

Training Young Peacemakers

BY MARILYN A. FARGO

We teachers dream of a class full of students who are respectful, on task, kind, responsible, and spiritually motivated. Most of our students are like that—at least some of the time—but we also get students who are disruptive, disrespectful, and destructive at least occasionally. However, whatever their attributes, every student has the potential to learn and mirror the peacemaking attributes of our “dream class.”

Peacemaking means dealing with conflict God’s way. I recently taught peacemaking principles to a group of 5th to 8th graders. After presenting “What Conflict Is and Our Reactions to It,” I asked them to make lists of: “What Peacemakers Do...” and “What Troublemakers Do...” The students were highly motivated and produced lengthy lists. Tyler,* a shy 6th grader, wrote: “Peacemakers get help; Troublemakers have troubled lives. Peacemakers try to help Troublemakers; Troublemakers make life difficult for the Peacemakers.”

• Students’ names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Problem Behaviors

The results of an informal survey of Adventist teachers during in-service training revealed that the most frequently listed “Troublemaking Behaviors” are:

1. disrespect
2. putdowns/name calling
3. tattling/gossiping
4. dishonesty/not taking responsibility

Disruptive classroom behavior takes a toll on teachers’ ability to teach and students’ ability to learn. In a 1997 *Phi Delta Kappan* poll, high percentages of teachers felt that the following behaviors were a problem “Most of the time/fairly often.”¹

71 percent	Schoolwork/homework assignments not completed
58 percent	Behavior that disrupts class
50 percent	Talking back to/disobeying teachers

Peacemaking is a crucial life skill that can be integrated into every area and activity of the curriculum.

Picture
Removed

“The Blame Game” aggravates conflict situations and spells Double Trouble.

These disruptive behaviors cause conflict between teachers, students, and parents. Often administrators, care givers, and extended family members become involved.

Conflict is defined as “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.”² One of Jesus’ disciples put it this way, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? . . . You want something but don’t get it” (James 4:1, 2, NIV).³ In every classroom, school, and church, conflicts arise that can produce frustration, anger, and broken relationships. These conflicts are often seen in students’ competition for their teacher’s attention, in their difficulty making and keeping friends, or in following routines and rules.

Young Peacemaker Goals

I have taught social skills to students with a variety of curricula including *Second Step* from the Committee for Children. Specific lessons in these programs help develop empathy, problem solving, impulse control, and anger management.⁴ However, I had not found any resource that offered a process for restoring relationships and regaining trust until Corlette Sande introduced me to *The Young Peacemaker*, a biblically based curriculum that she had written for elementary students. She describes it as follows:

“God’s Word is totally reliable and amazingly practical. So when the Bible commands our children and us to live at peace with others, it also provides detailed and concrete guidance on how to carry out that sometimes difficult task.

“Conflict is not necessarily wrong or destructive. If we teach our students to respond appropriately, it can become an opportunity for them to please and honor God, to serve other people, and to grow more like Christ.

“Many of the conflicts children experience are caused or aggravated by sin. Like adults, children wrestle with strong desires that sometimes get out of hand. We can and should use appropriate discipline to help them learn self-control and proper outward behavior. But it is even more important to help them understand the root causes of their conflicts (pride, selfishness, greed, unforgiveness, etc.) and encourage them to ask God to free them from these sinful attitudes. Since Christ alone can offer such freedom, the gospel is an essential part of true peacemaking.

“The most important skills for a peacemaker are repentance, confession, and forgiveness. Though communication and problem-solving skills are important, they cannot heal relationships that have been damaged by conflict. True reconciliation occurs only when students take responsibility for their wrongs, express sorrow

Picture
Removed

“Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional” (Max Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* [Dallas, Texas: Word Publ., 1994], p. 44).

for hurting others, and commit themselves to forgiving one another as God has forgiven them.”

Slippery Slope

The introduction to the program, the “Slippery Slope,” helps students identify two natural kinds of reactions to conflict: **Escape Responses** and **Attack Responses**.

