

Imbedding conflict resolution in the culture of the community

by Kathy Broad,
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I first became involved in developing a conflict resolution program when I was vice-principal of Lucknow Central Public School (Ontario). As a staff, we felt that there was too much conflict and aggression on our yard, and that we wanted it to be dealt with in more positive ways. For about two years, we read and researched. Out of that emerged STAR Power, a program that is still very dear to my heart.

We found the STAR acronym (Stop, Think, Act, Review, and added Power). We had a one-week kick-off, which included a skit with "Rats" and "Stars." We had T-shirts and mascots. Later we offered The Network's play, *Caught In The Middle*, to further educate our students.

Our school had approximately 350 kids from K-8, and drew from a rural community. One of the areas where we worked hard was how to get the same message out to parents. Early on, we realized that we were dealing with quite a difference between what we were trying to teach our students about conflict responses, and what they were experiencing outside of school.

We quickly realized that information that we were sending home was not having an impact. We had more success by putting information about STAR Power in each report card. In each marking period, we emphasized a different part of the program. Most successful were the skits we developed for the Open House in September. By focusing on a family conflict, like TV watching or completing chores, we were able to show the parents how the skills might be helpful for them in their families. We also offered parenting workshops with the health unit, and that was another way to reach our parents.

STAR Power was very successful. After our first year, we were given a \$1200 award from what was then the Federation of Women Teachers. We used the money to buy curriculum from Peaceworks, so that teachers could have

it in their classrooms. Even more important, although half of the original staff are no longer there, the program continues to be strong and effective. It's imbedded in the culture of the community.

We introduced Peer Mediators in the 3rd year of the initiative. The mediation program was most successful with grade 5 and 6 students when they were trained by their own teacher, parents and staff.

I've been principal of Elgin Market School in Kincardine for five years. We were a JK-8 school, but now are JK-4. I spent my first year just getting my feet wet, and I've gone on to work with the staff to develop responses to conflict. We draw heavily from the Peaceworks material. Every classroom has material and "I Care" Cats.

We've worked some at bullying issues. We used *Bullyproofing Your School* (Carla Garrity and others, Sopris West, 1994) but did not develop the comprehensive program that they recommend. We worked with the bullies to help them develop better social and friendship skills, and with victims to change their self-talk and become more assertive.

Most challenging for me has been working with intermediate students, particularly girls. If they haven't acquired those skills by the time they're in Grades 6-8, it's a very difficult time to try to teach them. I'd be very happy for suggestions from others about what has worked for them.

I really believe in prevention, and am so pleased with how sophisticated our young students have become. In everybody's vocabulary now, I hear students identifying problems, and being assertive problem-solvers. I believe we are impacting kids for life and that they will be healthier, happier adults. These are skills they take with them everywhere they go.

I, too, have been changed. I now have a much more positive approach to addressing conflicts actively and promptly; I've developed much more of a problem-solving response. I continue to have plenty of opportunities to

practice STAR Power and other conflict resolution techniques in my personal life as well. Although I am not perfect, I know that these tools have made a big difference in me.

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