

Tips for managing conflicts during your field experience

During your time in the field, whether in early field experience or student teaching, you will be under someone else's authority, and you may at times feel a lack of control. Students, teachers, supervisors, parents and other adults will influence your placement satisfaction, sometimes negatively. Conflict in the teaching profession is not rare and can be uncomfortable, but how you respond to disagreement and criticism may make the difference between a satisfying experience and a miserable fourteen weeks. Act rather than react, and don't let outside influences overwhelm your self-control. Likewise, you will always want to keep the best interests of students in mind throughout any school-related disagreement. Remember, also, that handling conflict in person avoids the potential for misunderstandings that may occur with less personal methods of communication. Below you will find a few tips for handling conflict. We would encourage you to seek out additional strategies that may work more suitably for your individual style. If you need help handling conflict please call 406-994-6277.

1. Stop and count to 10. Take a deep breath and gather your thoughts before speaking.
2. Communicate, in person, with simple and direct remarks using I-language. Wait until each party has had a chance to cool down before discussing what happened and any possible consequences. Address tension when it is first noticed in an honest and respectful manner.
3. Acknowledge the other party's feelings and desires. It is acceptable to be upset but emotions need to be handled professionally.
4. Engage in active listening by clarifying the other party's statements and ensuring you understand their frustration.
5. Be empathetic and understand conflict develops over time and often takes time to dissipate.
6. Employ a respectful tone and body posture indicating your willingness to engage in a discussion. Keep your voice calm and steady. Do not accept yelling, disrespectful or vulgar language from either yourself or the other party.
7. Avoid sarcasm and minimizing someone else's experience or feelings. Now is not the time to tell them you know how they feel or what they are going through.
8. Once an issue has been dealt with let it go. Do not carry grudges and accept closure once the situation has been dealt with.
9. Identify the root of the concern so it may be analyzed and rectified. Be sure to keep in mind the difference between the person and the issue.
10. Avoid generalizing statements like "You always" or "You never". Try to keep heat of the moment generalizations from clouding the desire to address the issue(s) at hand.