

# Strategies of Conflict Resolution for Peaceful Schools

A free online course for teachers/B.Ed/M.Ed/Education Researchers

## Course Developed by:

- Dr Vedabhyas Kundu, Programme Officer, GSDS, New Delhi
- Dr Shazia Mansoori, Assistant Professor, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh
- Hsin Yen Phoebe Mok, Master – Graduate School of International Peace Studies, Soka University, Japan



**Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti**  
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## Foreword

The baneful effects of absence of proper co-ordination and harmony among the various faculties of body, mind and soul respectively are obvious. They are all around us; only we have lost perception of them owing to our present perverse association...- Mahatma Gandhi

For a peaceful school, it is important that teachers and the authorities work with the students for proper co-ordination and harmony among the faculties of body, mind and soul. Also it is imperative that differences and disputes if they arise must be resolved with a Gandhian approach involving a win-win solution. The use of creative strategies like peer-mediation and dialogue should be encouraged in schools. As effective communication is extremely important in all functioning of the school system, we feel, schools should adopt nonviolent communication in the functioning of the school ecosystem. Promoting skills in emotional and moral intelligence and strengthening solidarity has to be important goals. The overarching objective hence should be to promote constructivist learning outcomes and a culture of peace.

In this context, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti is launching this free online course on Strategies of Conflict Resolution for Peaceful Schools. Anyone who is a teacher or student/researcher of education can do this course. No formal registration is needed. Participants can simply go through the course and send their answers to the Reflection Exercises to [gdspeacestudies@gmail.com](mailto:gdspeacestudies@gmail.com). We are providing certificates to all participants who submit the Reflection Exercises.

The Samiti thanks Dr Vedabhyas Kundu, Programme Officer, GSDS; Dr Shazia Mansoori, Assistant Professor, Aligarh Muslim University and Hsin Yen Phoebe Mok, a student of Soka University, Japan, an intern with GSDS for putting together the course material.



Dipanker Shri Gyan,  
Director, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti



# **GUIDELINES**

Thanking all participants who are embarking this online course with us.

Please send the replies to Reflection Exercises to :

[gsdspeacestudies@gmail.com](mailto:gsdspeacestudies@gmail.com)

There is no registration process. All those who write the Reflection Exercises will be given certificates. Please ensure that you write at least 100 words answers to each question.

For certificates, please furnish the following details:

Name:

Mother's Name:

Father's Name:

Institution:



### CONFLICTS IN SCHOOLS

Peace building is an important aspect of any education system. Peace provides quality to life. Teachers need to act as peace builders in the schools, helping the students to promote culture of peace around them. Harmonious and peaceful living leads to development and progress not only of the individual but of the society and country as well. However, blockades in peace restoration leads to societal degradation. There could be innumerable ways in which peace is disrupted within ‘self’ as well as with others. Conflicts are one of such barriers to peace building. Conflicts occur within an individual and also among the individuals in varying degrees. In the education system, we come across daily experiences of conflicts and ways to encounter conflicting situations with best possible measures. Teachers, administrators, students, parents, are important stakeholders of conflict resolution strategies in the education system. The present module on “Conflict resolution in Classrooms” has been built keeping in mind these aspects especially for school system. The module has 2 units. The first unit is dedicated to understanding the nature of conflicts in schools. The second unit is dedicated to strategies of conflict resolution. The whole module comprehensively discusses the underlying features of conflicts and their coping strategies, citing examples from the real situations. In order to help in better understanding and analysis, reflection exercises have also been incorporated in the unit for the learners to develop insights for practice in the education system.

#### 1.1 MEANING OF CONFLICTS

Conflicts are natural processes. They occur on a daily basis, and are unavoidable situations faced by everyone. Conflicts not only take place among the individuals but also within oneself. Conflicts are the differences in expression of opinions, viewpoints, ways of working and understanding, striving to achieve the same goals in different ways, etc. Any kind of human interaction incorporates conflicts. When a teacher tries to put forth some concepts in classrooms, there are differences in the meaning grasped by the students. These differing thought processes may lead to situations wherein conflicts arise. The conflicts may sometime result in better comprehension or at other times, may lead to rifts. However, in each circumstance, it’s important



to address the conflicts and devise effective ways to overcome such events. *“Conflicts simply denote incompatibility of needs, desires, goals, wants, temperaments, attitudes and values, which means that the two existing needs, goals or desires of individual or different groups could not be fulfilled simultaneously”.*

Schools are an important part of the society. Therein teachers and students mingle together, who come from a wide range of backgrounds, be it social, political, economical, cultural, educational, etc. Each background has certain beliefs and views to which people adhere to and adapt accordingly. However, in places like schools, these varied backgrounds are diminished for the sake of better achievement, prosperity, and growth of the students. Instead of isolating oneself, students and teachers interact, communicate, and construct knowledge by promoting discourse and discussion within the classrooms and outside. Even then, majority of times the differences in beliefs, perspectives, views and goals of the individuals may give rise to conflicting situations. Conflicts come into picture as a result of the changing worldviews, aspirations and goals, lifestyles, etc. Peoples’ likes and dislikes, acceptance and negligence, etc. cause conflicts. We come across such situations in schools and classrooms, where there are differences between teachers- teachers, students- students and teacher- students. These differences are expressed in a number of ways while proceeding to achieve the goals. It’s always recommended that for a successful running of the system, the differences however, have to be dealt effectively and constructively. Since conflicts are definite to occur on a daily basis, the key point is to handle these conflicting events in appropriate manner. Pain and rifts have to be reduced to a minimum, which are a result of these events. Teachers usually frame out a list of do’s and don’ts for the students to maintain peace, but the question arises ‘how much effective or comprehensive is this list?’ or whether such a list directed to students has actually helped in overcoming the conflicts and managing its consequences!

