

COUNSELING CORNER WITH MARCIA WEILL
How to Communicate with RESPECT When We Have a Problem

Our lessons this year have focused on RESPECT. Last trimester, students identified their heroes, thinking about why they admire a person (not just wealth and popularity), and trying to incorporate those admirable qualities into their lives. We asked, “Would my hero be proud of me right now?” Students who can name their heroes are more likely to set positive goals for themselves because of their role models/heroes.

This trimester, our lesson focused on how to communicate with RESPECT when there is a problem. There were two parts to the lesson. First, we need to stop and think about how upset we are, and take measures to calm ourselves before we start talking.

Kindergarten and first graders sang a song –“I have to stop and think about it, I have to stop and make a plan, so I can go and solve my problem, I just know that I can.”

With the older students, I used a homemade “anger meter”, something like the control knob on a stovetop, from 1 (low) to 2-3 (simmer) to 4-6 (fry) to (7-8) boil to 9 (burn) to 10 (explode)!!! Before we can communicate respectfully, we have to ask ourselves

- 1) Does this person intend to hurt me? –usually the answer is no, if the answer is yes, GET AN ADULT!!
- 2) Is this a good time to talk to the person about the problem—am I calm enough on the anger meter, is the other person ready to listen?

The second part of the lesson was practicing the three steps—PROBLEM, FEELING, ASK. For our youngest students we called it USING OUR WORDS. The hardest step is figuring out what the problem is. Most people, who haven’t calmed down on the anger meter first, would begin by blaming the other person and probably making things worse. The problem is the thing we want to be able to do but cannot because of the situation. We begin with the word I. Here are some examples: “I can’t fix dinner because the kitchen is a mess” instead of “You messy kids.” Or “I want to do well on this test but I can’t concentrate” instead of “Stop it, Be quiet!!”

Once we figure out the problem, the rest is easy. It goes together something like this:

I want to play with you and I don’t understand why you are whispering. I’m feeling left out. Will you please play with me?

I want to play tetherball and I just got pushed. I’m feeling angry. Will you please go to the end of the line?

Why do we include the feeling step? It’s because we want the other person to understand us, to learn empathy. Why do we stop and plan ahead what to say? It’s so we can learn to solve our own problems and also to practice communicating with respect, beginning with taking responsibility for first getting calm. It’s not easy, for children or adults. We want our students to learn to solve their problems independently and then ask for help from an adult. Before we adults step in to rescue, we can ask, “What have you already done to solve the problem?” If students remembered this lesson, they will know to STOP first and calm down and then communicate with respect using the three steps. I hope I have explained this lesson well enough that you can practice it at home. Thanks again for the opportunity to do these lessons at Sundahl.

