue continue and assures reiteration of the main thoughts and feelings.

As we teach active listening to people from a variety of cultural perspectives, we discover that, depending on our backgrounds, some of us have had a great deal of practice in listening whereas others have had less opportunity to develop good listening habits. I grew up in a family where a minimum of two people were always speaking at the same time. I’m not certain how much active listening actually went on; in the rare moments when there were a few seconds of silence at the dinner table, we assumed that the persons speaking had simply forgotten what they were about to say. This differs greatly from the experience of people whose cultures honor the value of silence and consequently give the speaker the opportunity to reach a deeper level of response. A Hebrew sage once said, “The beginning of wisdom is silence.” The next stage is listening.

Eye contact is another case in point. Establishing eye contact means dif-

ferent things in different cultures. For some of us, eye contact is a sign of disrespect; for others it is connected to feelings of intimacy and reserved for showing deep affection. For some, eye contact is important as a means of picking up deeper cues to what the other person is thinking and feeling. However, although our cultural and personal norms about eye contact differ, most of us would agree that active listening suffers when we glance around the room when another person is speaking. This is why, in teaching people to actively listen, we ask them to *focus* on the speaker. There are many ways in which our body language lets someone know when we are giving them our undivided attention, including gestures and postures as well as eye contact behavior.

Thus, again, in practicing any of these skills, it is important to realize that we may need a bridge from our cultural pattern to someone else’s in order to improve communication.

We also have to keep questioning our assumptions at all times. Most of us would agree that body language plays a key role in active listening, that our body language needs to be open and receptive. But how close or how far away from someone must we be to show receptivity? Once again, this varies from culture to culture, and there are individualities within each cultural group as well. When we as listeners get too close or too far away, we may cause anxiety on the part of the speaker. Since we are attempting to be in another person’s shoes when we actively listen, we must sometimes cross over to what feels comfortable for them, not us. In doing RCCP training in Barrow, I began to slow the rhythm of my speech to match the rhythm I was experiencing around me. My co-trainer began to think I was losing my train of thought. Instead, I was shifting to a pace that enhanced silence and, in this case, also encouraged more dialogue.

Active listening is one of the most powerful skills we teach. Learning to do it well gives us a variety of options for communicating and resolving conflict. The following are examples of instances when active listening can be a valuable tool:

- > To improve the quality of a conversation, especially when the discussion is a sensitive one
- > When someone needs help in expressing his or her feelings, and welcomes someone's help in problem solving
- > When a strong emotion—whether painful or joyful—is present and the person needs acknowledgment
- > When you disagree strongly with someone and feel that you are about to begin arguing and criticizing
- > To check accuracy before you act on something you've heard

Active listening is not just behavior. When we decide to listen empathically, we choose to engage our own feelings. It is not enough to learn all the techniques and put them to practice. We must *become* those techniques. It is the intent to have our hearts fully present, to engage ourselves in the other person's feelings, that makes actively listening an act of compassion. The technique then becomes a gift we can offer others, a powerful, effective way to transform a difficult situation.

Using I-Messages

Just as conflict is a natural part of life, so are anger and a host of other feelings. Our emotions can signal that something isn't quite right in a relationship, alert us to the presence of a problem that needs to be addressed. All emotions have the potential of enhancing personal awareness, deepening relationships, and aiding us in resolving conflict.

The feeling we normally associate with conflict is anger. Anger often drives us to aggression, either verbal or physical. Even so, we can develop

interpersonal and communication skills to express our anger and other strong feelings in beneficial, nonaggressive ways.

We first need to develop the ability to identify our anger. Sometimes our bodies give us cues: rapid breathing, racing pulse, rising voice pitch. It is also important to become aware of the kinds of behaviors and situations that trigger our anger. Finally, we need to think about which behaviors can lower the intensity of the angry feelings. We may need to remember to breathe deeply, count backwards, think about the consequences of our anger should it get out of control.