Escape Responses are:

- Denying
- Blaming
- Running away

Attack Responses are:

- Putdowns
- Gossip
- Fight

Genesis 2 shows that human beings as far back as Adam and Eve have used these responses. The results are always broken relationships with God and other people. They lead to a “Slippery Slope” that results in death. God’s plan is for us to use *Work-It-Out Responses*. For students, that involves:

- Overlooking;
- Talking;
- Getting help. (See Figure 1.)⁶

Introducing Peacemaking Concepts

By introducing the concept of conflict, along with possible responses, on the first day of school, I set the stage for a productive school year.⁷ I began by having my students brainstorm regarding their feelings and ideas about school. Later, I used the words they chose in a cooperative group activity to define “School as a Community.”

Early in the discussion, someone mentioned the word *rules*. That led to a discussion of the need for rules to help prevent con-

Picture
Removed

licts and hurt feelings caused by Escape and Attack Responses. By the time we talked about the “Slippery Slope,” it was time to go out for recess. I suggested that the students use this time to model ways of interacting appropriately and of getting help with conflicts.

After recess, we shared our observations. The concept of *conflict* now had an entirely new meaning in our classroom. Rather than a threat or problem, it became an opportunity for us to solve problems and work together.

Classroom Rules

During the first few days, we worked on a list of rules to ensure a good year together. At first, the students suggested many “Don’ts.” I wrote on the board: “*Choices Have Consequences*,” and we brainstormed about positive rules and the natural consequences of our actions. I also introduced the 5 A’s in a lesson in the “TALK” part of our *Work-It-Out Responses*. Even though I was not ready to teach the specifics in *Young Peacemakers’* later lessons, I wanted the students to notice when I modeled confession to them and to learn to use this part of the process in dealing with offenses.

In about one week, the class was ready to vote on a list of rules and consequences similar to the ones listed below:

RULES	CONSEQUENCES for OFFENSES
1. Be at school on time and ready to work	1st: Use the 5 A’s
2. Keep hands and feet to yourself	2nd: Time Out: 5 min.; Use 5 A’s
3. Use a quiet voice	3rd: Write “Action Plan”; Use 5 A’s
4. Treat others the way you want to be treated	4th: Conference
5. Use the 5 A’s	Adults and Student: Use 5 A’s (Or Classroom Meeting: Use 5 A’s)

Primary students generally need just the first three of the A’s and specific words:

- Admit (“I admit I...”)
- Apologize (“I am sorry I hurt you when I...”)
- Ask Forgiveness (“I ask you to forgive me for...”)
- Accept Consequences
- Alter Behavior

For older students, having an “Action Plan” with spaces to describe “What happened?” and “How I will use the 5 A’s” can be an effective strategy.

One group of intermediate students had “messed up” the supply room when getting items. Using Peacemaking strategies, they verbalized the 5 A’s; wrote a letter that they signed and shared with everyone concerned; cleaned up the area; and reviewed how to apply biblical principles of peacemaking.

“True reconciliation occurs only when students take responsibility for their wrongs, express sorrow for hurting others, and commit themselves to forgiving one another as God has forgiven them.”

The Christian principles of confession, repentance, and forgiveness can be very effective when “True educators, keeping in view what their students may become, will recognize the value of the material upon which they are working. They will take a personal interest in each pupil and will seek to develop all their powers. However imperfect, every effort to conform to right principles will be encouraged.”⁸

By teaching these proactive social skills and utilizing each opportunity to apply the concepts to real-life situations, you can empower your students to:

- maintain positive relationships in a classroom learning environment;
- improve academic performance on standardized tests;
- perceive the teacher as a facilitator or mediator as they use the processes at school;
- transfer learning to deal with conflicts at home;
- work productively in cooperative groups;
- be supportive of one another;
- serve as peer mediators who coach each other through conflicts.

