

Learning Objectives

- ✳ To recognise different types of conflict
- ✳ To explore different ways of dealing with conflict
- ✳ To practice assertiveness skills.

Total Time
45 mins
+15 mins
extension
activities

Teacher's Notes

This is the first of two lessons in citizenship on the theme of conflict. The focus here is on understanding conflict and responding assertively to it. This will prepare students for the next lesson which looks at personal and global conflict.

Ground rules: This lesson involves some discussion work, please read the ground rules statement out at the beginning of the lesson.

Resources

Optional: Examples of conflict from the newspapers to use as stimulus material.

Introduction and starter: Conflict experience

Ground rules: In this lesson we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by one of the topics that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the lesson, you can go to ... (please either give the contact person in the school, for example a school counsellor, or an outside number, for example Samaritans).

Explain: This lesson is about conflict. To start with work in pairs and make a list of times when you have experienced conflict second hand e.g. in the media, news reports on TV or in the papers, soap operas, films. Next think of times when they have experienced conflict first hand.

Take feedback: Highlight different types of conflict and make sure students have examples of each:

Internal conflict – arising out of making personal choices and leading to feelings of anxiety, confusion or indecisiveness.

Example: You're on a diet but you really want to eat the doughnut you see in the shop window.

Example: You know you're in an unhealthy relationship and you should break it off but you can't bear the thought of being alone.

External conflict – with other people, often family, friends and teachers and leading to feelings of anger, fear, jealousy and hurt.

Example: Fighting with your brother or sister.

Example: Bullying and aggression in schools.

Global conflict – involving different groups of people, cultures and societies and often caused because basic needs go unmet or interests and values are challenged.

Example: Civil unrest, war.

(Definitions taken from Lifetracks – Career Productions)

Time
15 mins



Responding to anger

The purpose of this activity is to understand the difference between passive, assertive and aggressive responses to anger.

Thought storm: How have you seen people respond to anger or conflict? List responses on the board in three columns.

- * Aggressive responses: shout, fight, gesture aggressively, make threats, throw things.
- * Passive responses: cower in fear, go along with whatever is said, give up.
- * Assertive response: choose to walk away, make your point calmly, agree to disagree.

Explain: We all respond to anger in different ways and it varies depending on the situation. What sort of people have to respond to situations of conflict assertively? Examples: police, telephone help lines, negotiators.

Time
10 mins



Assertiveness skills

The purpose of this exercise is for people to practice their assertiveness skills. Do this as a class as suggested or split students into groups of four where one reads the statement, and each of the others give either passive, aggressive or assertive responses.

Explain: An assertive response is where you treat the other people's needs as equal to your own. It shows respect for what they think whilst explaining what your view is. A technique for giving an assertive response is:

- * Say what happened
- * Say how it made you feel
- * Say what you would like to happen differently.

For example: When you said you were watching the football for the third day in a row, it made me feel rejected and unimportant. I would like to spend at least two days a week with you.

Explain: You are going to be split into four groups. I will read out a statement to which one group will give a passive response, one group an assertive response and the last group will give an aggressive response. Make sure your body language matches your response (n.b. for the aggressive group no shouting or swearing or violence!).

Statements

- * Your teacher says: You are late for the second time this week. You say your mum's car broke down but I don't believe you. You're on detention.
- * You are getting lunch from the canteen and you have asked for a bit of food because you have to play sport later. The dinner lady says you can't have any.
- * You have been preparing a birthday party for your boy/girlfriend. To keep it a secret it has meant lying to them about where you've been. They have become suspicious about it and accuse you of cheating.

Discuss: How did it feel doing this exercise? What was the most difficult type of response to give?

Reflect: It can be really difficult to know what to do when someone is being aggressive towards you. It is easy to get angry yourself but if you can keep calm and assertive it is more likely the situation will not escalate and you may be able to resolve the problem.

Time
10 mins



Optional Extension Activities

Understanding anger

The purpose of this exercise is to give students an understanding of what anger is and to help students to become more self aware of their own anger reactions.

Hands up: Who gets angry a lot? A little? Never? Why do people get angry?

Ask: Write down these 3 questions and answer them yourself. You do not need to share these with other people if you don't want to.

- * What makes you really angry
- * What calms you down?
- * Give an example of a time where the way you coped with the situation was destructive
- * Give an example of a time where the way you coped was constructive.

Take feedback: Invite students to share examples from their sheets but don't force people who don't want to disclose this information.

Reflect: It is important to be aware of what makes us angry and to think about ways of dealing with this.

Read out: Anger originates in the amygdala, the so-called emotional part of your brain. As you become angry your body's muscles tense up. Inside your brain, neurotransmitter chemicals known as catecholamines are released causing you to experience a burst of energy lasting up to several minutes. At the same time your heart rate accelerates, your blood pressure rises, and your rate of breathing increases. Your face may flush as increased blood flow enters your limbs and extremities in preparation for physical action. Your attention narrows and becomes locked onto the target of your anger. Soon you can pay attention to nothing else. You're now ready to fight.

Anger can significantly decrease your ability to concentrate. This is why it is difficult to remember details of really explosive arguments.

The prefrontal cortex of your brain, which is located just behind your forehead, can keep your emotions in proportion. It handles judgment and uses thoughts to keep emotions under control. Among the many ways to make this happen are relaxation techniques (which reduce your arousal and decrease your amygdala activity) and the use of cognitive control techniques which help you practice using your judgment to override your emotional reactions.

It is difficult to relax from an angry state. The adrenaline-caused arousal that occurs during anger lasts a very long time (many hours, sometimes days), and lowers our anger threshold, making it easier for us to get angry again later on. Though we do calm down, it takes a very long time for us to return to our resting state.

(Text adapted from MentalHelp.Net)

OR

Statement to school councils

Explain: In groups of 4 or 5 prepare a statement for the school council on how to tackle conflict in the school. Think about what types of conflict you have seen, who is affected by it and what you think should be done.

Take feedback: Ask what students came up with. Make sure someone feeds this back to the school.

15 mins
each
activity



OR

Time
10 mins



Summary

Ask students what they have learned this lesson. Summarise:

- * Conflict can be personal, external or global
- * Responses can be passive, aggressive or assertive
- * Calm and assertive behaviour can help to reach an agreed compromise.

Ensure that they know where to go for help either in school or out of school if they want to talk further about any issues raised.

Time
5 mins