Once we have this level of introspection in place, it is useful to have concrete techniques to help express what we need and want in ways that keep communication open and receptive. I-statements, or I-messages, are one way to do that. When strong feelings surface in a conflict, we frequently use "You-messages" instead. You-messages accuse, blame, judge, and belittle: "You're always doing that." "You're so irresponsible!" You-messages tend to generalize, make demands, or bring up past grievances, thereby shutting down communication. You-messages are aggressive. I-messages, on the other hand, are assertive. Social scientist Virginia Satir estimates that less than 5 percent of the population can be expected to communicate assertively.¹⁰ We either can't say what we want to say or we say it with a conscious or unconscious motive to hurt the other. Using I-messages allows us to state our needs and feelings and send a clear message to the receiver. This doesn't guarantee a positive response, but it does keep our own integrity intact.

An I-message generally has three parts to it, sometimes four: *I feel* (state the emotion) *when you* (state the other person's specific behavior) *because* (state the effect the behavior has on you), *and I would like* (state what you would like to have happen—something doable).

The I-message formula has appeared in numerous training programs, books, and articles over the last thirty years. Most of us in the field don't even know to whom we should give credit for the concept because it has become so widely used, but a few years ago, Janet and I enjoyed meeting

Thomas Gordon, whose effectiveness training courses for parents, teachers, and leaders are taught throughout the world. Tom shared with us how he first coined the term:

I had taught the first three or four classes of my Parent Effectiveness Training [P.E.T.] course in Pasadena, California, in 1962. One night after class, I shared with my wife that the course taught parents the value of empathic listening [active listening] when their children encountered problems in their lives, but that parents also needed to know what to do when children's behavior caused them problems. How can we help parents get their children to listen to them and change their behavior?

Before I knew it, I took a napkin and wrote the word "you," the pronoun I typically used as a professional counselor trying to help my clients to "own" their problems, as in "You are really feeling angry" or "You don't know what to do." Then I drew a vertical line down the napkin and on the right side I wrote, "I have a problem." That's when it really dawned on me that when a child has a problem, parents should use a You-message, as in "You're upset," but when a child's behavior causes the parent a problem, the message should logically begin with an "I," as in "I can't hear on the phone when the TV is on so loud." So I-messages were invented that cold night on a white napkin, and were soon added to the P.E.T. course.

I-messages are one of the most difficult techniques to add to our repertoire. We all lack experience in talking this way and require a lot of practice before it becomes natural.

Let's take the formula one step at a time. Our first task is to say how we feel about the effect the other person's behavior is having on us: "I feel . . ." Those of us who tend to withhold negative emotions or feel that confrontation should be discouraged are faced with a challenge right from the start. Moreover, it takes a lot of awareness to determine what we are feeling: we may be expressing anger when really we are frightened. Asking ourselves what the "first feeling" was when we experienced a specific behavior helps.

If we don't have a wide range of words for feelings in our vocabulary, then it may be difficult to communicate the emotion clearly: when we say we're angry, do we mean mildly irritated or completely furious? In some cases, we use words that are heavily charged: "I feel taken advantage of," "I feel abused or ignored." It is best to use words that are less judgmental.

The disclosure of feelings carries different "baggage" for each of us. Some people grow up in homes where they receive messages that only some feelings are okay ("If you have nothing good to say, then don't say it at all"), or that emotion itself is dangerous ("You're making my blood pressure go up"). If we cannot own our feelings, we tend to blame others for our reactions. Eleanor Roosevelt reminds us, however, that "no one can make you feel inferior without your consent." When I send an I-message, I take responsibility for my actions.

An I-message is ideally an act of love and concern, an act of communication, not manipulation. I've heard many adults and young people say, "My mother (father) never told me she (he) loved me or was proud of me." No wonder many of us have difficulty in practicing gut-level communication. Repressed emotion may be an important variable connected to illness. As Thomas Delbanco, director of the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, says, "When someone's belly hurts, I ask very quickly what's going on in the mind as well as in the abdomen. When someone is depressed, I think also about what might be going on in the body that's leading to the depression. Mind and body are inextricably woven together."¹¹

The next part of the formula, "when you . . . ," can also be tricky. It is important to express this part in clear, specific terms. The tendency is to add judgment to the description and to be vague. An example would be, "I feel angry when you ignore the school rules," as compared to the more precise statement "I feel angry when you arrive late to school three times a week." Another tendency we have is to go beyond reporting specific behavior to make inferences about another person's personality or motives: "I was upset when you left the party early because you were bored" or "I was upset when

you left the party just because your friends weren't there." One way to think about whether you have actually described the other person's behavior objectively is to ask yourself, Is this behavior observable? Do I really know why she left the party? A common mistake is to use words which are global and absolute—"always," "never," "every time." Instead of telling someone that they are often late we tend to say "You're never on time." Another roadblock to delivering a clear, descriptive statement about someone else's behavior is to say something about their character or worth. For instance, when you feel a person is endorsing a stereotype and you respond by calling him or her a racist or a sexist.