Picture
Removed

Picture
Removed

Compliments

To help students take responsibility for their own behavior, I designed a short, interactive evaluation that I often scheduled immediately following recess. As the students filed in, I wrote headings for “Compliments” on the white board and waited for their responses:

TO:	FROM:	COMPLIMENT:
David	Justin	encouraging words
Sara and Joelle	Brittany	sharing equipment

Dealing With Putdowns

Next, we moved to the “PROBLEMS” category. Students identified inappropriate behaviors but were not allowed to use the names of offenders. (I discovered early in my teaching career that writing students’ names on the chalk board for negative behavior was counter-productive). The list might include:

PROBLEMS:

- Putdowns
- Loud voices in the hallway
- Pushing and shoving

I then asked some hard questions like: “Who takes responsibility for a putdown?” and we agreed on these steps:

- That student raises his/her hand.
- We all clap as I acknowledge the student by saying, “Thank you for being so honest!”
- The student then stands and goes to the offended peer to: Admit, Apologize, and Ask for forgiveness.
- I later ask the student privately, (1) “What was the Accepted Consequence?”
(2) “How will you Alter your Behavior in the future?”

Generally, each of the parties has some responsibility for the conflict, so I encourage them both to repent, confess, and forgive. This five-minute process can be very helpful in resolving conflict and providing affirmation and accountability. I remind the children that, as a result of their actions, “All heaven is rejoicing!” (See Luke 15:7, 10, 32.)

Applying the Process

Ms. Jenn, an upper-grade teacher, started using this process recently. One day, Sue, a slender 8th-grade girl in her class, asked, “Can you believe how fat John’s mom is!?” Sue realized what she had said and used the 5 A’s to apologize. John refused to forgive.

What should Ms. Jenn do? She had doubts whether the process really worked. However, she kept praying and hoping. On the third day, after recess, John held the door open for Sue; looked her in the eye and said, “I do forgive you.” Ms. Jenn says that John and Sue were especially kind and supportive of each other for the rest of the school year.

Teachers inevitably raise some questions about the program, beginning with “But I don’t have time to teach peacemaking!” My answer: “You don’t have time NOT to!” It is a crucial life skill that can be integrated into every area and activity of the curriculum. Because conciliation involves a process that is radically different from our natural human responses, it is important to *teach* the skills effectively and then *apply* them in every situation. Since the lessons are so complete, older students can help present the stories, concepts, and activities, especially in multigrade classrooms.

Teaching Young Peacemakers

Following the horrific acts of terrorism on Tuesday, September 11, the need to teach how to address conflicts has become more urgent than ever. Peacemaking principles address the need for the impulsive, conflicted student to be responsible for his or her own behavior. These concepts also benefit the self-controlled student who has the potential to become part of the solution.

Mr. Farley, a 5th/6th-grade homeroom teacher in a large junior academy, has been applying Young Peacemaker principles in his classroom this year. On the morning of September 12, he drew a slippery slope on the white board and had his students fill in the blanks. They then discussed what had resulted from conflicted viewpoints of the terrorists the day before. The students committed themselves to using the Biblical Work-It-Out responses rather than the attack/escape responses of the terrorists.

Student responses on the afternoon of September 11:

Peacemakers Do . . .

- Negotiate solutions
- Help people
- Respect others

Troublemakers Do . . .

- Bomb
- Kill people
- Hate others

Pictures
Removed

The Young Peacemaker program helps students learn to say “I forgive you” when others hurt them.

Peace Centers

It is important for the offender to make eye contact with his or her peer(s). Janet, my best friend, has a “Peace Corner” in her classroom. A small fountain, a large stuffed chair, and posters provide a private area conducive to conciliation.

In my classroom, I used the bulletin boards to display the 5 A words using posters, student artwork, and snapshots. When they needed to Talk-It-Out privately, students would choose to sit at a table with an attractive cloth and centerpiece, away from distractions.

Another common concern: “What if . . . *they don’t Admit or forgive?*” First, check your approach. Try not to exert excessive pressure that may cause students to resist. Second, allow adequate time. Remember how God treats us when we offend. The Holy Spirit speaks gently as God gives us time and opportunities. We must do no less for our students.

