



## Practical Peacemaking Tips

### What's In A Word?

How many times a day do you use words that imply violence? Things like:

- I had to 'fight for a place in line' at the big sale.
- There were three of us in line for the promotion, but I 'beat them out' and got it.
- The store 'slashed' prices this week.
- There is a 'price war' between gas stations in town.
- Get out of my way or 'I'll punch your lights out'
- 'Sock it to them'.
- I hope we 'smash' them in the big game!
- Our 'offence delivered a crushing blow' in the last seconds of the game; so we won!
- He just 'made a killing' in the stock market!
- I 'annihilated' the competition at work.
- Our quarterback 'took out' their quarterback.
- We 'ran down' the information.
- We 'fight' the cold and 'battle' a snow storm
- We 'fight' traffic, 'tackle' an assignment, or 'wrestle' with a problem
- We talk about not 'shooting the messenger' when getting bad news
- We 'threaten' those who get in our way – like other drivers on the road
- We use war images to talk about it when bad things happen. Instead of saying the town looked like a tornado hit after one did, why do we say the town looked like a war zone after the tornado? Why don't we say the town looked like a tornado came through after it was bombed?

Many angry people use abusive or degrading language to express their feelings which is also a form of violence

- You idiot; or you're a jerk; or worse
- Some people cannot express any strong feelings without using swearwords or sexual innuendos which are also forms of violent speech (and some would say actual violent acts!)

What does it do to the way we think and look at the world when we cannot describe anything without violent language? Do we become so 'comfortable' with violent images that the line between just talk and actual violent behavior becomes blurred – especially for our children? Does the language we use contribute to the fact that children and many adults cannot distinguish between emotions like disappointment and anger? Being unable to make that distinction, are they also unable to determine what responses to their feelings are appropriate?

Some people say words do not matter. . . If that is so, why is there one notable exception to the prevalence of openly violent language in our culture? When the horrors of actual war are described, the military uses less violent sounding, less personal language. Especially in times of stress we now let law enforcement officers do the same.

- "collateral damage" instead of civilians killed
- "neutralized": instead of killed the enemy or a suspect
- "Take out" instead of kill

- The "decendent was pronounced non-viable" instead of the person was pronounced dead

The constant use of violent images in language helps desensitize people to the realities of violence. At the same time, using impersonal images in language to describe actual violence also desensitizes people to the real horrors of violence and war by trying to mask it. Both make it easier for people to think of violence as acceptable.

What would happen if we all think about the words we use in daily conversation and make a conscious decision not to use violent words and images? It would certainly make big changes in our speaking! Would it also change how we think and see the world? Would changing how we see and think change the way we act? Give it a try. The time to wait for others to act to end violence is gone. Allowing the cycle of violence to continue will lead only to destruction. "All who live by the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)