Conflicts can give pain, lot of energy is expended in such situations of conflicts, people move apart, miscommunication occurs or even communication cease to exist, and peaceful atmosphere is disrupted. Conflicts can also lead to constructive behaviour in the classrooms, more interaction and healthy competition, better discourse, etc. This implies that conflict in itself is not disruptive



or constructive, but its consequences are either positive or negative. The diversity observed in the classrooms require that contradictory views lead to building of constructive ideas, help in addressing the underlying problems, motivate the learners to participate and together put forth solutions. In this way, conflict has positive consequences by utilising the differences which are bound to exist in a classroom. Conflicts become a nuisance when dealt in improper ways. This will lead to lower productivity or achievement of the students, more differences are created and inappropriate or disruptive behaviours can be seen in the students. In both cases, the educators and teachers have to act responsibly and mediate the strategies of resolving conflicts to achieve better outcomes.

### Classroom Situations

Have you ever come across the following situations in your classrooms-?

- 1) Students physically fighting among themselves on reasons unknown to you as a teacher.
- 2) Students or teacher phone rings and answering it during the classroom learning process
- 3) Students questioning your marking pattern in their answer books.
- 4) Competing ideas arising on certain political, social or cultural issues, etc.

All the above mentioned situations lead to conflicts in the classroom. The teachers and students need to skilfully deal accordingly in each of these conflict situations to resolve them.

## 1.2 TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Conflicts are of different types depending on individuals involved.

- 1) Intrapersonal conflicts
- 2) Interpersonal conflicts
- 3) Intra-group conflicts
- 4) Intergroup conflicts

1. **Intrapersonal Conflicts:** Conflicts within an individual are termed as Intrapersonal conflicts. Within an individual simply implies that the person finds himself/ herself in situations where he/ she is not able to decide between two or more goals. “Should I or



should I not?” “This or that?” etc. are some questions faced by individual during intrapersonal conflicts. Struggling between “what I want to do” and “what I should do” is also another example. Moral and ethical decisions are faced with intrapersonal conflicts at times. Examples- (a) Knowing and feeling bad about missing the next morning class, but still staying awake on social media late night. (b) Whether to work a little harder and do the assignment yourself or copy it from a friends notes. (c) Teacher is tired of strenuous work and coming to class just for presence and not teaching the students.

Intrapersonal conflicts include three events of- *approach- approach conflict, avoidance- avoidance conflict, and approach- avoidance conflict.* (NCERT, 2010)

- 2. Interpersonal Conflicts:** Conflicts arising between the individuals as a result of incompatibility of their own attitudes, values, and aspirations. However, it is important to develop meaningful relationships to overcome interpersonal differences or conflicts. Asking questions, listening, and being compassionate towards others are all skills that need to be learned and practiced. Nelson-Jones (1990) indicates that interpersonal conflict is a situation in which one or both individuals in a relationship are experiencing difficulty in working or living with each other.

Examples of interpersonal conflicts in schools- (a) When two teachers distrust each other’s motives, dislike one another or for some other reason cannot get along. (b) Two students fighting and teasing each other with inappropriate names. (c) Student X moved back and hit student Y accidentally, and immediately student Y hit him back, causing disruption of discipline.

- 3. Intra-group Conflicts:** This type of conflict arises when individuals think themselves belonging to the same group. This is however, a complicated conflict to identify, because of all the types of conflict; students have the most difficulty identifying sub-groups within a larger group. Intra-group conflicts may affect the whole team work as each member of the allotted team work is related to each other. *Thus, having any discrepancies in the single group will affect the whole project. These conflicts may become beneficial when handled mutually by understanding the perspective of each member, and finding out the best solution by both the perspectives.* (Jordan & Truth, 2004). This occurred



mainly due to lack of co-operation, poor accountability and responsibility among committee members, and neglect or ignorance of duties and instructions. In turn, this often affected overall efforts to achieve the goals set by the school administration. Such types of conflicts are even related to poor leadership skills. Negative attitudes on the part of the head or chairperson could lead to intra-group conflicts. Examples- (a) Students are not paying attention to class monitor. (b) Head of the school dissatisfied with work of various committee coordinators. (c) Teachers arguing on the measures to be taken to punish students for indiscipline.

4. **Intergroup Conflicts:** Strong interdependency may sometimes lead to such intergroup conflicts. This type of conflict occurs between two or more groups of individuals. The underlying reason can be competition among the groups. There may occur rivalries between the groups due to the limits set by each group for other groups. Examples- (a) Students are allotted in different teams to build a project for participating in a competition. (b) Superiors trying to control the subordinates in the organisation. (c) Teachers adhering to one teaching method but students wish to explore learning through other methods as well.

### 1.3 UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR IN CONFLICTS

The behaviour of both the teachers and the students is explicit in the conflict process. Conflicts refer to a process or course of events taking place which may lead to personal or social growth and development. Avoiding conflicts is not the key to progress. When such conflicting events are bound to occur, it becomes extremely important to analyse the attitudes and behaviour of the participants of conflicts. The behaviour analysis simply helps you to overcome and resolve the conflicts in better manner. What kind of behaviours will be exhibited by both the teachers and students in the classroom post conflict management strategies is also important. Shah Mohammadi (2014) indicated the conflicting attitudes of students that include a wide range of unacceptable behaviours such as lack of classroom participation, causing and disrupting peers and situations of violence (e.g., verbal: offending peers; and physical: destroying school facilities and equipment, as well as peer materials). Wheldall and Merret (1988), for example, asked teachers to identify behaviours that disturbed teachers the most. These were “pupils talking out



of turn,” “pupils hindering other children,” and “out-of-seat behaviour”. Disruptive behaviour is evident during conflicts. Destructive behaviour refers to creating disturbances in the classroom both for teachers as well as other students. Disciplinary problems are also faced by teachers on a daily basis in the classrooms. Communication is hindered. Disrespect in the classrooms is a common behaviour nowadays. Students feeling sleepy or bored during the lectures are also usually encountered by the teachers. Late attendance or not coming to the class is also a regular phenomenon. Behaviours like dragging a chair or table during teaching, talking to other students, playing games in mobiles, throwing things at others, etc are indicative of student’s disruptive behaviour. Verbal abuse, temper burst in class and violence to teachers and other pupils are some more examples. Nasty insults and abusive or disruptive jokes, student’s anger and frustration, unnecessary complaints, high expectations/ambitions, prejudices, intolerance etc. are also other common behaviours depicted by students in a conflict.

