

Lawyers Teach Students to Resolve Conflict Peacefully

By Christine Lett

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What should you do if someone hits, pushes or shoves you? What should you do if someone calls you a bad name? Three members of the Young Lawyers Committee of the VI Bar Association spoke to fourth-fifth and sixth graders Thursday at Eulalie Rivera Elementary School on simple steps to easily resolve conflicts.

The conflict-resolution class was held as part of Education Week, which ends today. The members were Ernest Batenga, counsel to the Attorney general; Lydia Logie, a Territorial Court Attorney and Albert Meade, who is in private practice. Their solutions presented to about 150 students.

"Before you throw that punch, just stop and think about what you are doing," Batenga said to his group of fourth-graders. Logie told fifth-graders, "Never resort to hitting." She suggested telling a teacher or even talking through the problem. "Don't be afraid to say how you feel. How you feel is very important," she said.

Sixth graders questioned Meade on issues beyond conflict resolutions. They wanted to know how to handle peer pressure and the consequences of crimes like gun possession. "They were very perceptive and receptive," Meade said. "I think we don't give our children enough credit."

Logie promised her fifth-graders she would return monthly to visit and discuss conflict resolution. Batenga said he gave his fourth-graders his business card and told them to call whenever they had questions. By 4 p.m. Thursday he received two calls. The school's principal, Anita Gondon Plaskett, said her school improvement team came up with the idea.

"We felt that by having children think through problems, they could find alternatives to fighting and disrespecting each other," Plaskett said. Logie said, "There's so much violence in school these days....if we start at the elementary level, then maybe we can stop it from escalating to that level."

In the past three weeks, Central High School had two stabbing incidents. Earlier this year, and Education Complex student shot another. The Senate Education Committee this week forwarded to the Rules Committee the proposed Safe School Act of 1997, which would provide stiffer penalties for students found with weapons on campuses. The legislation was sponsored by Sens. Almando "Rocky" Liburd and Judy M. Gomez after the stabbing death of Charlotte Amalie High School student Lamar"Chappa" Knight in 1995.