

HELPING KIDS RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Disagreements, arguments and interpersonal conflicts are a part of life. Learning how to resolve conflicts is one of the most important skills children will learn and apply in their lifetime. And, one of the most important things to know is when to intervene and when to step back.

Here are some quick tips for you to facilitate the learning of conflict resolution throughout your daily interactions with children.

Make it Age Appropriate—You probably deal with children of multiple ages throughout the day. As children develop, they continue to learn how to interact with others. Younger children need more guidance and instruction, as physical responses to conflict tend to be their natural response. Older children benefit from having a balance of guidance from you and then the autonomy to try it on their own.

Practice Makes Perfect—Understanding how to resolve a conflict is only one part of the conflict resolution equation. Additionally, students need to apply what they understand to each situation. Consider practicing with children through role-playing or trying out simple phrases they might use during a conflict.

Hear Both Sides of the Story—Sometimes you will need to intervene in a conflict that isn't being resolved effectively. One effective approach is to hear both sides of the story, without interruption and identify what the core problem is.

Brainstorm—Brainstorming is a collaborative process and everyone's ideas are initially included. Once the brainstorming is exhausted have children decide on the resolution that is the most mutually beneficial.

Quick Resolve—Some conflicts between children are about who goes first, who sits where on the bus or who gets to be the line leader. The following simple

“chance” activities can be quick resolves to basic conflicts and use the strategy of taking turns:

- ▲ Rock, Paper, Scissors
- ▲ Odds or Evens
- ▲ Pick Straws
- ▲ Flip a Coin

Is it Hurtful or Helpful?—Use this simple question to guide students in responding to conflict in a helpful manner, versus a hurtful manner.

I'm Sorry—Part of teaching conflict resolution to children is teaching them the importance of saying “I am sorry.” Children need to know that apologizing does not necessarily mean they were wrong or that they agree with the outcome, but that they care about the other person and their feelings.

Meet in the Middle—Help students determine what everyone wants to get out of a situation and find a “half-way” resolution. Students will learn that to get a little, you have to give a little.

Ask for Help—Teach students that that if they can't come to a resolution, after trying a variety of strategies on their own, asking someone not involved in the conflict to help mediate is appropriate.

You May Need to Intervene If...

- ▲ There is a risk of serious injury
- ▲ There are repetitive arguments over the same conflict
- ▲ There is a “power imbalance”
- ▲ There is a loss of emotional or physical control

Adapted from:
<http://missourifamilies.org/FEATURES/parentingarticles/parenting30.htm>