However, in all the aforementioned behaviours shown by the students towards other students or teachers, cannot be ignored. These behaviours need to be checked accordingly with appropriate strategies of conflict management. The teachers and administrators have to play a significant role in these circumstances. The skills and styles of teachers in dealing with the disruptive behaviour are of utmost importance. As mentioned, each behaviour and attitude shown by the student in conflicts will disturb the teaching- learning process to a large extent. So, a huge responsibility lies with the teacher to confront the students’ disruptive behaviour in appropriate ways. Designing lessons in such a way that they keep the students engaged and practically active to increase their participation can be done. Using positive reinforcements, encouragement and motivation to students, defining rules in the beginning of the class, etc. can help to challenge the conflicts. It has been found that unanimous decisions of the teachers’ group on managing classroom conflicts can help in bringing positive outcomes. An example of teacher talking to students privately to understand why they are late or not attending the class can also help. Providing feedback to students on regular basis. Role playing by students to understand different cultures, opinions and perspectives will definitely help to avoid the destructive behaviours in the students. It is important to note here that many of such inappropriate behaviour of students are a result of lack of moral and ethical values, so it becomes extremely relevant for the teacher to



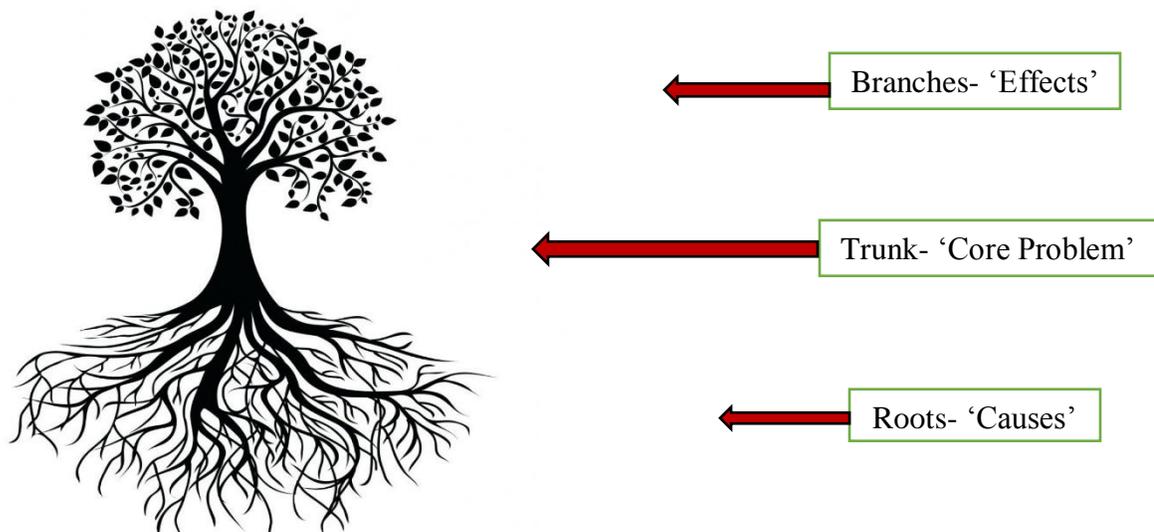
generate moral sensitivity and incorporate values- based education in classrooms. Recognition and addressing the conflicting behaviour and situation is another step that can help teachers. Don't ignore or leave the conflicts unnoticed! Face them with the right strategies. Active learning methods, holding discussions, interactive learning, communication, etc. need to be adopted. Teachers' confidence, self- efficacy and emotional intelligence have been found to manage disruptive behaviours of the students effectively. Teachers role to maintain a successful and motivating educational environment which removes the students out of anxiety, fear and improper behaviours, can promote effective learning in schools. Majority of students' unwanted behaviours in the classrooms towards teachers is a result of boring, or unattractive classroom teaching. New methods of teaching to make the students active learners, listening to their problems attentively, becoming good role models themselves are some essential skills of teachers in facing and overcoming behavioural problems of students. Generating positivity in the classrooms, not being too strict, not considering oneself as most superior, promoting culture of interaction and healthy competition, respecting identity of students, addressing their psychological, social and emotional needs are important. An important aspect is Emotional intelligence (EI). Researchers have found that teachers who tend to have higher levels of EI use less obliging, dominating, and avoiding strategies for classroom conflict management. Positive classroom relationships are promoted by emotionally intelligent teachers. How these skills and strategies can be employed in the classrooms will be dealt in the next unit.

#### **1.4 CONFLICT TREE ANALYSIS AND SOURCES OF CONFLICTS**

Understanding conflicts is not an easy task for the stakeholders of education system. A better and in-depth understanding of conflicts is pre- requisite for adoption of effective conflict resolution strategies. Analysing and constructively designing methods for conflict resolution is one way of overcoming the harmful effects of conflicts. But how do we understand and analyse the conflicts? This leads to the concept of conflict tree analysis, wherein addressing the conflicts is done in an explicit manner. The conflict tree analysis is confrontation of conflicts in a more comprehensive way by sorting the events of the conflicts in three major categories- causes, core problems, and effects, each symbolised by the roots, trunk and the branches of a simple tree,



respectively. As a teacher, if you use the conflict tree analysis to understand any kind of conflict in the classrooms or outside it, you may be better able to employ the conflict resolution strategies effectively.



### ***Conflict Tree Analysis***

(Adapted from Source: Simon Fisher et al. (2000))

This kind of analysis helps in identifying the major causes of any conflict, addressing the core problems and the consequences or effects of such conflicts. Let's take an example of a classroom situation to understand this concept. Student A comes to the class usually late and almost gets punished on a daily basis for not complying to the rules. At times, he could be found sitting alone during recess and taking his meals. When asked he says he doesn't feel like eating and has the food in his bag. He is sometimes even seen fighting with other students in the class. The grades have decreased and participation in the classroom discussions is also not seen. The teachers scold him, asks him to focus and give him more exercises to practice at home. Failing to do so, he is often seen getting punished. Poor performance and ultimately low achievement scores at the end of the year- session are observed.

