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## Conflict resolution starts early

### Newfield program encourages kids to find alternate solutions

By DARISE JEAN-BAPTISTE  
Journal Staff

NEWFIELD - Cool, warm or hot, anger is not a bad emotion.

"It is OK to get angry, but it just depends on what you do when you get angry," said Linda Getz, social worker for Newfield Elementary School and Kid Talk coordinator.

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼ Established in conjunction with the Community Dispute Resolution Center, Kid Talk offers small groups of students at Newfield Elementary School an outlet for building conflict resolution skills.

Two groups of five students in grades kindergarten through second and third through fifth meet between 2 and 3 p.m., which is also remediation period for the entire school. Kid Talk students engage in activities where they explore how conflict arises and the different ways to deal with it.

"Can you think of another choice you could have made?" Getz asked a second-grader, who said he became angry when his brother asked to share their PlayStation game.

"We could have played two-player," the student replied.

Though conflict is a natural part of one's life, Getz said Kid Talks aims to help students see and use their positive options in conflict situations. With a \$15,000 Healthy Families focused grant received through Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, school officials teamed with the CDRC to develop the Kid Talk curriculum. Parents and teachers also provided input on the program.

Caitlin Connelly, CDRC youth and family program coordinator, said developing Kid Talk was the first time the organization had worked with elementary school- aged children. The CDRC considered working with Newfield as an opportunity to expand the organization's scope, Connelly said.



**MATTHEW HINTON/Journal Staff**

Newfield first-grader Patrick Banfield, 7, left, pulls away a toy car from second-grader Derek Mosher, 7, during a scenario to teach kids how to act in confrontations. The conflict resolution program offered at Newfield Elementary School engages students in exercises that help in understanding emotions and dealing with differences.

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"I think we can have more positive affects if we start younger," Connelly said.

Kid Talk coordinators invited students they thought would benefit from the program to participate and ones who would fit into the program schedule, Principal Vicki Volpicelli said. A total of 16 students were given permission slips to have signed by their parents and 10 expressed interest, she said.

"Ideally, these are skills we want all kids to have," Volpicelli said.

Kid Talk is implemented in conjunction with the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions Support initiative or PBIS. The initiative promotes a safe, caring and respectful school environment.

Designed to approach conflict resolution in eight distinct units, Kid Talk delves into the core of conflict and addresses the right and wrong turns one can make when dealing with it.

During the Dealing with Anger unit, students in social worker Jamie McCaffrey's group role-played in a scenario, where two students played basketball and another student stole the ball. McCaffrey and the students walked through each point of the conflict, from the initial shock of disrespect to the final resolution, in which the three students found a way they could play together.

"We realize people can experience a greater quality of life if they can learn how to deal with conflict in constructive ways instead of destructive ways as people often do," Connelly said.

At the end of each session, students are given a letter to take home to their parents or caregivers to sign in recognition of the activities they participated in during the session.

With positive feedback from parents about the program, along with exciting results shown from students, Kid Talk coordinators are confident about building more concepts into the curriculum and expanding its reach. Connelly said she'd like to work with other school districts in implementing Kid Talk.

"I think it's fair to say kids are practicing these skills," Volpicelli said.

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**Originally published April 11, 2006**

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Newfield fifth-grader Brian Schermerhorn points at fifth-grader Daymone Meeks, bottom left, while school social worker Jamie McCaffrey tries to explain who is at fault in a conflict scenario. Also taking part in the scenario is fifth-grader Michael Teeter, top right.