

One Page Resource: Conflict Management

It is natural and healthy for conflicts to arise in any preschool setting. It is these conflicts that allow children to practice socialization and negotiation skills. It is the teacher's job to enable children to successfully navigate through conflicts with others.

What should discipline strategies accomplish?

1. Stop a misbehavior
2. Enable a child to regain control of emotions/calm down
3. Have the child consider what has just happened and understand the consequences and its effects on others.
4. Problem Solving: sometimes negotiation or compromise
5. Child initiated actions of forgiveness

How to talk through conflicts with children...

1. Get on the child's eye level
2. Acknowledge each child's feelings. "I see that you are upset; can you tell me about it?" "It is okay to be angry." Also try encouraging children to empathize with other children's emotions and the impact that their actions had. "Look at Mary's face; how is she feeling?"
3. Listen to what the child has to say. If more than one child is involved in the conflict, listen to each child and encourage other children to listen to the speaker as well.
4. Restate your understanding of the conflict, "So Mary took a block from Paloma, then Paloma hit Mary."
5. Ask children for their possible solutions. If children are unable to offer any solutions prompt them with open ended questions. "What could we have done differently?" "What would a better solution be than _____?"
6. Listen to the answers of the children, guiding them to choose one. You may also guide their solutions "What if we decide no one can use the blocks and then you change your mind and want to build there?"
Try what the children suggest. If their suggestion is unsuccessful, repeat steps 1-6.
7. Encourage children to make reparations in one way or another. "Paloma, Mary's arm is really hurt. Can you think of any way that you can make her feel better?" Your goal here is three-fold– 1. To ensure peace between all participants, 2. To encourage forgiveness and reparations and 3. To teach children how to master the skill of conflict resolution.

Appropriate guidance techniques

- Work with the families for consistency and inclusion. This is so important! Try to explain what the child does well and what the child struggles with and develop a plan with the family about how to reinforce the desired behaviors at both school and home.
- Warnings: For example, a 5-minute clean-up warning is effective in preparing children for the next part of your day.
- Planned Silence: Sometimes a teacher's silence can be a powerful tool to imply the magnitude of a situation. Use this tool to watch before reacting– children may refocus/solve an issue on their own.
- Doing something over again: If a child is feeling unsuccessful, offer to allow them to try again. If you see a child becoming frustrated while attempting something, step in and talk through the conflict. Focus on what the child can do!
- Making reparations: Be sure that this is genuine from the child and not teacher induced. This could take many forms: an "I'm sorry" card, the retrieval of an item, or an apology.
- Plan: Either as a class or with an individual child you can identify situations which are likely to become problematic and create a plan about what to do with that child ahead of time. Then help that child to implement the plan by reminding them during the potential conflict period.
- Rearrange the daily schedule if there are problematic time periods. Based on teacher observations at problematic times a simple change can often go a long way.
- Rearrange the classroom environment: Sometimes constant problems in one learning center means that there is not enough room, materials, or work space. Other times there may be too much room (as in a "runway" situation). Use teacher observations to identify the bigger picture.
- Change your own behavior. Is the child trying to get a certain reaction from you? Is your behavior inadvertently causing the conflict? Be sure to evaluate this periodically.
- Offer an alternative. If you have a child who struggles with hitting or kicking, introduce a pillow punching bag as an appropriate outlet. Sensory materials are often a soothing alternative as well.
- Offer a safe spot in the classroom. Encourage children to use this spot when they need to calm down. Discuss with the class how when someone is in there they should be left alone. Teach respect for personal space.
- Use positive reinforcement. Be as specific as possible when you see a child doing something that should be encouraged. Be aware that indiscriminate praise is not as effective as genuine and specific praise.
- Consider why the behavior is occurring. Has the child experienced a loss, change, or has a national or local disaster happened lately? Is the child being exposed to violent television or video programs? Be aware of what is happening in the children's lives. If needed, discuss feelings with that child and/or as a class. Help children understand what they are experiencing. Subject-related books, puppets, and songs can be helpful in this.