Now any teacher in this situation will try to use some measures to help the child perform better in the class. As mentioned above, giving more work, giving directions to the student, citing examples of good performers of the class, comparing him to his siblings, etc. But is this the



actual conflict that the student was facing? Were the teachers taking the appropriate steps to help the student? This can only be understood once analysis of the conflicting situation is done accordingly. The core problem is the behaviour of the student which includes- not coming on time, being aggressive, poor performance, avoiding lunch in recess, etc. The effects observed were punishments by teachers, low scores on achievement, fighting with others, poor health, etc. But what were the root causes in this conflicting situation? In-depth information is required to identify the root causes. Surprisingly, the student was brought into confidence and effective communication revealed that both the parents of the student have started working overtime and the care and concern received earlier by the child at home has lessened to a large extent. The negligence of the child's needs and not giving appropriate attention to him by his parents has created a sense of loneliness in the child. As a result, he has exhibited such behaviour which has led to conflicts within himself and also with other students and teachers. It was even found that the student stopped bringing lunch to the school and lied about it. Further analysis revealed that because parents couldn't get time to prepare meal for him on time so his health deteriorated. The frustration was build up in the child and his interest in studies was lost because of lack of attention and time devoted to him by the parents.

When such a deep analysis of the situation was done, key factors came into picture, and the teacher arranged for a meeting with student's parents and the problem was thereby resolved.

This is how any conflict tree analysis will work in gaining information about the causes of a conflict, and challenging the conflict problems with decisive strategies in order to avoid deleterious effects.

In any classroom situation, it's more likely that the root causes of a conflict may be ignored and greater emphasis is on the problems and its consequences. The teachers usually find themselves facing the problems on a daily basis and taking immediate action to overcome the conflicts. We are more engrossed in identifying and dealing with the problems instead of acknowledging the underlying causes of it. The causes may be psychological, social, emotional, economical, cultural, political, etc. However, if the causes are not checked and addressed on time, the same conflicts may arise in different forms and varying degrees all the time. Even the best resolution strategies may not work effectively if the causes are not identified in time. Tracing back the root causes



and factors responsible in each conflict is essential, in order to develop a peaceful learning environment.

## **SOURCES OF CONFLICTS**

Deep down each conflict, a number of root causes and underlying precursors can be found. Possible sources of conflicts are- poor communication, competition among the individuals, differences in perceptions, incompatible goals, cultural differences, scarcity of resources, social or organisational structures, etc. To a large extent, needs of the individual give rise to conflicts. Attaining satisfaction and fulfilment of needs is underlying aspect of each source of conflicts. For example, in a classroom, a student belonging to a special need category demands certain facilities to fulfil his/ her desire of learning in an inclusive environment. However, if the learning needs are not met according to the requirement of the special student, this may cause intrapersonal as well interpersonal conflicts in the classroom, thereby lowering the efficacy of inclusive education system. Values and beliefs system, nature of relationships, unclear role structures, interdependence in work are other common sources of conflicts. Keeping in mind these sources of conflicts, it will become easier for a teacher to manage classroom conflicts by using the conflict tree analysis pattern of observation and research. Conflicts can offer competitive as well as cooperative context in the schools however, it will vary according to the situations and methods they are dealt with. It is nearly impossible to offer a conflict- free school or classroom due to individual differences and interests both at the level of teachers and students, hence, there's a need to devise and employ conflict resolution strategies. The various skills, methods and styles of dealing a conflict in school is discussed in the following unit of the module.

## **1.5 REFLECTION EXERCISES**

Here are a few situations which you need to analyse and comprehend in classrooms for effective teaching- learning process.



- 1) Describe a conflicting situation in the classrooms, where you have managed the conflict single-handedly. In your opinion, what are the key factors of any situation turning into a conflict?
- 2) You are teaching in Class 5th. There are a number of students who seem to be disinterested. In what ways will you promote active listening amongst students?
- 3) In a classroom setting, you find a student who has difficulty in speaking and stammers a lot. Because of which he/she is isolated by others. How are you going to deal with such a situation?
- 4) There's a science project competition in your state. You as a Science teacher needs to select a team for participation. What are your criteria of selecting the students for team-work?
- 5) You are teaching political science. During a class, a group of students end up being aggressive to each other due to ideological differences. How as a teacher you would handle the situation of aggressive posturing by the groups of students in the normal course?
- 6) Cite examples of intrapersonal conflicts which you are able to deal effectively and some which you are not able to manage in the course of time.

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## UNIT 2:

### STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS

Think of a situation: A student in the classroom comes up with a bizarre question. Other students start laughing at the student and makes weird comments which are humiliating and hurtful. How does the teacher respond to such a situation? Does the teacher reprimand the student who makes the comment? Does the teacher admonish the students who are making fun of the students? In some cases, a teacher actually joins other students in laughing at student who comes up with the bizarre question! This is a situation many teachers have to grapple in their classrooms. What should be the communication strategy a teacher should adopt so that the student who came up with the question do not feel humiliated as it could have deep psychological impact on him/her? S/he could become de-motivated from asking questions again. How will the teacher bring together the students and create a safe space for all to engage in a dialogue?

These are some of the questions that keep on coming up in the course of classes and in fact in the entire educational settings. In this unit, we would look at such situations and what kind of communication teachers could use to handle such instances. Besides, there could be instances of groups of students being at loggerheads with each other. What are the best possible ways to handle such conflicts in classrooms, playgrounds and other sites in schools?

Dear participants in the previous unit, we had discussed about the different types and nature of conflicts in schools. For resolution of any conflict, it is important to look at the genesis of the conflict from different perspectives before working out the process to resolve it.

