

BUILD THE NEST

RestorativeTeachingTools.com

OBJECTIVE

Students will understand how structural injustices contribute to crime and will think about ways to address these issues restoratively.

MATERIALS

You will need to create a large replica of Máire Dugan's Nested Model of Conflict on the floor using string and tape. Label each level of conflict in the model. You will also need blank paper "sticks" that students can write on.

INSTRUCTIONS

Begin by explaining Máire Dugan's Nested Model of Conflict, using a story to illustrate. The authors like to borrow the story that Máire Dugan uses as an illustration in her article, "A Nested Theory of Conflict."

Story Summary: There was a fight on high school grounds between two groups of white and black teenage male students. The fight started because white students had arrived on campus wearing jackets with Confederate flags on them. No one was seriously physically injured in the fight, but there was emotional harm to those involved in the fight and the wider community.

Note that a standard restorative justice process may repair the interpersonal relationships between the teenage boys involved in the fight, but is that enough in this case? There are clearly bigger issues in the community that contributed to the fight taking place in the first place. This specific conflict between individuals is a manifestation of deeper societal conflict, structural violence, and historical harm.

Máire Dugan's Nested Theory of Conflict provides a framework for understanding the interrelated types of conflict in a community. Go through each level of the nest with students related to the example story. Reference the large replica of the model on the floor as you move through each level of conflict.

- **Issue-Specific Conflict** occurs between individuals or groups and the source is one or more specific issues. Ask students, what is the Issue-Specific Conflict in this story? (In this example, it is the wearing of the Confederate flag and the resulting fight.)
- **Relational Conflict** is conflict that emerges from problems having to do with the interaction patterns of the parties involved in the conflict and their feelings toward each other. The relational problem is the source of the conflict, not just the specific issue. Ask students, what is the Relational Conflict in this story? (In this example, it is likely a lack of connection, friendship, and opportunities for respectful interaction between these two groups of students.)
- At this point, it is helpful to skip past Structural: Sub-System Conflict and explain Structural: System Conflict (the outer most layer of the nest) first. **Structural: System Conflict** is conflict that emerges from inequities that are built into social systems. For example, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc. Ask students, what is the System Conflict in this story? As a group, discuss racism in the wider social system as well as a history of slavery, discrimination, and social inequity.
- Next, return to explaining **Structural: Sub-System Conflict**, which is how the rules, procedures, and traditions of particular social organizations manifest System Conflict, often as a result of internalized and institutional oppression. Ask students, what is the Sub-System Conflict in this story? Discuss as a group the ways racism shows up in the rules, procedures, and traditions of the school. Teachers may be more likely to label students of color as “trouble-makers” for similar behaviors and punish them more severely. People of color (and other marginalized groups) are under-represented in history books, literature, etc. There is also often unaddressed racist history within schools (segregation, naming buildings after racist individuals, etc.).

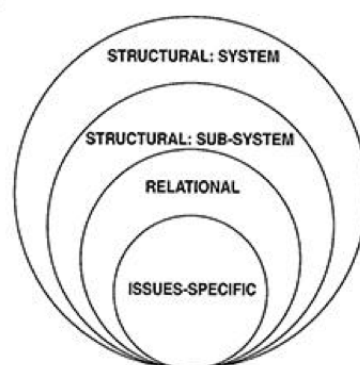


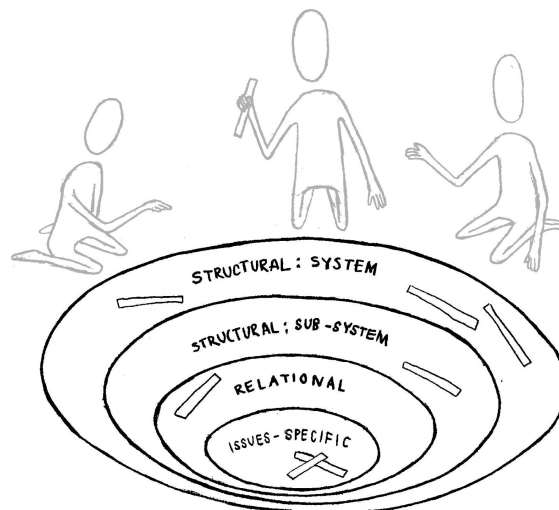
Figure 1 — A Nested Model of Conflict

Example Scenario: At a local high school, someone created a private group on an online social media platform for male students wherein several boys swapped naked or provocative pictures of girls without their consent. Most of the girls in the pictures also attend the school.

Give the groups ten minutes to discuss their level of conflict and to write relevant factors on their sticks. Next, bring students back together and give each of the three groups a chance to share what they discussed. As they name each relevant factor they identified, they should lay the corresponding “stick” down in their level of the nest model on the floor. In this way, the groups are co-constructing a full picture of the nest and all the contributing conflicts related to the specific issue.

