

# PEACE POWER TOOLS

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## *Crisis Teaching*

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### **Summary:**

Crisis teaching is a simple, four-step behavior strategy developed at Boys and Girls Town that adults can use to help youth defuse situations in which young people are losing emotional control. The goal of crisis teaching is to help youth regain self-control and develop the skills necessary to manage future responses to conflict. The four steps involved in crisis teaching are: addressing the behavior, monitoring one's own self-control, ensuring the youth's self control, and engaging the youth in follow-up teaching once emotions have moderated. The crisis teaching format helps the adult focus on the youth's behavior of talking or arguing, rather than on the words that are being said.

### **Resources Needed:**

- None

### **Implementation Steps:**

- First, address the behavior by interrupting it and then provide the youth with an alternative behavior (i.e. "Julie, you need to sit down now"). Although many negative behaviors are best ignored, out-of-control behavior cannot be ignored because it is likely to escalate if there is no response.
- Second, monitor one's own self control. An adult's reaction can go a long way toward either calming or escalating an out-of-control situation. Therefore, adults need to develop anger defusing skills, such as viewing the situation as a teaching moment rather than a challenge to one's own authority or ego. Adults who find themselves losing control many need to take a few minutes to calm down or ask someone else to take over.
- Third, ensure that the youth has self-control by offering calm and empathetic statements, recognition and praise for steps toward calmness, choices for immediate action, and reminders of the improved consequences of calmer behavior (i.e. "If you calm down now, we can work this out without having to take it any further). If the situation is unsafe, refer to organizational policy, as physical intervention or other staff involvement may be necessary.
- Fourth, engage youth in follow-up teaching once emotions have moderated. Follow-up teaching can involve direct instruction as to what the problem behavior is, why it is a problem, and what the consequences are. Consequences, such as a small loss of privileges, can be implemented at this point.

### **Variations:**

- There are many similar approaches to defusing crisis situations. All rely on communicating empathy, and managing the emotions of both the person in crisis and the person in a helping role.

### **Rationale and Evidence Base:**

Crisis teaching, which was developed at Boys and Girls Town, is a straightforward respectful discipline procedure that can be used in most settings that work with youth. Crisis teaching, when used as a component of and adjunct to the core PEACE POWER strategy, holds considerable promise for reducing coercive, threatening, and violent actions in organizational and community settings. There is evidence that youth who face adverse situations without using negative or hurtful behaviors are more capable of getting their needs met, better equipped to handle stress, positively change their behaviors and resolve conflict more successfully. Research shows that when youth are taught to use a self-control

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strategy, as is done in crisis teaching, they begin to assume responsibility for constructively developing positive behaviors. Using crisis teaching under pressure can be very challenging, so it is recommended that opportunities are offered to practice with role-plays and all of the steps are outlined and posted. Frequent practice will help crisis teaching become a familiar part of the adult's repertoire before it is needed.

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Prepared by Julia M. Wesley & Mark A. Mattaini, September 2007