The fulcrum of any conflict resolution process is communication. The key to the constructive handling of any dispute is how the individuals or groups involved in it talk about their differences. Use of effective mutual communication can help resolve the dispute with a win-win solution whereas aggressive posturing can further widen the rift. In our daily lives more than often we find how individuals try to stick aggressively to their positions when their ideas are threatened. People are mostly accustomed to think of differences in polarized and blame-oriented



ways. For instance, in classrooms, when two students are fighting over an issue, we find that each one of them tries to blame the other for the situation. Both the students can be found to construct different stories to reiterate their positions. In fact we will find that the interactions between the two students who are in conflict are negative. The challenge before the teacher or any student who is trying to mediate to resolve the issue is to try and transform the negative communication to a positive communication. The efforts to intervene in the conflict and resolve it with a win-win solution is an art, an art to turn the breakdown or aggressive communication to a meaningful and constructive dialogue. Constructive dialogue between the two conflicting students with the help of the teacher will help in the goals of cohesive classroom. Conflicts or differences are part of our lives and many times these cannot be avoided. However, it is the ingenuity of a teacher to help her/his students to actually make a conflict into an opportunity to learn- learn about the individuals involved in the conflict and the differences dimensions of differences. Instead of letting conflicts destroy relationships, it should be seen as a ‘conversation of opportunity’. Hence, in a nutshell, the major challenge before a teacher to ensure a cohesive classroom is to promote a communication ecosystem which encourages mutual respect, mutual tolerance, dialogue and constructive resolution of differences. Encouraging a healthy communication not just in the classrooms but in the school as a whole is crucial to promote a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere. While it is critical for the success of the teaching-learning process, an effective communication ecosystem helps in strengthening the student-teacher relationships thereby acting as a trigger for strong cognitive development. It helps in motivating students. It guides teachers to develop better understanding of the aspirations and problems which students could encounter during their studies. A healthy communication ecosystem creates a sense of belonging to the classroom and to the school as a whole, it aids in increasing the self-confidence of students and their desire for learning.

In this module Unit, we will focus on the following:

2.1 Promoting a Nonviolent Communication Ecosystem in Schools

2.2 Encouraging Dialogues

2.3 Encouraging Mediation



2.4 Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

2.5 Strengthening Solidarity in Schools

2.6 Reflection Exercises

## ***2.1 PROMOTING A NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEM IN SCHOOLS***

As our goal is to ensure a healthy and cohesive classroom and school, the challenge is to ensure a communication ecosystem which encourages empathetic connections, mutual respect and understanding. The aim is to promote good interpersonal communication skills amongst the students and teachers. From the point of view of teachers, the aim should be on how to foster less judgemental perceptions and reactions to challenging student behaviours. It is also on how they can deliver their lectures in a manner which ensures greater learning. The focus should also be on construction of new thinking structures amongst students that reflects respect of each other's views and counter views. It also entails how a teacher is able to encourage a culture of dialogue in the classroom so that it can contribute to interactions and greater engagement with knowledge. It is in this backdrop that the essence of healthy communication becomes the pillar of a nourishing environment in the school. It is important for effective class management and triggering the enthusiasm amongst students. To make the pillar of healthy communication stronger, it would be pertinent to look at different approaches to communication. The most appropriate in this context would be the use of nonviolent communication. In fact, the aim of schools should be to encourage the practice of using nonviolent communication in all its *functions and by all its stakeholders- students, teachers, the management and other staff.*

*Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti is running a free Orientation Course on Nonviolent Communication. The course is available at [www.gandhismriti.gov.in](http://www.gandhismriti.gov.in). It is open to all.*

The foundation of nonviolent communication is the five pillars of Gandhian nonviolence:

- Respect
- Understanding
- Acceptance
- Appreciation
- Compassion



## What is Nonviolent Communication?

### Importance of Nonviolent Communication Elements in Educational Settings?

Practicing nonviolent communication in our daily lives helps us to reframe the ways which we have been using to communicate. It gives us tools to effectively connect, see the humaneness in others and strengthen relationships.

Senior Gandhian Natwar Thakkar has given us an elaborate understanding of nonviolent communication:

*To me nonviolent communication literacy would mean how our communication efforts should be nonviolent; how our ability and capacity to communicate not only with ourselves but with our family and society be nonviolent in all aspects and overall how the entire process of communication whether between individuals, groups, communities and the world at large should be nonviolent in nature. This would entail deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and its centrality in all our daily actions. It is not just verbal and nonverbal communication, nonviolent communication literacy would also include whether our thoughts and ideas are nonviolent or not. This would also mean how we can communicate and stop evaluating them to suit our own ideas.*

*More than often we are attuned to think in terms of moralistic judgements which may be our own constructions. By developing deep understanding of the art and science of nonviolence and integrating it in our communication practices we could get over with biased and moralistic judgements; this in turn could contribute to emotional bridge building....So, I firmly believe that by practicing nonviolent communication, there can be amazing opportunities to promote goodness in our world which keeps on getting struck with conflicts. It is an essential part of efforts to evolve a culture of peace and nonviolence not just in our homes but in the entire world. This is also an antidote to all acts of revenge, aggression and retaliation as all these arises from breakdown in communication or our reliance in violence in communication.*



With this explanation of nonviolent communication, it would be pertinent to look at how the different elements of nonviolent communication can actually help in encouraging a motivating environment in schools. The following are the elements of nonviolent communication:

- i. **Nonviolent Communication means complete lack of violence in the way we communicate with others.** This includes verbal, nonverbal communication and our thoughts and ideas. For a safe school environment, this element of nonviolent communication has to be the starting point.
- ii. **We should learn to communicate with ourselves and self-introspect.** Our aim should be constructive inner dialogue. Students should be motivated to be self-aware and cultivate the practice of constructive inner dialogue.
- iii. **Role of mutual respect in communication.** This helps in constructive mutual communication amongst all stakeholders in the school system.
- iv. **Use of appropriate and positive language.** Students should be guided to avoid words and language that hurts others or demeans others.
- v. **Expansion of emotional vocabulary.** If students learn to strengthen their emotional vocabulary, they will be able to improve their relationships and interaction with others. Several studies show on how a child's social and emotional competence can impact future relationships and overall mental health.
- vi. **Avoiding stereotypes in our communication efforts.** For a cohesive school environment, the school authorities, teachers and students should avoid getting entrapped in stereotypes. Respect for diversity and inclusivity should be the goal.
- vii. **Avoid moralistic judgements.** Promoting ways to inculcate moral values and using them in practical life situations can reduce conflicts.
- viii. **Avoid evaluative language.** The effort should be to enhance one's observation power instead of negative evaluative language.
- ix. **Power of empathy.** There is a need to teach students skills in empathy right from primary level. It is an integral part of establishing effective communication and learning relationships in classrooms.



