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## Kid Talk: Learning the lessons of life

There was a time when children learned important lessons long before the first school bell rang. Back before soccer moms were in a hurry to get to the next league tournaments. Back before television and video games dominated summer days. Back then, kids gathering in neighborhood groups had to organize themselves. Sandlot baseball or dolls, it didn't matter, kids had to learn to cooperate with peers and develop peaceful ways to resolve disputes so the games could go on.

That has changed dramatically. A 2000 study found that kids spend 50 percent more time in structured, adult-managed recreational programs than their predecessors did in 1980. Barely a factor in childhood just more than a half century ago, a University of Michigan study notes that children today average 20 hours of TV a every week - watching about 10,000 rapes, assaults and murders each year - and much of that viewing is done alone.

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Among the tube time and the parent-planned schedules, what's been lost is that gentle childhood anarchy that once taught us all to learn to work together.

That's why a new program taking root in Newfield Elementary School is a model worth replicating. Working with the Ithaca-based Community Dispute Resolution Center and a \$15,000 grant secured by Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, Newfield social worker Linda Getz is coordinating the Kid Talk effort to work with about 10 kids from kindergarten to fifth grade. The students meet in two groups based on age for about an hour a day, and the Kid Talk program walks them through eight units that address sources and non-violent solutions to the inevitable situations that trigger tension between humans.

It might sound silly to those of us who sorted out balls and strikes without an umpire, but it's a huge leap forward for a couch-bound generation weaned on 100-plus channels of digital conflict.

Caitlin Connelly, the CDRC's youth and family program coordinator, said the Kid Talk effort marks the first time the 22-year-old local institution has worked with elementary school kids. She told Journal reporter Darise Jean-Baptiste that one motivation for Kid Talk was the center's hope that a small effort invested early will have a greater effect throughout each kid's life. She's absolutely right.