The final part of delivering an I-message requires that we let the other person know the effect their behavior has had on us. Again, describing this only in tangible and observable ways is helpful. Rather than saying, for instance, "I feel nervous when you call me at work and talk a long time because you think that I'm not listening," one might simply say, "I feel nervous when you call me at work and talk for a long time, because then I can't get my work done on time."

A fourth element is becoming widespread in the use of I-messages—telling the person what you would like to see happen, as in "I feel frustrated when you don't let me know until Thursday that I have to work on a Saturday because I can't plan my weekend, *and I would appreciate knowing at least one week in advance.*" When I asked Tom Gordon what he thought about adding this fourth component to the standard for I-messages, he said, "I like to leave it up to the higher side of the person to come forth without asking. It almost seems like a demand." So you'll see I-messages presented in two ways, with or without this final ingredient.

As is true for all conflict resolution skills, culture and family communication patterns influence one's comfort level in using I-messages, and societal context dictates how safe or appropriate it is to be either assertive or nonassertive in a given situation. In families and communities that are hierarchical, where engaging in free-flowing discussions and expressing opinions is discouraged, delivering a straightforward I-message would be considered

disrespectful. The level of expression around the emotions is influenced by both gender and cultural norms, and differences in culturally appropriate ways to express feelings should not be confused with either a lack of emotion or too much emotion.

An important consideration in teaching young people about I-messages is to become aware of the context in which a young person operates—his or her ethnicity, race, culture, and gender. Children of color, who live with racial oppression every day, have many opportunities to deliver I-messages, but they have to deliver them in a society that still supports their oppression. A young boy named Troy described it this way: "Do you know how it feels to have people cross the street to get away from you? To have a security guard follow you around the store? To have women clutch their purses to their chests when they see you? Well, that's how it is to be black." Who in our society will support Troy's message if he has the courage to deliver it?

Gender plays an important part in delivering I-messages as well. Assertiveness and aggression are culturally condoned for boys in our society, while girls are encouraged to be submissive. All this must be taken into consideration.

Robert Bolton, author of *People Skills*, makes an important point: "Virtually all creatures defend their space using a variety of tactics which fall into one of two basic categories—fight or flight. Only humans have a third option—verbal assertion."¹² I feel it is useful to teach young people and adults how to use I-messages, but until we all share power equally in this society, these messages will be riskier for some of us to deliver than for others.

Mediation

There are times when we are neither perpetrators nor victims in a conflict, but rather bystanders. Bystanders can become active participants in solving conflict when they have the skills to intervene. An intervention by an adult in a conflict involving young people often means that the adult will exercise power or authority, controlling both the situation and the outcome. But a

different method of intervention exists—one through which a neutral third party helps create an environment where the disputants themselves can find a mutually acceptable solution. This is the method of mediation.

★ Mediation is similar to arbitration, but differs in that an arbitrator listens to both parties and solves the problem by offering a solution, while in mediation the power for solving the problem lies with the disputants themselves—the mediator simply uses his or her skills to facilitate problem-solving between them.

Mediation has been used in a variety of settings to help settle conflicts. One of its first uses in the United States was as an alternative to court proceedings. At first, community disputes involving minor complaints were settled in a less official way through mediation; today the skill of mediation is helpful in divorce and child custody cases, and in disputes between employers and employees, and between labor and management. Recently it has become a valued practice in schools.

A person trained in mediation can be a neutral, third-party intermediary in informal settings such as public places, family gatherings, and classrooms. The skill of mediation can also be used formally, as in community mediation efforts between a landlord and a tenant. The mediation process can also be formalized in schools where peer mediation programs are in place.