Begin with the Relational Conflict group. For this example scenario, they may mention factors such as male and female students objectifying each other because they do not see each other as people, or being able to degrade and disrespect each other because they have little opportunity to have meaningful conversations that challenge stereotypes, assumptions, and biases.

Next, move on to the Structural: Sub-System Conflict group. They may mention a “boys-will-be-boys” attitude, teachers who allow microaggressions and disrespectful jokes on the part of male students, dress codes that target only female students, and other Sub-System factors likely at play in the school.



Finally, move on to the Structural: System Conflict group. They will likely mention issues such as sexism and misogyny in wider society and the media, sexual purity narratives, and the effects of pornography among others.

Allow adequate time to discuss each level of the nest as you move from group to group, ensuring a depth of understanding of how the specific issue is nested in these larger layers of conflict.

DEBRIEF

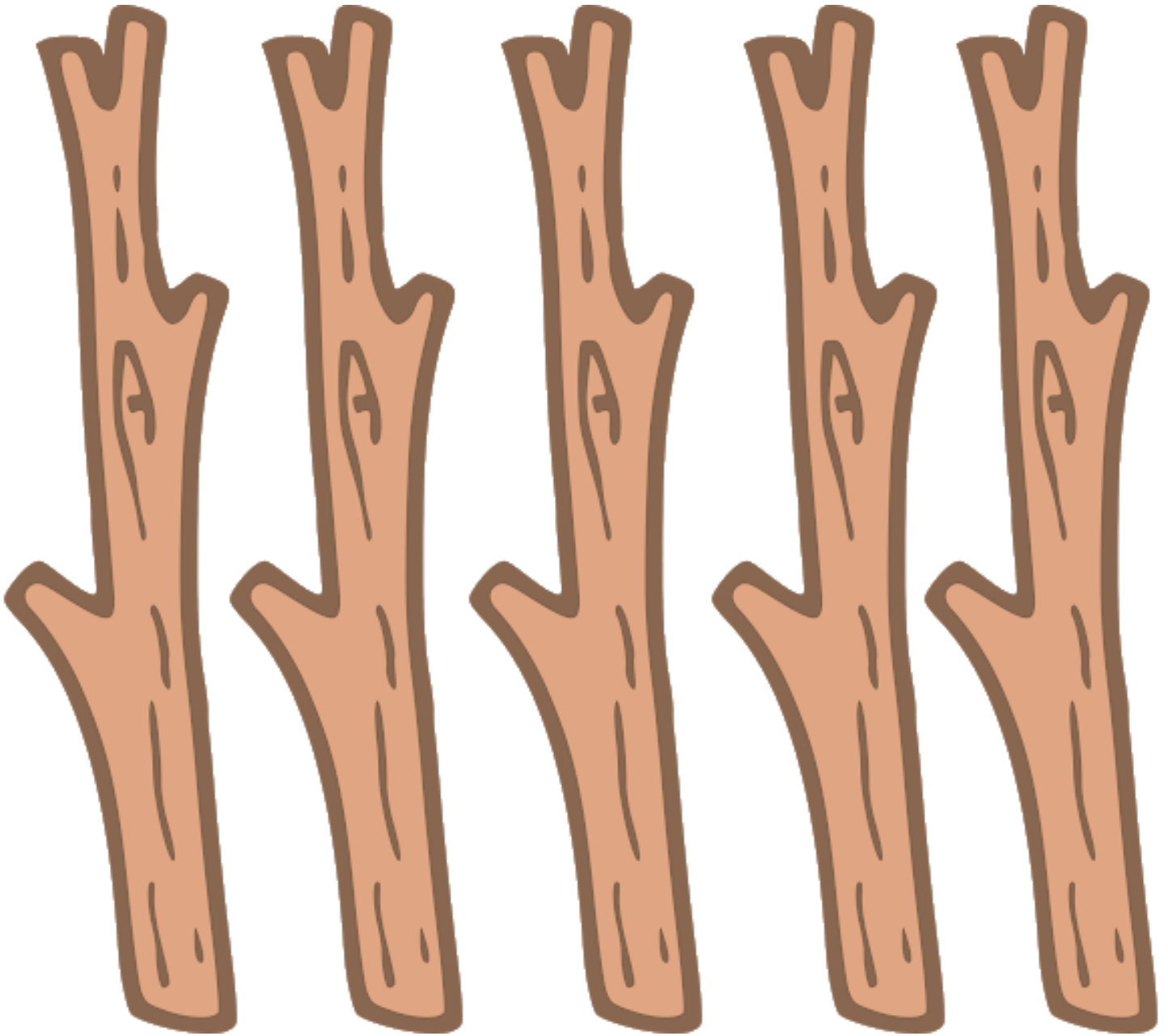
Having built this nest together, and seeing the true complexity of the issue and how it is a manifestation of greater, more-entrenched societal conflict, what are some outcomes that would address these larger topics? How can we use restorative practices to address these systemic societal issues? How does understanding conflict in this nested way change your understanding of restorative justice? How will this aid you as a restorative practitioner?