Brandy’s Story

Following recess one day, my students were all lined up, ready to come inside. We started through the doors and down the hallway. Suddenly, there was an animated buzz as the message quickly reached me that a girl at the end of the line had said, “All blacks and Indians are dumb and stupid.”

I stopped, signaled for silence, and led the students into the classroom. It was October 1 and our first big test involving the entire classroom. I was not certain how Brandy, who was emotionally

For older students, having an “Action Plan” with spaces to describe “What happened?” and “How I will use the 5 A’s” can be an effective strategy.

fragile and just disclosing that she was being sexually abused at home, would respond to the peacemaking process. I was also uncertain about how ready the other students were to re-

spond. I began praying silently that the Holy Spirit would lead us through this “opportunity for conciliation.”

As the students filed to their desks, it was obvious that Brandy was not with us. She had escaped to the girls’ bathroom. I told the students to take out their notebooks and doodle, saying that we would resolve this together. When Brandy came into the classroom, the students were quietly engaged. I set the stage by calmly announcing, “I understand someone in our class said something un-

Picture
Removed

Students learn how to resolve conflicts God's way in the Young Peacemaker program.

kind and untrue.”

The students continued to doodle as I slowly circled the room, quietly affirming them. I then suggested that “When the student who said something unkind and untrue is ready to talk to us, we are ready to listen.”

Finally, Brandy raised her eyes to meet mine and motioned for me to come over to her desk.

I asked, “Are you ready?”

She nodded.

“Where do you want to stand?”

“Behind my chair.”

“Where do you want me to stand?” She pointed to a spot close by.

Brandy looked around the room at each of the students and said, “I admit I said something unkind and untrue. I am so sorry I hurt you by saying those words. Will you please forgive me?”

By the time Brandy got the words out, the students were getting out of their seats, coming over to her, giving her high fives and hugs with smiles on their faces and tears in their eyes. She finished the process of Accepting Consequences; the students voted that asking forgiveness was sufficient. Brandy promised, “Next time I will stop and think before I say unkind and untrue things.”

Heaven was rejoicing. I brought out some crackers and juice, and we celebrated, too. Math could wait. The students asked Brandy if they could sit with her at lunch and play together at recess. It turned out to be one of her best days.

When Brandy and I were alone, I asked how she felt after talking to the students. She said, “I felt so *relieved*.” Her body language had noticeably changed during her confession from raised shoulders, clenched hands, and furrowed brow to a more relaxed posture.

After years of using Young Peacemaker principles with all ages and presenting them to hundreds of Adventist administrators and

teachers, I have experienced the profound difference it can make in establishing positive relationships in the classroom, school, community, and church. It is worth taking time to “deal with conflict God’s way.” ☞

Marilyn A. Fargo is a graduate of Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan) and Montana State University-Billings, and has graduate training in special education, counseling, and other subjects. She recently retired after 26 years as an elementary teacher and state consultant to train Adventist teachers, administrators, and families to resolve conflicts God’s way as the Education Specialist for Adventist Christian Conciliation Ministries (ACCM). She writes from Billings, Montana.

Academy Application Ideas

“Peacemaking can give our students greater success in their friendships, marriages, and careers.” Ken Sande⁹

1. First, teach and model the peacemaking principles using Scripture, the *Responding to Conflict Biblically* workbook (revised Seventh-day Adventist version), and Peacemaker resources for teachers.

2. Incorporate the principles into everyday academy experiences. Resident assistants, deans, and faculty members can encourage students to use the Work-It-Out Responses with roommates, friends, parents, and teachers when they face a conflict.

3. Affirm students for using peacemaking principles through specific verbal/written comments to them and their parents.

4. Train the faculty to do conflict counseling and to provide a

process for students to interact with their faculty family, mentor, or an ongoing small group when they need help with issues. "Let the [students] come to me, . . . for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

5. Challenge students to try conflict counseling with their friends, family, and faculty, using the 5 A's to restore relationships. This is especially important when someone will need support because of major consequences for breaking the rules.¹⁰

6. Students can volunteer at the local church school to dramatize, teach, or reinforce Young Peacemaker stories and lessons.