- x. **Strong belief in the power of compassion.** Schools should encourage students to develop skills in compassion. Being compassionate helps in promoting pro-social behaviour.
- xi. **Connecting with needs of others.** When teachers are able to connect with needs of their students, their issues related to behaviour, learning outcomes or conflicting situations can be handled properly.
- xii. **Importance of flexibility in our communication.** When there is flexibility in communication, it becomes easier to overcome disputes or differences.
- xiii. **Practicing active listening skills.** Developing active listening skills is critical for not only better learning outcomes but also improvement of interpersonal relationships. It is a growth activity which requires sincere practice and perseverance.
- xiv. **Expressing gratitude.** When students learn the art of expressing gratitude to people or situations because of which they might have benefitted, they will evolve into better human beings. Studies show individuals who can express gratitude have the capacity to be empathetic and develop capacities to take the perspectives of others.

## 2.2 ENCOURAGING DIALOGUES

*“Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.” (Paulo Freire, 1968, p. 92-93)*

Here, Freire underlines the significance of effective communication in the education process. He points out on how one of the effective means of communication in the education system is dialogue. In fact, in order to facilitate greater learning outcomes and understanding amongst students, teachers should encourage dialogue. In fact studies show on how by engaging in a process of dialogue, students learn how to think critically, how to be more reasonable, how to develop the ability to understand the perspectives of others, develop skills to engage with each other through a participatory process and how to take decisions.



Dialogue can be described as a form of constructive discussion which aims at fostering mutual insights and achieve common purpose. It is an open and inclusive process where communication is based on respect for each other. Its main objectives are: listening with empathy, searching for common good, exploring new ideas, bringing unexplained assumptions into the open and creative problem solving. By using the strategies of nonviolent communication, we can ensure an effective dialogue.

### **What are the benefits of dialogue?**

- Helps in overcoming mistrusts
- Individuals at odds with one another come together in a single platform with shared objectives and strategies
- Shaping of vision
- Development of new perspectives and insights
- Evolution of innovative and creative ideas
- Strengthens bonds of community

Dialogue offers students a ‘safe space’ to share their thoughts and ideas. When teachers encourage dialogues in the classroom, it helps them to develop valuable insights into the beliefs, ideas, questions and misconceptions of their students.

### **Ground rules for Effective Dialogue:**

Whenever we aim to engage a group in a dialogue, it is useful to focus on common interests and not the divisive ones.

- It is a safe space where individuals are encouraged to reveal their own insights and assumptions
- The dialogue process focuses on conflicts between ideas and perspectives and not between people.
- Wherever appropriate, participants can even express their emotions
- The aim is to minimize the level of mistrust before the group pursues practical objective.

### **Dialogue Circles in Classrooms**



Teachers can encourage dialogues in classrooms through Dialogue Circles. A classroom where the teacher stands and students sit in rows underlines a hegemonic relationship. With students sitting the rows, it is a matter of fact on who is in charge. While such arrangements have their own appropriate functions, but for encouraging dialogues through nonviolent communication, teachers can bring together the students in form of 'Dialogue Circles'. For students, it is a totally different experience from what they listen to a teacher in the traditional classrooms.

For a successful dialogue process, the physical sitting arrangement is critical. Students sit in circles facing each other. The aim is to ensure that there is no barrier between the participants like tables or chairs. Also the aim is to ensure that there is no background noise which distracts the participants. When participants sit together in a circle with no barriers, there is an inherent sense of community and belonging. One of the objectives of teachers encouraging Dialogue Circles is to build a strong community of students in the class. Here, every participant shares responsibility in the process of the dialogue. While the ground rules are to be followed by the participating students, all decisions are taken by the consensus of the entire group. Leadership skills are developed through such Dialogue Circles when a student or a few students take turns to initiate the dialogue and moderates it so that its objectives are achieved. Dialogue Circles can be a powerful tool which teachers can use to help students develop greater understanding of an issue, enhance their communicative abilities, and help looking at diverse perspectives.

### **What are the Guidelines for a successful Dialogue Circle?**

For any successful Dialogue Circle, the following points should be kept in mind:

- Strategies of nonviolent communication should be used by the participants
- As the teacher may have given the theme of the dialogue beforehand, it is important that the students come prepared with adequate readings.
- Each of the students should take responsibility for effective organization of the dialogue.
- Students should be able to show leadership skills in ensuring a meaningful dialogue.
- For an insightful session, students should be able to share interesting examples related to the theme of dialogue



- Students should show skills in asking questions. Questions should be open, non-judgemental and designed to learn more.
- Students should be able to show nuanced understanding of the theme of the dialogue and should be able come up with creative ideas and suggestions
- They should be able to offer constructive reactions to comments
- They should be able to summarize
- They should be able to critical analysis of the theme

### *2.3 ENCOURAGING MEDIATION*

In its simplest form, mediation is essentially to facilitate a conversation. According to United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation:

([https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation\\_UNDPA2012%28english%29\\_0.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GuidanceEffectiveMediation_UNDPA2012%28english%29_0.pdf))

Mediation is a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements. The premise of mediation is that in the right environment, conflict parties can improve their relationships and move towards cooperation. Mediation outcomes can be limited in scope, dealing with a specific issue in order to contain or manage a conflict, or can tackle a broad range of issues in a comprehensive peace agreement. Mediation is a voluntary endeavour in which the consent of the parties is critical for a viable process and a durable outcome.

The role of the mediator is influenced by the nature of the relationship with the parties: mediators usually have significant room to make procedural proposals and to manage the process, whereas the scope for substantive proposals varies and can change over time. Mediation as a tool of nonviolent conflict resolution can be used in families, educational institutions, in different organizations and groups. Conflicts arise due to distortion or breakdown in communication and mediation is a constructive initiative to plug the breakdown in communication for a win-win solution. In any successful mediation, the effort should be to care for the needs of all and not just for the needs of one side. The overarching goal is to make connections. Mediation can be a very effective tool to handle conflicts in schools. Schools can introduce peer mediation programmes



and develop capacities of students to take the lead in mediating in case of disputes between students.

