

ing it!

Stefan Bachmann (left) and Steve Graves (right) demonstrate the ugly face of conflict.



Nickie, a student council officer at Wheatland-Chili, attempts to serve as a mediator when her friends are embroiled in a dispute.

"I try to calm them down, but it's not always easy. Some people call me nosy for it," she said.

Steve's work with Rochester Teens for Peace, he said, has enabled him to develop "the traditional count-to-10 mentality."

Very angered and violent reactions to things don't last very long, so anger doesn't survive well on its own. It just goes away," Steve said.

Because these emotions often blow over so quickly, Steve concluded that "violence is never a logical action."

Dan Mesiti has followed these same ideals in his role as a peer mediator at Brockport High School. His duties require him to meet with students who have requested to talk to a peer mediator. If the conflict can't be resolved through Dan's intervention, the matter is taken to a school official.

Like Steve, Dan believes in counting to 10 before acting violently — advice he gives to the students he helps.

"I ask them, 'Would it really be smart to do this?' A lot of the kids don't think of the consequences," Dan said.

Getting to the truth of the matter, Dan said, usually helps defuse a lot of hard feelings.

"You've got to keep them talking. Once you find the real story, you settle it," said Dan, 16, from Brockport's Church of the

Nativity.

Conversing in a calm tone, he added, is also highly advisable.

"When we start yelling, it's a sign of losing control of the situation," Dan said.

Nickie said she attempts to avoid conflict in her own life by keeping a close check on her emotions.

"I try to stay in control of the situation because if I don't, I sink down to the other person's level," she said.

Alicia in Elmira said she is currently attempting to help patch up a falling-out between two of her friends. Careful listening, she said, is a skill that seems to come in handy as well.

"I try to keep my mouth shut. Then I try and give advice so that it doesn't cause a problem," she said.

Alicia gained some of this wisdom through her own personal experience last year, when she and a friend sought out a peer mediator at Elmira Free Academy to help settle a dispute.

Academy to help settle a dispute.

"We came to the agreement that if we couldn't say anything nice to each other, not to say anything at all," she said. Alicia added that she and her friend made up and have remained close.

In addition, Alicia said, she has worked hard to avoid initiating conflict with other students.

"I try not to pick on anyone who isn't popular. I used to go along with my friends, but now I say something to them if they do that," Alicia said.

Dan and Steve emphasize that many conflicts are products of the imagination and are not based on fact.

"Most of the time it's about a friend starting a rumor," Dan said.

"The person you think is out to get you may not even know you're there," Steve stated. "Generally, people escalate things in their minds."

Nickie cited Jesus Christ as a good role model for conflict management. She noted that when doubters confronted him, his peaceful attitude quickly silenced their anger.

"He stayed calm and reversed the situation," Nickie remarked.

Steve added that Jesus instructed his followers to love their enemies and to offer no resistance to evildoers. However, he added that this example is difficult for people to live by when the going gets tense, and that it's quite normal for anger to be the first emotion to register.

"Nobody's perfect, and I'm not saying that I succeed every time. But don't feel bad about getting angry," Steve advised. "It's going to be a natural response — so make it a learning experience."

EDITORS' NOTE: Teens for Peace will hold an informational gathering from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 17, at St. Mary's Church, 95 N. Main St., Canandaigua. Youth and adult representatives from all parishes in the Diocese of Rochester are invited to attend. For details, call 716/234-6347.

Coming next Week:  
Discussions  
on profane  
language.

Steve's experience with Rochester Teens for Peace, he said, has greatly improved his ability to manage conflict in his own life. He is an original member of the group, which began in 1993. This organization works toward the prevention of violence through seminars and other community activities.

Prior to his involvement with the organization, Steve said he often got into fights while attending Charlotte Middle School. His attitude began to change, however, when he saw innocent people get hurt as a result of violent actions. He recalled the day he observed a fight in which one of the participants tumbled to a bystander. The collision caused that bystander to fall through a window, and she was badly cut.

School seems to be a breeding ground for quickly developing conflicts, Nickie Keenan observed.

"Part of it is that I go to such a small school. Everybody knows each other, and

tensions are higher because everybody gets into each other's business. There are times, definitely, when we're closer than any other school — but lots of times you need breathing space," said Nickie, 16, who attends Wheatland-Chili High School.

Alicia pointed out that adolescents can be particularly vicious toward each other, so high schoolers seem to be prone to conflict.

"You know how teenagers are — they like to make fun of people who don't meet up to their standards," Alicia said.

Because of these circumstances, Nickie said, small issues can quickly become big ones.

"We've had people in literal fistfights from bumping into each other in the hall at a certain point in time," Nickie stated. She added that even during her youth-group meetings at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville, there have been conflicts "over girlfriends."

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