

# Section 10: Conflict Resolution Policy

Reviewed July 12, 2018

In providing opportunities for growth in our interpersonal wisdom and humanity, we expect commitment on all sides to come to mutually acceptable resolutions. Our goal is to focus on the positive experience that comes from using empathy and effort to understand others, as well as developing negotiation and coping strategies to find solutions that work.

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## Background:

The continual changes inherent in everyday life provide constant challenges for us to use our thinking skills and creativity, our wisdom and compassion, in order to adapt and grow. Therefore, conflict and problem solving are natural by-products of human interaction. We view the expression of human emotions to be part of the process of communicating and learning, and indeed a healthy lifestyle in general. We also consider the resolution of interpersonal conflict as an integral part of a school that focuses on the learning of the *whole child*. Members of the Banbury learning community have the right to express their opinions and feelings, as well as the right to resolve their problems, in a respectful environment, as long as the resolution of conflict contains safeguards for the individuals concerned—that of respect for each one's dignity, perceptions, emotions and needs. When there is commitment on all sides to come to a mutually acceptable resolution, it can be a positive experience. People may recognize and resolve deep individual issues, and all parties will feel accepted, respected and appreciated. This search for win-win solutions also enhances our coping strategies and negotiation skills. In support of this belief, we take a two-step procedural approach—rights and responsibilities—to address the spectrum of interventions required to resolve social problems.

The development of interpersonal understanding, compassion and social responsibility are the primary goals of conflict resolution. Therefore, students spend a great deal of time at this school in discussions regarding life, social topics, academic challenges, and emotional issues. Meetings with the Director, the

Principal, or the teachers and other staff are supportive and constructive. We feel very proud to offer this kind of personal mentorship, and we have discovered over the years that our students become comfortable with the process of negotiation and problem solving through this method. The development of interpersonal understanding, compassion, social responsibility, trust, respect and personal empowerment are the ultimate goals of conflict resolution.

### **Principles-Based Approach:**

General guidelines regarding acceptable social behaviour have evolved from discussions with the students at the beginning of each term. Over the years, a consistency was observed in the quality and quantity of the ideas generated. Eventually, they were written down in a condensed version, which remain on permanent display in every classroom. These guidelines are divided into two interrelated parts—rights and responsibilities. The interesting thing is that all of the essential needs of students and staff fall into the category of rights, and all of the self-evident responsibilities are a complementary mirror image of those rights, established for the purpose of protecting them. These guidelines governing the exercise of our rights and responsibilities are as follows:

<b>It is our RIGHT to:</b>	<b>It is our RESPONSIBILITY to:</b>
Be heard and listened to and have our wishes respected.	Listen to other people and respect them.
Work in peace.	Leave others alone when they are working.
Problem solve when disagreements occur.	Solve problems with the people involved and seek assistance from a teacher if necessary.
Have our things left alone.	Leave other people's things alone or ask to borrow something.
Be safe both physically and emotionally.	Keep our hands and feet to ourselves and speak nicely to one another.
Privacy.	Allow people their space.

To this end, teachers counsel and mentor learners with different strategies that can be used when dealing with conflicts, as well as model these various strategies through their own behaviour and for their own benefit. Through communication and mediation, teachers hope to assist all the parties concerned to achieve new insights for conflict resolution. We realize that change takes time and understanding. It may be a long and difficult process, with change required on both sides, in order to come to a mutually-satisfactory solution. All parties must be willing to return to the resolution process if the problem persists.

Strategies are different for each situation, and for the particular people involved. Nevertheless, there are some basic problem-solving techniques that are commonly used for resolving conflicts. Banbury encourages the communication steps that are outlined in *Parent Effectiveness Training*, by Dr. Thomas Gordon.

### **Procedures:**

1. Anyone perceiving that a conflict may be developing should first take their concerns directly, informally and verbally to any and all parties involved. At this point, we encourage communication between the individuals involved to come to a reasonable solution themselves. If conflict resolution is attempted by students on their own, they must be able to use the strategies below:
  - In voicing concerns, consideration for each other will be extended by the following means of showing respect:
    - Keep the topic of discussion the *concern* or the *problem* and not the people involved. Use of “I” statements is strongly encouraged.
    - Demonstrate a desire to reach a solution by allowing everyone involved time to express their opinions, and by listening carefully, so that each person speaking feels heard and has their feelings respected.
    - iii. It is helpful for both the speakers and the listeners to feel heard. It is helpful to clarify what the listener understands from the message received. This involves identifying the overtly expressed concerns, as well as the underlying feelings.

- iv. The use of paraphrasing, as in “I heard you say...” is an active form of message confirmation.
- Avoid the use of communication roadblocks like name-calling, sarcasm, threats, generalizations, unwanted advice, aggressive behaviour or the silent treatment.
- vi. It is expected that both parties remain involved in the discussion until resolution is achieved, or, failing an early agreement, until another time has been set for continuing the resolution process. Walking out on the discussion beforehand is neither acceptable nor fair to the other party, unless emotional or physical safety is an issue.
- It is our primary goal to reach, by consensus, agreements whereby BOTH PARTIES WIN. The underlying basis for all discussions and problem-resolutions is the attempt to **behave in an UNCONDITIONALLY CONSTRUCTIVE MANNER**. Punishments and rewards are avoided. When discovering differences in values, resolutions may be more difficult, and if common ground cannot be found, parties may agree to disagree and drop the topic.
- Whenever people are involved in a conflict, it is important to remember that **all persons** have value and the right to their own opinions, and that **all persons** must listen to each other. It is an act of respect to speak, even when complaining, with both honesty and gentleness. In order to be effective, critical comments must be seen as the communication of differing viewpoints, with the goal being the arrival at a compromise or change of understanding, with empathy being shown on both sides. We see it as a process of refinement in problem solving.
- Sometimes problems do not get “solved” right away, according to all parties involved, since:
  - All the elements crucial to the issue are not identified or acknowledged, and thus remain unaddressed. This interferes with the attempt to resolve the major issues;