★ Mediation is the conflict resolution skill of effective communication and problem-solving. It is based on openness and honesty, attempting to equalize power between two parties. Mediation is a cooperative future-oriented process based on nonthreatening, nonpunitive solutions. Mediators seek win-win solutions and are willing to deal with underlying issues and emotions. They maintain neutrality and confidentiality, using the skill of active listening to create trust and separate the disputants from the problem.

Mediators make decisions for neither party. Self-awareness on the part of the mediator is important, as he or she must maintain neutrality and treat both parties without bias. Mediators are skilled at using neutral language, remembering that suggestions and judgments are not objective; they are

trained to catch themselves before saying things like “One of you is lying” or “The best thing you could do here is to avoid each other.” Skillful mediators use open-ended questioning to help the disputants clarify and problem-solve. They tend to not ask questions that lead to one-word or yes-no responses, asking “What happened?” rather than “Did you push into him?” or “Are you sorry for doing that?” A skillful mediator delves into the interests and needs of both parties and helps separate those interests and needs from their positions. Each person’s perspective is given attention.

The main task of a mediator is to help both parties approach the conflict in a new way, to shift their perceptions as they better understand, communicate, and trust one another in the hope that this understanding and trust will eventually lead them to a solution they can both agree upon. The steps of mediation follow a similar process regardless of the length or formality of the intervention. The process usually comprises the following components:

- [1] *Setting the Stage: The mediator introduces him or herself as a third-party intermediary. The disputants agree to try to solve the problem with the mediator’s help. Ground rules are also shared and agreed upon: the disputants will avoid violence, physical or verbal; speak directly to the mediator; let each other finish speaking without interruption; and maintain confidentiality.*
- [2] *Getting the Stories Out: The disputants discuss what happened and how they felt, while the mediator reflects and restates what they have said. The mediator summarizes the whole story, including key facts and feelings, before the mediation proceeds.*
- [3] *Brainstorming Solutions: The mediator moves back and forth between the two disputants, helping them both focus in on the question, What can you do here and now to help solve the problem? Active listening on the part of the mediator continues as he or she restates ideas and potential solutions.*
- [4] *Resolution: At this final stage, the mediator helps the disputants reach a solution that works for both, repeating the solution in all*

its parts. The disputants are asked individually whether they are in agreement with the solution. They are also asked what they might do differently if a similar situation comes up again. The mediator continues to restate their comments and finally congratulates them on a successful mediation.

Seeking the help of a third party to mediate feels more natural to some of us than to others. Using mediation or having designated mediators feels especially familiar for people from backgrounds where open confrontation is discouraged and seeking the counsel of a person in a position of authority is the norm. For others, a third-party intervention may seem cowardly. Some may feel that it is easier to just think aloud, express gut feelings openly, and try to resolve a conflict as soon as it emerges; mediation, which entails scheduling time to meet about the conflict, may be perceived as artificial. Some of us feel very comfortable using traditional, tried and true procedures; we welcome solid, consistent intervention by an authority figure. For some of us, sharing our inner feelings is reserved for family members and school mediation is not an option unless the school environment feels familial.

Mediation is acknowledged in many cultures, even honored as a process. In Buddhist monasteries, practices have been in place for the last two thousand years to settle disputes with the help of a third party—in this case the entire community. Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen master and author, describes the technique:

In a convocation of the whole Sangha community, everyone sits together with the willingness to help. The two conflicting monks are present and sit face to face knowing that everyone expects them to make peace. People refrain from listening to stories outside the assembly. Everything must be said in public, in the community. Both monks try to remember the whole history of the conflict, every detail, as the whole assembly just sits patiently and listens. Everyone expects the two monks to try their best for reconciliation. The outcome is not important. The fact that each monk is trying his best to

show his willingness for reconciliation is most important. The next step is "covering mud with straw." One respected monk is appointed to represent each side of the conflict. These two monks address the assembly saying something about each monk that will cause the other monk to understand better and de-escalate his anger or resistance—covering their mud with straw. The next stage is voluntary confession. Each monk reveals his own shortcomings without waiting for others to say them. Finally there is decision by consensus in accepting the verdict. It is agreed in advance that the two monks will accept whatever verdict is pronounced by the whole assembly. After exploring every detail of the conflict, a committee presents a verdict. It is announced three times. If the community remains silent that means "okay." This is the end of the session and the monks abide by the decision.¹³

Buddhist monks and nuns have been practicing this form of mediation for thousands of years in India, China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, and many other countries.

