Managing Interpersonal Conflicts

In support of the ‘Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships’ module in Liberal Studies of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum, this lesson plan aims to provide guidance through case studies and scenario discussions for students to consider how to manage interpersonal conflicts and ethical dilemmas, adopt positive attitudes towards conflicts, and uphold personal integrity.

Related ICAC resources on moral education:

Module 4 of ‘ICAC Investigators’ Moral Education Package for Senior Secondary Liberal Studies (in Chinese only)

(http://www.me.icac.hk/new/newsec/solutiondifficult.htm)

Youth and Moral Education Office, ICAC
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Issues to be Explored:
How should youngsters manage interpersonal conflicts (such as value conflicts)? How to resolve conflicts in a positive manner and uphold personal integrity?

Intended Learning Outcomes:
After completing the module, students should be able to:

1. reflect on the causes of interpersonal conflicts and their relationship with values
2. understand the principles to be considered in resolving conflicts among peers and be able to uphold personal integrity during its course
3. establish positive values and attitudes including integrity, self-respect, respect for others and responsibility

Target:
Secondary 4-5 students

Time Allocation:
2 periods (about 80 minutes)
**Teaching Flow:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Stages</th>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Reference Materials</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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| **Warm-up Activities** | - Play the video ‘Separate Business from the Personal’ (about 5 minutes) to introduce the topic of ‘Managing Personal Conflicts’.  
  - Teachers may play the video up to 3’18” where the cause of conflict among the characters is shown, then ask questions about the video to encourage students to make a decision by putting themselves in the main character’s shoes.  
  - Play the rest of the video to demonstrate how a wrong decision will lead to negative consequences on self and the society. | Micro Film Series on Business Ethics: ‘Separate Business from the Personal’  
Teaching Suggestions (Annex 1) | 15 minutes |
| **Development** | Managing value conflicts among peers | ‘What do you think?’ Scenarios (Annex 2) | 40 minutes |
| |  
  - Scenario analysis: value conflicts among peers – ‘What do you think?’  
  - Teachers choose a suitable scenario in Annex 2 for discussion.  
  - Students form groups for discussion (scenario analysis and conflict management) and presentations.  
  - Students may share their experience of handling value conflicts among friends, then try to suggest some ways of thinking or decision-making models which are conducive to solving problems.  
  - Highlight the importance of upholding principles and integrity in the course of handling conflicts among peers. | Ways of Managing Conflicts (For Teachers’ Reference) (Annex 3) | 20 minutes |
| | Ways of managing conflicts  
  - Use the characters in the video ‘Separate Business from the Personal’ as an example to explain how to apply the 3-step decision-making model.  
  - Introduce other ways of managing conflicts and guide students to apply them on the case in the video.  
  - Principles for managing conflicts. | | |
| **Conclusion** | Reiterate the importance of upholding the core value of integrity in managing interpersonal conflicts. Encourage students to handle interpersonal conflicts with positive attitudes, such as self-respect, respect for others and responsibility. | | 5 minutes |
Annex 1  Teaching Suggestions

Play the video ‘Separate Business from the Personal’ from the Micro Film Series on Business Ethics
• Teachers may assist students to understand the video by introducing its synopsis and the characters.

Synopsis of ‘Separate Business from the Personal’
Jane unexpectedly discovers that Alex, the purchasing manager of the company, has been making extra money to pay for his wedding by fabricating quotes and placing purchase orders with an outside business secretly set up by him. Jane and Alex have been long-acquainted friends. Should Jane report Alex or turn a blind eye for the sake of friendship?

• Teachers may play the video up to 3’18” and ask the following question:
  - What interpersonal conflict has to be handled by Jane?

• Play the rest of the video and invite students to respond to the following questions:
  - What negative consequences will Jane and the society suffer because of her wrong decision?
  - If you were Jane, how would you handle the interpersonal conflict and make the decision?

Suggested answers (for reference only)

What interpersonal conflict and ethical dilemma is Jane facing?
• Jane unexpectedly discovers that her long-acquainted friend, Alex, has been making extra money by fabricating quotes. She is torn between reporting Alex and turning a blind eye for the sake of friendship.

What negative consequences will Jane and the society suffer because of her wrong decision?
• After the matter is discovered by the company, Jane, being suspected of conspiring with Alex to defraud the company, is suspended during the investigation. By covering up the crime committed by Alex, Jane not only indirectly assists him in deceiving the employer with false documents, but also brings detrimental effects to the level playing field for business.

If you were Jane, how would you handle the interpersonal conflict and make the decision?
• Students may answer the question in their own ways. Teachers may point out that interpersonal conflicts may be caused by different viewpoints, values and interests, etc. When conflict arises, one should analyse the differences of both parties, consider ways of managing conflicts and make proper decisions (please refer to Annex 3 for details).