### **What is Peer Mediation?**

Peer mediation is the process in which school children and young people help their peers handle and sort out their disagreements and arising conflicts. These conflicts can range from spreading rumours to fights in the playground. Thus, peer mediation is simply pupils helping their peers to resolve conflict in safe and positive ways, and peer mediation training is the process of giving pupils the knowledge, tools and skills to become peer mediators. Peer mediation sessions are always co-mediated, meaning two pupils will sit down together to mediate a conflict between two peers who are having a conflict or disagreement. (<https://www.scottishmediation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Research-on-Peer-Mediation-Overview-2015.pdf>)

### **Benefits of Peer Mediation:**

It helps students to develop skills to prevent and resolve conflicts through nonviolent means. Through this process, they are able to develop their values, skills, knowledge and attitudes.

- It inculcates a spirit of self-discipline amongst students
- It helps students to have a greater sense of belonging to the institution
- It helps in promoting critical thinking and reflection abilities
- It builds decision making abilities amongst students
- Peer mediation programmes helps in contributing towards cohesive schools and classrooms
- Having acquired the skills in mediating, students can use these skills in different settings like families and neighborhood.

The success of a student as a peer mediator depends on:

- Adept in using skills of nonviolent communication
- Friendliness
- Caring attitude
- Helping attitude
- Showing no prejudice while mediating
- Handles the dispute impartially and avoids taking sides



- Has a good and deep listening skill
- Is able to assimilate the facts from different perspectives
- Helping each group to see the situation from other group's perspectives, thereby encouraging empathetic connections

Now it is important to understand the process of peer mediation in the light of classrooms situations-

The student mediator explains the rules of mediation to those in conflict. The aim of the mediator is to make the disputants feel comfortable.

i) Identifying the problem:

In the next stage, the student mediator sincerely listens to each of the disputing students who explain the issue. The student mediator writes down the agenda which includes all the elements of the dispute.

ii) Identifying the facts:

Here the aim is to look at the underlying facts and feelings related to the dispute. The aim is to reframe the issue of conflict by looking at it from different perspectives.

iii) Finding out options:

The disputing groups are encouraged to brainstorm on the best solution to resolve the issue. The student mediator is expected to put together all the solutions. Sometimes the student mediator has to facilitate individual sessions with each disputant to ensure a better perspective to the issue.

iv) Agreement :

Based on the brainstorming sessions and individual discussions, the student mediator draws out a mutually agreeable solution which ensures a win-win resolution of the conflict.

## ***2.4 ENHANCING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE***

Besides skills of nonviolent conflict resolution, to ensure that students are able to manage themselves in a better way and relate to others around them, it is useful if teachers work with students to enhance their emotional intelligence. This can help them develop improved self-motivation and more effective communication skills.

Emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate



effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and the defusing of conflicts.<sup>1</sup> Emotional intelligence helps people to build stronger and more meaningful relationships, thrive in school, work, and home settings, and achieving individual career and other personal goals. It can also help individuals to seek connection with their own feelings, turn their intention into action, and make informed decisions about what matters most. To successfully cultivate emotional intelligence, in the observation of Mahatma Gandhi as a mentor, we can draw the connection between emotional intelligence with the awareness of moral intelligence. Moral Intelligence entails the individual's sense of "social responsibility and social relationship"<sup>2</sup> that connects the authenticity of an individual with another, to create inter-personal and emotional stability. Thus, to truly cultivate a peaceful classroom setting and joyful discussions, we must first, as educators, recognize our social and moral responsibilities towards our students, and their parents. Recognizing social impact and the power to influence our audiences makes the development of such self-awareness, necessary.

In the words of Science Fiction author Issacs Asimov, "education is not something you can finish." Linking the aspects of emotional and moral intelligence, to living principally on the ideas of non-violence communication, active listening, intentional cultivation of student's character and personality development, gives teachers themselves a moral and emotional compass to their daily objectives in the classroom. Reflect on "What moral values do I intend to inspire my students with?"; and the follow up question of "What needs do I seek to fulfil in my student's lives". In practical wisdom, we have come to understand that the human brain cannot be fully indoctrinated with the amount of information and knowledge the world is discovering today. Human beings do not operate as computation systems. What students need, is the inspiration towards learning new topics, to be encouraged to learn, and to deepen trust between teacher and the student. To do so, teachers need to be made self-aware of their role to engage with the

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi: A Phenomenon of Emotional and Moral Intelligence.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236735551\\_Gandhi\\_A\\_Phenomenon\\_of\\_Emotional\\_and\\_Moral\\_Intelligence#:~:text=intelligence%20which%20is%20surmounted%20by,dislikes%3B%20aptitude%20and%20attitude.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236735551_Gandhi_A_Phenomenon_of_Emotional_and_Moral_Intelligence#:~:text=intelligence%20which%20is%20surmounted%20by,dislikes%3B%20aptitude%20and%20attitude.)  
Website.

<sup>3</sup>Maamari, B. E., and Majdalani, J. F. (2019). The effect of highly emotionally intelligent teachers on their students' satisfaction. *Int. J. Educ. Manag.* 33, 179–193



students. Researches also showed the effectiveness of positive action in the development of teachers' emotional skills, increasingly recognizing teachers being emotionally intelligent as the basis for a good relationship with students, for providing a steady and wholesome classroom environment<sup>3</sup>(Maamari and Majdalani, 2019).

Emotional and Moral intelligence is also deepened when teachers can recognise social responsibility and encourages students to realise that even they have an important role to play in the life of the educator. When relationships are genuine and sincere, students will not superficially connect with their school, or their learning course materials. To achieve better attendance and participation from students, Educators must themselves recognize their own moral values, and how to adjust themselves before classes, emotionally and mentally, to live up to their own moral values. When Educators communicates authentically and sincerely to the students, students will feel at ease to trust the intentions of the educators and will bring their authentic self to the discussions as well. The teacher must develop empathic behaviour with the students to perceive, recognize, and become aware of the students' feelings and express this understanding to them. This provides a closer connection to the relationship of affection necessary for the quality of teaching and learning. Developing these empathic skills in students also means teaching them that we do not all feel the same in similar situations and toward the same people, that individuality guides our lives, and that each person experiences different needs, fears, desires, and hates (Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera, 2002).