Africa also gives us examples of dispute resolution being completely interwoven into the community. Nicole, an RCCP teacher, told us of one method of mediation which was a natural part of the regional culture among the Dogan people in Mali. In every village she visited in the area, she came across a low platform that triggered her curiosity. When she asked about their use, she was told that these were places to reconcile conflicts. When two people in a village had a dispute, the tribal elders would bring them to the platform and they would sit beneath it until the conflict was resolved. The platforms are built low so that disputants are not able to stand up and engage in physical fighting. The elders serve as mediators and apparently perform their task nonverbally. To Nicole, the spaces under the platforms resembled quiet, private mediation rooms—sacred places that hold a history of peaceful solutions in their very structure.

Native American conflict resolution practices have found their way into mediation circles everywhere. Indeed, they are probably at the root of many

commonly used mediation processes in this country. The native people of Hawaii, for instance, have an ancient family problem-solving process called *ho'oponopono* (to set right), in which a *kupuna* (elder) or another respected person who is not involved in the issues at hand serves as *haku* (facilitator). The *haku* becomes a vital element in facilitation and in setting the tone of *aloha* or love and affection which is at the center of the *ho'oponopono*. There are five conditions that must be understood and agreed upon by each participant before the *ho'oponopono* can begin:

- > Each individual in the *'ohana* (family) must share a common commitment to be a part of the problem-solving process.
- > All words and deeds that are part of *ho'oponopono* will be shared in an atmosphere of *'oia i'o* (the essence of truth).
- > The *o'hana* must share a common sense of *aloha* for one another or be committed to reinstating that spirit.
- > Everything that is said in a *ho'oponopono* is done in confidence and will not be repeated when the session is complete.
- > The *haku* must be commonly agreed on as a fair and impartial channel through which the *ho'oponopono* is done.¹⁴

The *ho'oponopono* is a complicated process consisting of several phases. Because it has so much to offer as a model, we feel it's worth describing in some detail. The initial phase, *kukulu kumuhana*, consists of clearly identifying the family's general problem and outlining the procedures for the whole process for the benefit of all participants. This phase also involves the pooling of emotional and spiritual forces through prayer. The *mabiki*, or discussion phase, is the time when the family talks about what has happened. Each person talks with the *haku*, one by one, about the incident, taking into

account each person's feelings and reactions to the specific issue. In the *mabiki*, only one issue relating to the general problem is dealt with at a time. Everyone is given a chance to speak, and the discussion of the problem is led by the leader, who functions as an intermediary, keeping individuals from directly confronting one another. The problem is unraveled layer by layer to enable family members to see how a network of negative entanglements called *hibia* has bound members together in a distressing relationship and caused the problem. Family members see how the initial act of wrongdoing, the *hala*, caused a chain reaction of compounded hurts and angers that led to larger misunderstandings.

When the discussion is complete, the resolution or forgiveness phase, called *mibi*, takes place. This is a time of confession, repentance, and forgiving. It is expected that forgiveness be *'oia i'o* (true, sincere), and that it be given whenever asked. If restitution is necessary, the family arranges it and agrees upon the terms.

In the closing or final phase of the *ho'oponopono*, the leader summarizes what has taken place. He or she also reaffirms the family's strength and enduring bonds. As a final step, the family has a closing ritual or *pani*. Traditionally, *pani* involved food offerings to the *'aumakua*, or family guardian spirits, followed by feasting. Today, the *pani* frequently consists of the sharing of a snack or a meal together.

This ancient process has much to teach us today, and we are grateful to Native Hawaiian educator Manu Aluli Meyer for documenting this tradition.

Finally, of course, mediation has also been welcomed as a tool in schools throughout America. In many of our schools, educators are working in many different ways to create a culture which finds room for mediation as a way of resolving conflict. As we shall see in chapters 6 and 7, children from many backgrounds are benefiting from this effort.