1. Group activity: Teachers may choose a suitable scenario for students to discuss and give presentations:
   - What are your views on the characters’ behaviour in the scenario? Why?
   - If you were a character in the scenario, how would you decide/handle the situation?

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<th>Scenarios</th>
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2. Reflection questions:
   - What kind of conflicts are the characters in the scenarios facing?
   - What are the causes of these conflicts?  Are they related to the characters’ values?
   - How to uphold personal principles and integrity in the course of managing conflicts among peers?
Annex 3  Ways of Managing Conflicts (For Teachers’ Reference)

The 3-step decision-making model described below will help us make proper decisions when facing value conflicts.

Step 1: Analyse the Issue

- Sort out the facts and identify the value conflicts.
- Objectively assess the situation of the person(s) concerned and the possible consequences that the decision will have on them.
- Identify possible alternatives in handling conflicts.

Step 2: Legal Requirements, Regulations and Self Values

- ‘Legal Requirements’, ‘Regulations’ and ‘Self Values’ are the criteria for assessing each alternative:
  - ‘Legal Requirements’ refer to the legislation which should be considered when assessing whether the decision will lead to any illegal acts.
  - ‘Regulations’ refer to school rules or staff code of conduct which may serve as behaviour guidance.
  - ‘Self Values’ refer to the personal values such as honesty and fairness.

Step 3: Sunshine Test

- Ask yourself whether you dare to discuss the issue openly and whether you are able to tell others your decision with a clear conscience.
Application of the 3-step Decision-making Model

- Example: In the video ‘Separate Business from the Personal’, Jane discovers that her long-acquainted friend, Alex, has been making extra money by fabricating quotes. What should she do?

**Step 1: Analyse the Issue**

- Jane’s dilemma: should she report Alex or turn a blind eye for the sake of friendship?
- List out all person(s) concerned and conflict handling alternatives. Assess the pros and cons of each alternative and the possible consequences that it will have on the person(s) concerned:

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<tr>
<th>Person(s) concerned in the scenario</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Pros/cons and consequences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane (self) Alex Kay (Alex’s fiancée) Company Other colleagues Other suppliers Clients of the company</td>
<td>Turn a blind eye Assist Alex to cover up his act Advise Alex to turn himself in Make a report</td>
<td>(Example) If Jane decides to turn a blind eye, she can avoid having conflicts with Alex who can also keep making extra money to pay for his wedding. However, Jane will have to face severe consequences: Jane will implicate herself The company’s business and reputation will be affected It is unfair to other rule-abiding colleagues and suppliers Interests of the company’s clients will be prejudiced</td>
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**Step 2: Legal Requirements, Regulations and Self Values**

- ‘Legal Requirements’, ‘Regulations’ and ‘Self Values’ are the criteria for assessing each alternative for resolving conflicts.

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<tr>
<th>Will she break the law?</th>
<th>She will be investigated for suspected conspiracy.</th>
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<td>Will she violate the staff code of conduct?</td>
<td>She will violate the staff code of conduct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will she fail to uphold her personal values?</td>
<td>She will be unable to uphold her own principles such as honesty and fairness.</td>
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**Step 3: Sunshine Test**

- In the video, Jane cannot pass the sunshine test as she feels ill at ease after deciding to turn a blind eye.

**Conclusion:**

- Jane should not turn a blind eye to Alex’s unlawful acts for friendship’s sake. She should uphold personal integrity when handling interpersonal conflicts and report Alex’s crime.
1. **Reflect on the causes of conflicts and the principles for managing conflicts:**
   - A cure-all method? (Is there any cure-all method for all kinds of conflicts?)
   - What makes them different? (Will the method of managing conflicts be different according to people, issues, places or specific conditions?)
   - Foolproof? (Is there any foolproof method that works every time?)

2. **Methods of managing conflicts – Thomas Kilman’s five types of conflict management styles:**
   - Competition (high concern for self, low concern for others) – The conflicts are resolved by wills.
   - Avoidance (low concern for both self and others) – One party is aware of potential conflicts and avoids confronting the other party.
   - Accommodation (low concern for self, high concern for others) – One party tries to meet the goals and wants of the other party first. One’s own immediate goals (relatively less important) are put aside.
   - Collaboration (high on both concerns) – One respects the other person’s goals and work out strategies to have both parties’ goals fulfilled.
   - Compromise (moderate on both concerns) – Both parties are fairly equal in power, competing for a while, then reach agreement to get part of their goals fulfilled.


3. **Important principles for conflict management:**
   - Put yourself in the other party’s shoes, try to understand his/her motive/thinking
   - Communicate in a calm and sincere manner
   - Be careful with your own attitude and tone
   - Be honest to the other party about your own feeling/opinions
   - Have a sit-down discussion to get a consensus

4. **Develop positive attitudes:**
   - Integrity
   - Self-respect
   - Respect for others
   - Responsibility