Quite naturally, educators might feel overwhelmed with their task and responsibilities. It is recommended that in order to lower their own anxiety and stress, educators ought to practice taking deep breaths before conducting classes and find meaningful connections in their daily experiences and classroom teaching- learning process. When the teacher discovers ways to cultivate purpose, meaning, and joy within their own lives, they can seek to develop these aspects even further when engaging interpersonally with their students. Teachers who can perceive and express emotions are able to identify the emotions and their contents. As an example, when teachers perceive discouragement in students' faces, after decoding information about facial expressions, they change the pace of the lesson, giving an example to make the explanation most understandable of the theme.

Some Emotional and Moral Intelligence Exercises to practice in schools by teachers-

Create a daily or weekly journal entry, asking yourself:



- What are the objectives for this class?
- In the journal, build the habit of jotting down student names, their birthdays, and their interests.
- In class, call students by their names instead of saying- ‘you at the back’ or simply pointing with a scale or pointer at student’s face
- Always reflect upon the impact of your own behavior, and how this can potentially affect the students. Write them down in your journal
- Always end the class with words of appreciation towards the students. Remember: Without students, there will be no need for teachers!

### *2.5 STRENGTHENING SOLIDARITY IN SCHOOL*

For a cohesive school environment, it is important to motivate students, teachers and the authorities to work together as common unit. In this context, the goal should be to strengthen solidarity. Solidarity is characterized by mutual collaboration between individuals which makes it possible to overcome difficult situations. Human solidarity is founded on the principles of mutual respect of each other’s uniqueness. It echoes a deep sense of appreciation of our common humanity, an intrinsic realization of the essence of human interconnectedness. It also echoes that we are individuals with intrinsic self-worth.

The importance of human solidarity was underlined by Jacques Delors at the UN Conference on Environment, Rio de Janeiro, 1992, said,: “The world is our village: if one house catches fire, the roofs over all our heads are immediately at risk. If anyone of us tries to start rebuilding, his efforts will be purely symbolic. Solidarity has to be the order of the day: each of us must bear his own share of the general responsibility. We need a global ethics to guide us in solving global issues, in strengthening our global interdependence and solidarity.”While Delors was stressing on the need of global solidarity, in the local context, like in a school, the same principles hold. In fact when we weave in the ideas of solidarity, cohesion, community building, safe spaces to contribute one’s opinion and nonviolent resolution of disputes, the overarching goal becomes a march towards a culture of peace in the school ecosystem. Classroom experiences of diversity, skills in sharing one’s own thoughts, perspective taking, inclusivity, engaging in dialogues are all



lived experiences which helps students to collaborate together in solidarity. Hence the aim of teachers should be to contribute towards creating a culture of peace in the classroom by providing experiences which enable students to assimilate these principles. Also the aim should be to try and ensure on how the relationships amongst students and between students and teachers manifest these principles. In our previous sections, we have underlined the importance of nonviolent communication. When students and teachers start practicing nonviolent communication then automatically it will aim in encouraging solidarity amongst all the stakeholders in the school. Encouraging dialogues and discussions also enhances solidarity. Solidarity can be fostered through encouragement of random acts of kindness towards their fellow classmates. Guiding students to see their fellow classmates as “long-lasting friends” instead of competitors, cultivating good moral character and full-hearted personalities further contributes to the spirit of solidarity.

Some simple solidarity exercises that can be tried:

- Encourage students to make a speech addressing to the classmates about how you find the class, and how you feel about your classmates. This encourage sharing of emotions and vulnerability. Be sure to check the student’s speech beforehand to offer guidance on social communications.
- Encourage student-teacher-principal gatherings to learn about each other’s different upbringings. This helps to humanize and demystify the association of authority positions.
- Raise student awareness on differences (Cultural, Social, Economic, Religious, Political), and guide them to recognize that differences are to be respected. And friendships can be built despite such differences.
- Conduct culture appreciation workshops, to help students familiarize with cultures they have never been in touch with.

## *2.6 REFLECTION EXERCISES*

Participants are requested to respond to the following Reflection Exercises:



- I) You are the class teacher of Xth standard. You are finding a situation of increasing groupism in the classroom which is disrupting the teaching –learning outcome. Xth standard is critical as there will be board exams. You realize there is lack of mutual communication amongst different students. What is going to be your strategy to develop a nonviolent communication ecosystem in your classroom?
- II) Mutual communication amongst different sections of students in your school is becoming violent. There are multiple reasons. Please frame a nonviolent communication plan for your school so that there is greater engagement of students and the overall atmosphere of your institution becomes peaceful.
- III) You are the Class Teacher of Class 12. The students are getting ready for farewell function. There are three groups of students who have different views on how the farewell function should be organized. One group wants to go for a picnic and enjoy the farewell function. Another group wants the function to be organized in a hotel/restaurant. One group wants it in the School itself where they can spend time with their peers. Each group is adamant and it becomes an emotional issue.
- a) Which is the usual way a teacher might handle the issue?
- b) How would you resolve the conflict using the tools of nonviolent communication?
- IV) An effective dialogue should be like a handball match in which the teacher is just *one* of the players rather than the whole of the opposition team! The “ball” should be passed from teacher to student to another student to another and another and another before going back to the teacher and back again to another student and so on. Yet many dialogues in classrooms seem more like a tennis match with the “ball” going from teacher to student to teacher to another student and so on. (<https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/82735Chapter1CLDialogue.pdf>) Please share your thoughts on the above aspect of dialogue. How will you, as a teacher, facilitate dialogues in your classroom?
- V) We know that classroom peer mediators are students who can mediate issues between other students with very little (or no) teacher involvement. You think much of the small differences in your classroom can be handled easily by



encouraging peer mediators. Please enumerate on the steps you would consider in creating a group of classroom peer mediators?