Gandhi wrote, "My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your sur-

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roundings and by and by might oversweep the world.” Our goal is to encourage those trained in conflict resolution to make these skills a way of life, to make a decision to be nonviolent. By decision I mean an act that doesn’t have to be revisited every time one has a choice. When both my parents gave up smoking within the same week, they struggled with this change until about a month later, when they each made the *decision* to never smoke again. From then on they no longer had to think about how they would act when cigarettes were available.

This is what we want the skills of win-win problem-solving, active listening, and I-messages to do—empower us to make the decision to be nonviolent. Thich Nhat Hanh put it succinctly in the title of his book, *Being Peace*.

It is the difference between simply practicing conflict resolution techniques and choosing to *live* nonviolence. We know we’ve internalized these skills when Gandhi’s words ring true to us: “Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being.”

How to Make Peace

The following pointers to remember in resolving a conflict nonviolently were formulated by Tom Roderick, executive director of Educators for Social Responsibility Metro.¹⁵ We at RCCP have found them invaluable.

- > *Slow down the action.* Many fights and arguments get out of control very fast. Before reacting, think. Remember the conflict escalator.
- > *Listen well.* Don’t interrupt. Hear the other person out. It helps to paraphrase or state in your own words what you hear the other person saying.
- > *Give the other person the benefit of the doubt.* In a conflict between two people, each person has feelings, each person has a point of view. You

may not agree with the other person, but try to understand where s/he is coming from. Ask open-ended questions to get information about how the other person sees things. Try to listen with an open mind. If you see that you have done something wrong, don’t hesitate to apologize.

- > *Acknowledge the other person’s feelings.* When people believe they’ve been listened to, they generally become less angry and more open to listening to what the other person has to say. Statements like “I can see you’re angry” or “You really feel strongly about this” tend to diffuse anger and open up communication.
- > *Be strong without being mean.* Express your needs and your point of view forcefully, without putting the other person down. Use I-messages to communicate how you are feeling rather than you-messages that put the blame on the other person. Name-calling, blaming, bossing, and threatening tend to block communication and escalate conflict.
- > *Try to see a conflict as a problem to be solved, rather than a contest to be won.* Attack the problem, not the other person. Try to get away from fighting over who’s right and who’s wrong. Ask instead: What do I need? What does the other person feel they need? Is there a way we can both get what we want?
- > *Set your sights on a win-win solution.* In a win-win solution, both parties get what they need and come away happy. This requires good listening on both sides and creative thinking. If a win-win solution is not possible, you may have to settle for a compromise, where each person gets something and each gives up something. A compromise is a lot better than violence.
- > *If you don’t seem to be getting anywhere in solving a conflict, ask for help.* Of course, you’ll need agreement from the other person that help

is needed and you'll have to agree on who the third party should be. But a third party can be helpful. Try to find someone who is a good listener. Tell the third party their role is to help the people in conflict talk with each other, not to take sides.

> Remember that conflict, handled well, can lead to personal growth and better relationships. Try to see the conflict as an opportunity. Working through the conflict with a friend can lead to greater closeness. Hearing other points of view can introduce us to new ideas and increase our understanding of ourselves and other people.

* > { The true heroes of today's world are not the Rambos. They are those men and women who have the courage and intelligence to deal with conflict in creative, nonviolent ways.

[4]

VALUING DIVERSITY: CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition. The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and people as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustice is a commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength. This fight begins, however, in the heart and it now had been laid to my charge to keep my own heart free of hatred and despair.

- James Baldwin -
Notes of a Native Son

Why Include Diversity Education in Conflict Resolution Programs?

IN THE PAST, PEOPLE in the fields of conflict resolution and emotional literacy have rarely attempted to integrate prejudice reduction and issues of equality and justice as part of their emphasis. But in our work we have found that one of the most pressing problems in schools and among youth in general is cultural and racial bias. From the start, our work in conflict resolution has been intertwined with diversity and anti-bias education. Our K-12 curriculum focuses as much on helping kids develop skills to confront prejudice as it does on teaching skills in conflict resolution, and we have found that conflict resolution skills are extremely useful for enabling students of different races and cultures to work through bias issues.