

Resolving Conflicts

Objectives:

- To learn the mediation process for resolving conflict.
- To learn the courts' role of resolving conflicts peacefully.

Grade Level: K - 3

Activity Format: Role play, classroom discussion.

Materials: None.



So, why are we here today?

- The Judicial Branch is one-third of our government in Minnesota. In courtrooms, judges help people resolve their disagreements peacefully. There are several ways of resolving arguments.
- Today, some of you are going to learn one way.
- But first, how many of you like to play on the playground? Have any of you had any problems on the playground? *[Elicit several responses.]*
- When you have problems, how do you solve them? *[Listen to several responses.]*
- I am going to share with you a special way to solve problems. It's called mediation. *[Write the word "mediation" on the board.]*
- A lot of people solve their problems this way with the help of a third person. Sometimes that third person is a judge.

The four steps of resolving conflict

- There are four steps we follow when we resolve a conflict with mediation:
 - The first is the introduction. Can everyone pretend to shake hands to show this step? This is when we try to make everyone feel at ease. Remember, the mediator does not make the decisions. The mediator only helps the people with a problem agree on their own solution.
 - The next step is telling the story. We can show this step by making talking gestures with our hands. *[Make talking gestures with your hand, as if it were a puppet.]* Everyone gets to tell their side of the story without interruptions from others.
 - The third step is brainstorming solutions. Everyone touch your head to show this step, which is when we come up with ideas of how to solve the problem.
 - And the final step is reaching an agreement. We show this by giving a "high five" sign.
- So let's review the steps: The introduction *[hand shake gesture]*, telling the story *[talking gesture]*, brainstorming solutions *[touch your head]*, and reaching an agreement *[high five sign]*.
- Let's go back to the playground...

Tell the playground story

- Two children were playing catch on the playground at recess. Pretty soon another child came along and asked to play. The two children said, "No! We don't want to play with you." The little child who was left out cried and cried.
- Could this situation ever happen on your playground?
- How do you think the children felt?
- Was this a good thing to happen?
- We're now going to see if mediation will help these children.
- I'm going to need three volunteers to help me.

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- *[Ask the students to act out the playground scene as you read it again. When the two children reject the third child, step in as the mediator and coach the children through the mediation process as described below.]*

Role play the playground mediation

- Two children were playing catch on the playground at recess. Pretty soon another child came along and asked to play. The two children said, “No! We don’t want to play with you.” The little child who was left out cried and cried.
- Ok, so we start with the first step: the introduction [*hand shake gesture*].
- [*To student volunteers*]: Hello, my name is Judge _____. What are your names? It seems like you have a problem here. Would you like me to help?
- [*To class*]: What’s the next step? Telling the story [*talking gesture*]. I’d like each person to tell his/her side of the story without anyone else interrupting. Everyone will get an equal chance. [*Allow students to tell their story.*]
- Next, we brainstorm solutions [*touch head*]. Can anyone give me an idea about how to solve the conflict? [*Suggested questions are: “What would have to happen for you to feel better about this? How could we solve this problem?”*]
- And the final step? Reach an agreement [*high five sign*]. [*Help the students find a compromise to resolve the dispute.*]
- [*Invite other volunteers to role play the steps in the mediation process. Keep coaching. Ask the other children to help you coach each group through the process. Repeat several times, until you feel confident the children understand the process.*]

Options

- Discuss the difference between the mediation process and the court process.
- Discuss other ways in which people can resolve disputes.

Q&A

- Invite students and teachers to visit the court system’s web site at www.mncourts.gov.