What Are the Similarities and Differences between “Conflict Resolution” and “Violence Prevention”?

In their work to promote school safety, practitioners use two primary strategies: “violence prevention” and “conflict resolution”. While these terms sound similar, they refer to two distinct approaches, with separate goals, methods, and outcomes. This fact sheet compares and contrasts these two techniques in order to clarify the distinction between them and demonstrate how they can be used together to maintain peaceful, conflict-free schools. A good understanding of these two strategies can also lead to increased collaboration and integration of efforts between these two fields, further advancing school violence prevention efforts.

What Is Meant by the Term “Violence Prevention”?
The field of violence prevention is grounded in the understanding that violence is symptomatic of problems in the larger arenas of family, school, community, and society as a whole. Thus, violence prevention utilizes a broad, systemic approach to minimize, reduce, and eliminate injury by addressing underlying causes. Violence prevention is based on some fundamental principles of public health, including:

1. **Primary prevention** - prevent violence before it occurs
2. **Data-driven approaches**: use quantitative and qualitative information to describe the nature of the problem, as well as identify risk and resiliency factors
3. **Collaboration**: involve multiple partners in efforts to produce change
4. **Population-based strategies**: develop community-wide solutions that impact both individuals and the overall health environment

What Is Meant by the Term “Conflict Resolution”?
The field of conflict resolution characterizes conflict as an event in which two parties are in opposition; it prescribes a specific action plan to help participants in the conflict resolve their differences. Comprehensive conflict resolution programs in schools also aim to change the climate of the school, not just the attitudes and actions of individual students. Such programs include training in conflict resolution skills for peer mediators, students, and school personnel. Training participants learn to use these skills to promote a safe and supportive school environment.

Conflict resolution operates on multiple levels, examples of which include:

1. **Intra-personal level**: a person trying to decide whether or not to do drugs
2. **Interpersonal level**: an argument between two students
3. **Inter-group level**: gang conflicts, ethnic conflicts
4. **Societal level**: racism, violence
5. **International level**: war between two or more countries

The chart below describes some of the differences between violence prevention and conflict resolution.
**Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence Prevention</th>
<th>Conflict Resolution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Concerned <em>only</em> with violence-related events and their underlying issues.</td>
<td>- Addresses conflict issues that <em>may or may not be related to violence</em>.</td>
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<td>- <em>Inequalities</em> are considered as endemic to the environment, therefore requiring broad-based change.</td>
<td>- <em>Assumes equality</em>: two rational beings are equal and prepared to negotiate for an agreement.</td>
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<td>- <em>Lethality and risk addressed</em>: risk factors that may increase or decrease the likelihood of a conflict becoming violent are examined. Violence prevention practitioners may accept that a conflict will occur and even be violent, but they will focus on reducing the extent or lethality of the violence. This includes efforts to reduce the availability of guns and alcohol in the environment, and reducing the risk of negative consequences if violence were to occur.</td>
<td>- <em>Conflict addressed</em>: focuses on the conflict event, as opposed to the factors leading up to it. Risk factors are usually addressed in the resolution/mediation process after the conflict has already occurred.</td>
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**Additional Resources**


*The National Center for Conflict Resolution Education*: [http://www.nccre.org](http://www.nccre.org)


*Peace Center*: [http://www.comcat.com/~peace/PeaceCenter.html](http://www.comcat.com/~peace/PeaceCenter.html)

For a copy of *Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings*, call the Juvenile Justice clearinghouse at (800) 638-8736. The guide is also available online from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at [http://www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org).