7. Students and/or faculty members can plan a "Week of Peace" with speakers, activities, and guest counselors. End with parents and former students joining a weekend Celebration of Conciliation.

8. Interested students can research the "National Day of Reconciliation" introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives as it proceeds through steps from idea to law.

9. Encourage all sophomores to read a "Driver's Manual" and take a field trip to observe traffic court proceedings and consequences.

10. Invite a Christian attorney to speak about the cost, emotions, and time involved in a divorce settlement or other litigation.

11. Have students choose one person or place in conflict and write letters, pray, and offer support. They can use the Internet to help gather information about a church, conference, union, division, religious liberty issue, specific missionary, or Amnesty International, the United Nations, or the Red Cross, for example.

Activity list compiled with suggestions from Stephanie Johnson, counselor and director of the Self-Esteem Program at Champion Academy in Loveland, Colorado.

BRIEF LESSON DESCRIPTION

Lesson No. 1: Conflict Is a Slippery Slope

Objectives: To learn what conflict is; different responses to conflict; that God is with us even in conflict.

Lesson No. 2: What Causes Conflict

Objectives: To learn where conflict comes from; what causes conflict.

Lesson No. 3: Choices Have Consequences

Objectives: To learn that choices belong to us, as do consequences.

Lesson No. 4: Making Choices the Wise Way

Objectives: To learn that there are two basic approaches to making choices; that it is wise to seek godly advice; making wise choices can prevent conflict.

Generally, each of the parties has some responsibility for the conflict, so I encourage them both to repent, confess, and forgive.

Lesson No. 5: Playing the Blame Game

Objectives: To learn what it means to blame; playing the blame game can cause double trouble; that students can get help to resist the blame game and change their choices.

Lesson No. 6: Conflict Is an Opportunity

Objectives: To learn to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ.

Lesson No. 7: The Five A's for Resolving Conflict

Objectives: To learn what the 5 A's are and how to use them; the biblical principles of repentance and confession.

Lesson No. 8: The Freedom of Forgiveness

Objectives: To learn what forgiveness is not; the four promises of forgiveness; when, how, and why to forgive.

Lesson No. 9: Altering Choices

Objectives: To use the STAY Plan (Stop, Think, Act, Yea) to help them alter choices.

Lesson No. 10: Think Before You Speak

Objectives: To learn the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication; why,

what, and how to communicate effectively.

Lesson No. 11: The Communication Pie

Objectives: To learn how to communicate to help prevent conflict; to consider the time and place to communicate.

Lesson No. 12: Making a Respectful Appeal

Objectives: To learn what it means to make an appeal; how and when to appeal.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Carol A. Langdon, "The Fourth Phi Delta Kappan: Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 78:3 (November 1997), p. 214.
2. Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), p. 24. Additional information and resources: Peacemaker Ministries: <http://www.HisPeace.org/>.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, Bible texts are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version* © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.
4. Committee for Children, *Second Step® Violence-Prevention Curricula for Preschool Through Grade 9* (Seattle, Wash., 1992). Additional information and resources: Committee for Children: <http://www.cfchildren.org/>.
5. Corlette Sande, *The Young Peacemaker: Teaching Students to Respond to Conflict God's Way*. Teacher's Manual (Wapwallopen, Penna.: Shepherd Press, 1997), p. 9. Additional information and resources: Peacemaker Ministries: <http://www.HisPeace.org/>.
6. Corlette Sande and Russ Flint, *Young Peacemaker Student Activity Book No. 1* (Wapwallopen, Penna.: Shepherd Press, 1997), p. 4.
7. Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong, *The First Days of School* (Mt. View, Calif.: Harry K. Wong Publ., 1998), p. 3.
8. Ellen G. White, *True Education* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), pp. 141, 142.
9. Ken Sande, "Peacemaking: A Key to Socializing Children," p. 4. See also <http://www.HisPeace.org/> or call (406) 256-1583 for this article.
10. _____, *The Peacemaker; A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflicts*, pp. 109-118.