LESSON

Crime and other forms of misbehavior cannot be understood as isolated incidents, but rather need to be understood as embedded in a wider nest of structural injustices and deeply rooted social inequity. As restorative practitioners, we cannot truly repair harm until we understand and seek to address the larger systemic and historic forces at play.

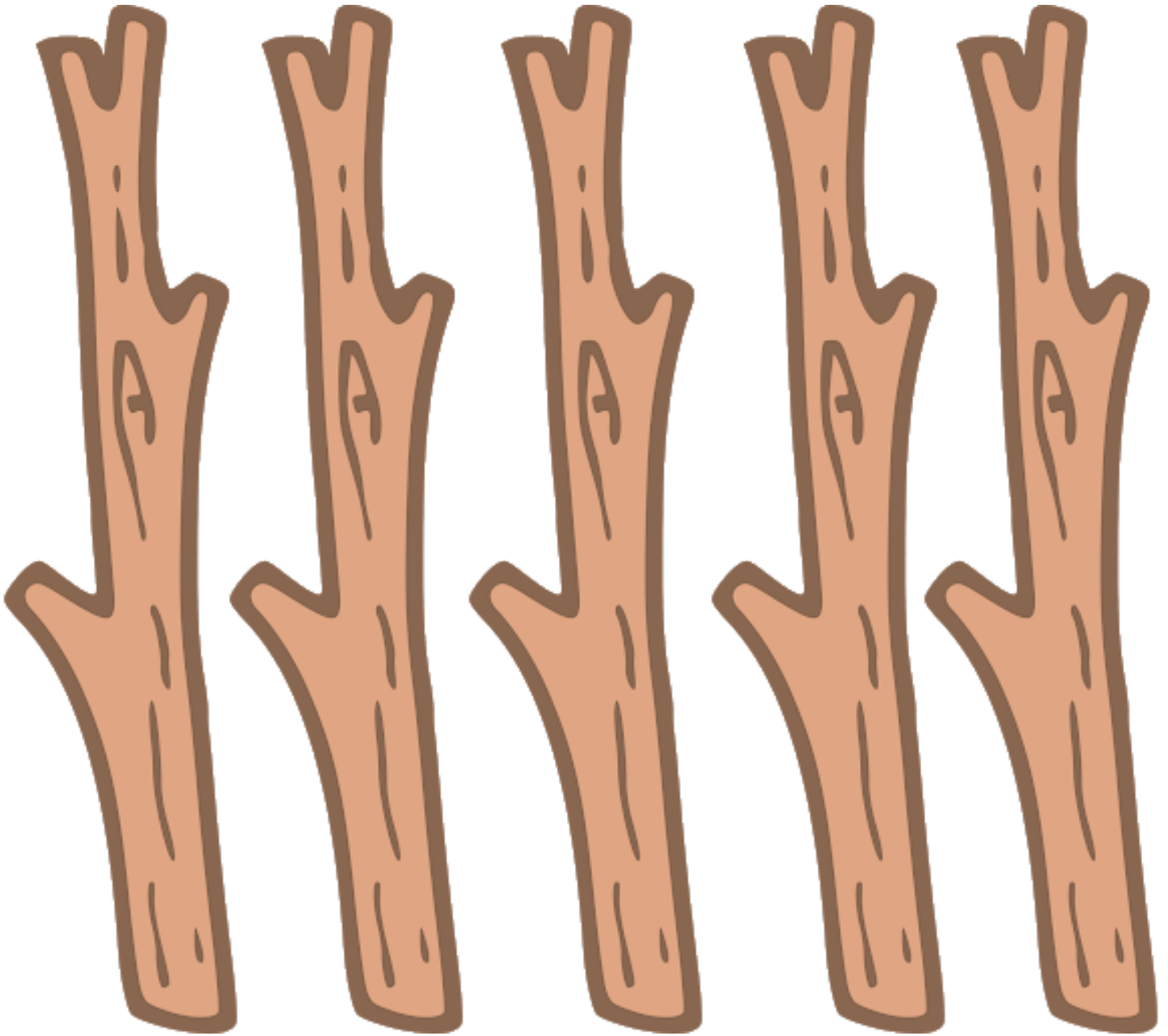
STICKS TO PRINT

Print and cut-out these sticks for participants to use to build the nest during the activity.



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