- The parties at stake have different priorities and are aiming in different directions;
  - iii. Personality issues or undeveloped social skills may lead to one person being focussed on his/her own desires, and unable to value or respect the desires or needs of others;
  - iv. Distrust disables the process. Attitudes of participants may turn negative as frustrations and distrust mount, and parties may stop trying to be unconditionally constructive, thus leading to a downward spiral of preconceptions regarding the intentions of the other side.
- Therefore, we are not necessarily upset if complaints are not resolved right away. It may be a time-consuming and challenging process. It may require *willingness and ability* for all participants to change focus or perception, in order to come to a position of win-win for all parties. At all times, we attempt to bring people together to face issues as a team. We want open and gentle communication in a spirit of helpfulness, respect and positive thinking.
2. If a resolution of concerns has not been met by the participants themselves, we encourage students to seek out a teacher, or some other neutral party, to act as a mediator. During this mediation, *the above expectations regarding the process still hold*. If the initial teacher or neutral party is unable to resolve the concerns, then the matter is brought to the Director or Principal, and another attempt at resolution is made. In any case, all adults who are asked to get involved will:
- Ensure that all parties are aware that a mediator is now involved, and that they agree that everyone involved will be present in the process to achieving a reasonable solution.
  - In order to prevent hearsay, and to allow participants to speak for themselves, first ask them what happened from their points of view, and what strategies they have attempted so far.
  - Following this, all parties take turns to respond to the ideas expressed. We discuss the similarities and differences in these viewpoints. Often at this stage, the mere fact that clear

communication has occurred may allow the participants to see any misunderstandings that may be at the root of the dispute, and to resolve the issues more easily.

- Ensure that all information needed to bring about a solution has been brought forward and examined in a non-threatening way by all involved.
  - Remain neutral throughout, and ask questions to clarify the issues, overt thoughts and underlying emotions involved.
  - Model active listening through paraphrasing with empathy and compassion, and encourage the use of “I” messages.
  - Ensure that all parties will be heard **without interruption**, and encourage the expression and acknowledgement of feelings. Take turns, to avoid an individual monopolizing the conversation.
  - If the issues in a dispute are complex, confusing or interrelated, ask the individuals to identify and clarify the initial step in the dispute, as well as subsequent issues. Since punishment is not the point of this problem-solving approach, ask what different and creative options there are for resolving it, and for avoiding similar disputes in the future.
  - Find elements of common purpose in order to come to a workable position of win-win for **all** parties that addresses all aspects of the dispute.
  - Encourage compromise, collaboration and altruistic thinking.
  - Arrange for follow-up meetings to assess progress.
  - At appropriate times, ask parents to join a problem solving session, when doing so would add wise words, background information or emotional support.
  - Inform parents afterwards about the process if the circumstances are of a serious nature and require parental input or assistance.
3. Conflict resolution between parents and staff, students or administration will be handled in a manner consistent with the steps outlined above. In addition:
- It may happen that, having attempted a resolution according to the procedures described above, the first steps may prove unsuccessful. At that point, a formal complaint may be written and submitted to the

Director and/or the Principal, who will set up a meeting to discuss the matter. If the matter is resolved at the initial meeting, the resolution will be recorded and signed by the Principal, the complainant, and other parties involved.

- When a family/student seems in crisis, professional counseling, psychological assessment and/or support programs will be highly recommended and expected for change to occur.
- When resolution seems impossible between the parties involved, then the intervention of a mutually-acceptable formal mediator may be requested by either party. Any resulting costs must be negotiated.

<b>What we want:</b>	<b>What we <u>don't</u> want:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students having a voice;</li> <li>■ Students becoming confident in expressing their opinions and bringing up problems to solve;</li> <li>■ Lots of discussions;</li> <li>■ Attempts for win/win solutions;</li> <li>■ Good communication and negotiation;</li> <li>■ Use of P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness Training);</li> <li>■ Active listening;</li> <li>■ Attitude of caring, gentleness and helpfulness;</li> <li>■ Desire to understand and be respectful of others' needs and perceptions;</li> <li>■ Empathy and compassion;</li> <li>■ Parent/teacher team efforts;</li> <li>■ Encouragement and positive outlooks;</li>   <li>■ Analytical approach;</li> <li>■ Long term and deep solutions;</li> <li>■ Persistence in revisiting on-going problems until they are solved;</li> <li>■ Children helping children;</li> <li>■ Kindly, peaceful, supportive atmosphere;</li> <li>■ Emphasis on students' demonstrations of self-responsibility and autonomy;</li> <li>■ Ability to accept being "in the wrong" and to make amends;</li> <li>■ Respect between the ages;</li> <li>■ Trust.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students afraid to discuss issues;</li> <li>■ Students letting problems fester;</li> <li>■ Emphasis on punishment and reward methods;</li> <li>■ Students being told what the consequences will be, and having them applied without discussion;</li> <li>■ Harsh, aggressive or violent words and actions by any party;</li> <li>■ Quick and arbitrary judgments;</li> <li>■ Short term, shallow thinking;</li> <li>■ Win/lose, selfish solutions;</li> <li>■ Stressful, competitive, unsupportive atmosphere;</li>   <li>■ Adults or students focused on power and control;</li> <li>■ Inability to accept responsibility for being "in the wrong", thus displaying reproachful, non-repentant behaviour;</li> <li>■ Disrespect in any form;</li> <li>■ Distrust.</li> </ul>