

**LSA:** The term “conferencing” is not significantly different than the term “mediation” in terms of process. There is much confusion simply because of the different terms being used for a process that remains, at the heart, much the same. The original term used for the first program was, as I mentioned earlier, VORP (Victim Offender Reconciliation), which

victims in particular found to be troubling given the connotations of the term "reconciliation". Many programs began using "mediation" as a substitute but some programs still felt uncomfortable because of the connotations associated with it (negotiation, dispute) which are terms not used in VOM. There was then the introduction to the term "conferencing" through the New

Zealand model of Family Group Conferencing whereby more people are involved in the restorative justice process of bringing together victims, offenders and members of their respective community.

**SG:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**LSA:** The issue of training is one

(Amstutz *continued on page five*)

## How Can I Follow My Own Advice?

*By PMC Training Coordinator Ellen DeBenedetti*

I teach people to be mediators. I hold workshops on how to manage conflict. I believe that how we handle conflict isn't a 9 to 5 job, it's 24-7. I tell people, weekly, that conflict can transform, that they should look for opportunities in difficult situations. During workshops I think, “Hey, this is pretty good advice.” THEN I go home or to the office and someone pushes MY buttons. I think I'm right and they're wrong...and...I know I don't have time to deal with this now.

When I'm at my worst, I hear words coming out of my mouth that I know are making things worse and I can't stop myself. When I'm at my best, I think before I speak. When I was asked to write this article, I had to sit down and think about what I really do. How do I put the principles of conflict resolution into practice in my life?

Nothing works all of the time. In considering how to respond, I ask myself some questions. Sometimes I have time to mull these over. Sometimes I'm thinking on my feet.

1) What is my relationship to the other person? I am much more quick to confront my husband or children about a conflict than I am with my co-workers. As my daughter says, “I can get mad at you because I know you will still love me.” 2) How important is this problem to me? Do I need something right away? Is it a nagging problem that passes my “I can't sleep at night” test? Is resolving this conflict key to my relationship to the other person? 3) What are the consequences of not resolving the conflict? Will I be better or worse off for taking the time to resolve the conflict? 4) Is someone confronting me? Do I need to respond because they are confronting me with the problem and it is important to them? Will they just keep at it until we work it out?

I thought long and hard about what I actually do when I'm at my best. I interviewed my children to keep me honest. If I only had one piece of advice, it would be *listen, listen, listen*. Here's my whole list.

- **Listen more than I talk.**  
If you don't understand how the other person sees the problem, there is no way to resolve it.
- **Use active listening.**  
I need to know if I understand, and the other person needs to know that I understand.
- **Validate the other person's feelings and concerns.**  
If I don't really care then I shouldn't be there.
- **Be calm and patient.**  
Resolving conflict takes time and yelling will probably make it take longer.
- **Respect the other person's need to cool off and reflect.**  
If they say “not now”, it's probably a bad time to talk. Sometimes I try later and sometimes I leave them a note to get back *(continued on page four)*

*(Advice continued from page three)*  
to me when they are ready.

**Figure out what is important to me.**

It takes time to figure out what I really need and it's hard sometimes to separate that from what I think I want.

**Talk directly to the other person.** I may run some ideas by a third party, but I won't use them to send messages.

**State my feelings and needs.** I need to let people know why

the issue is a problem for me, not what they did wrong or what is wrong with them.

**Work together to solve the problem.**

Ask how they think we can work this out. Focus on their needs and my needs. I can push my pet solution and get resistance or ask and get some good ideas.

• **Make sure we are on the same page about the solution.**

If we have invested this much time, we might as well take one more minute to be sure we all

know what to do next. It's better than starting all over again.

Even on my best days I can't take my own advice all of the time. Hopefully, I can take my mistakes and learn from them. Often when I am in a conflict, I learn about resolution from the other person. I spend time considering and reconsidering my responses in light of what I have learned from the responses of others. I wanted to end this article with some words of wisdom. The best I can do is—*listen, listen, listen.*



*(Littleton continued from page one)*

It is the persistent reluctance to involve young people in the conversation about school violence. Instead, we adults have taken charge. We scurry all over the place trying to find the perfect piece of legislation to limit gun sales to minors without abridging the second amendment rights of adults or the best school security system. We try and solve a problem through the lens of our own point of view without ever asking the other party, in this case youth, how they see it.

Every day, after the Littleton shooting, I kept waiting to hear a call for town meetings with youth. What I really wanted was for every school in the country to dispense with classes for one day and instead bring more adults into the school to listen to the students

talk about whatever was on their minds. I hoped that the students would feel safe enough to open up a conversation that went well beyond the limited thinking of the adults and that somehow the adults would have the heart to listen. We can't have forgotten that we once had the same fears and suffered the same humiliations as many of our kids.

Through our conflict resolution and mediation programs with the schools, we have found that the only way these programs succeed is when the whole school community buys in. It isn't enough to focus on "fixing the kids". Adults have to change as well which is a much more difficult and scary proposition.

I have often stood in front of training groups and said, "This is not an information dump from my

head to yours. Learning conflict resolution skills and integrating them into your life is about changing the way we as individuals operate in the world." The teachers and parents who have taken our conflict resolution training to heart have found that changing themselves to be better listeners and problem solvers had a profound effect on their classrooms and their families. It is not a quick fix solution but a moment-to-moment daily practice that after much work and soul searching bears fruit.

So in contemplating Littleton and Kosovo and the many snippets of violence that find their way in to the pages of our newspapers and onto the screens of our TVs, I ask you to ask yourself my new daily question--what can I do to have less Littleton and less Kosovo in the world that I touch every day?

