

Leadership Curriculum

Lesson 4

Conflict Resolution

Lesson Overview:

Students will continue the Leadership Curriculum by completing the following steps:

- 1) exploring ways to resolve conflicts
- 2) engaging in role plays to practice resolving conflicts

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Leadership

Lesson 4 – Conflict Resolution

Lesson Overview:

In this lesson students will hone their STEM leadership skills by exploring and practicing productive ways to resolve a conflict in the classroom or workplace.

Time Frame:

1–2 hours, including time for students to work independently

Core Concepts:

- Resolving conflicts is an important leadership skill.
- There are good and bad ways to resolve a conflict.
- Conflicts can be productive.

Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Continue to develop STEM leadership skills, specifically as they relate to conflict resolution.
- Explore productive vs. unproductive ways to address a conflict.
- Work with teacher and peers to practice resolving conflicts.

Materials Needed:

- [Conflict Resolution slideshow](#)
- Conflict Resolution Role Play worksheet

Step 1: Introduce the Lesson

Explain that as STEM students and future STEM professionals, students will often find themselves working with partners and teams. And as students likely know already, occasional conflicts are inevitable.

Point out that conflicts are not necessarily a bad thing — in fact, they sometimes lead to better and more innovative ideas and solutions. In addition, working together to solve conflicts can make a team stronger and more cohesive. It's important, however, for team members to know how to solve conflicts productively. In this lesson, students will explore and practice conflict resolution skills.

Step 2: Activate Background Knowledge

Ask: *Has anyone experience a conflict when working on a team project? How did you and your team resolve the conflict?* Invite a few students to share their stories. Ask students to keep the stories in mind as they proceed through the lesson and to think about whether and how the conflicts could have been handled more productively.

Step 3: Present the Conflict Resolution slideshow

[Slide 1/2]

Conflict Resolution DOs

In order to make a conflict work for you—instead of derailing your work—you must develop the skills needed to resolve conflicts peacefully and productively. The following are tips on good ways to approach a conflict with partners or team members.

DO ...

- Be sure you understand what the conflict is really about. Does it involve a true clash of opinions and ideas? Or have people simply misunderstood something or someone?
- Be polite and respectful when others are speaking.
- Listen actively to others' opinions and ideas. Active listening means giving your full attention to the speaker, using body language such as eye contact and nodding to show that you are listening, and paraphrasing back what the speaker says to be sure you have understood.
- If possible, rehearse what you want to say before it is your turn to speak.
- Explain clearly what you want from the situation and ask others what they want.
- Suggest solutions to the problem or conflict. Suggesting solutions indicates your willingness to cooperate and resolve the conflict, rather than just "venting" and complaining.
- Be flexible and open to others' solutions. The solution you have in mind may not be the best possible solution, so avoid becoming fixated on it.

- Stick to the conflict at hand. Avoid introducing unrelated issues and problems into the discussion.
- Ask a teacher, adult advisor, or neutral peer to mediate when necessary.

[Slide 3/4]

Conflict Resolution DON'Ts

As you practice using your conflict resolution skills, there are also some things to avoid in order to make the most of a conflict situation. The following are tips on behaviors to avoid when approaching a conflict with partners or team members.

DO NOT ...

- Ignore conflicts or avoid dealing with them.
- Get personal. Stick to the issue—don't air feelings and opinions about the people involved.
- Assume another person is wrong or has bad intentions.
- Belittle other people's ideas and solutions. You may disagree, but be sure you do so respectfully.
- Point fingers. Focus on resolving the problem or conflict, rather than assigning blame.
- Be defensive. Don't assume others want to punish you or prove you wrong.
- Let emotions get out of control. If the discussion becomes heated or upsetting, suggest taking a break and resuming when people feel calmer.

[Slide 5]

Active Listening

As you may have noticed in the previous lists of DOs and DON'Ts, communication skills are critical when it comes to successfully resolving conflict. While *what* you say is important, *how* you listen may be even more valuable and effective.

One skill that you can work on to improve your ability to resolve conflicts is *active listening*. Active listening means really paying attention to what the speaker is saying and how she or he is saying it. People who are actively listening are *not* thinking about how to respond to the speaker. Instead, they are fully engaged in what the speaker is saying. Their actions – facial expression, body language, etc. – all demonstrate to the speaker that they are paying attention.

[Slide 6]

Role Play

Acting out a pretend or real conflict with others through a technique called "role play" is one method of developing conflict resolution skills. Role play gives everyone an opportunity to practice these skills when the stakes and pressure are low. With role play practice, you can be prepared for conflict when it is real and potentially serious.

Step 4: Plan a Role Play (15 minutes)

Explain that students will now engage in role plays to practice resolving conflicts and hone their conflict resolution skills. Distribute the Conflict Resolution Role Play worksheet and begin the activity by asking partners or teams to brainstorm topics and scenarios for a conflict-resolution role play involving 2–4 people. Have students use the worksheet to record their notes, being sure to answer the following questions:

- What will the conflict be about?
- Who will be involved?
- What role will each person play (e.g; team leader, team member, team advisor/teacher, conflict mediator)?

Step 5: Conduct a Role Play (30 minutes)

Direct students to work in pairs or teams to complete the role plays they planned. When they are finished, ask each pair/team to work together to write a brief summary of what happened. Guide students to highlight the skills, tips, or techniques that most helped them to resolve the conflict. You might wish to invite a few pairs whose role plays were successful to act out their role plays for the class.

After students have completed their summaries, schedule time to meet briefly with each pair/team to discuss their role play and summary. Answer students' questions and concerns, and use the following points to guide additional discussion:

- What feedback or questions do you have about the team's conflict resolution role play?
- How might you approach any real-life conflicts students are currently facing?
- Can you share an example of a time that you were involved in a conflict or observed a conflict in your professional life? How (if at all) was the conflict resolved? What conflict resolution skills were used? Was the resolution satisfactory?

RESOURCES

Share these resources with students seeking additional information about conflict resolution.

The Upside of Conflict

While we often think of conflict as something negative, the ultimate results of conflict can often be positive. To learn more about the positive side of conflict, read/watch one or more of the following:

- [Why conflict doesn't have to be destructive](#) (TED Talk video)
- [Conflict is a Place of Possibility](#) (TED Talk video)
- [Positive Results from Conflict](#)
- [Conflict's Positive and Negative Aspects](#)
- [Conflict Can Be Positive and Productive](#)
- [Advantages of Conflict](#)

Active Listening

Active listening skills are useful in resolving conflicts and in many other situations that require leadership. Learn more about active listening from these websites.

- [Skills You Need: Active Listening](#)
- [Active Listening: Hear What People Are Really Saying](#)
- [What Is Active Listening?](#)

Role Play

For more information on how to structure and utilize role play, check out one or more of these websites:

- [Mediation Roleplay Collection](#)
- [Exercises and Training Activities to Teach Conflict Management](#)
- [From Conflict to Collaboration](#)
- [The Magic of Role Playing](#) (TED Talk video)