

Helping resolve conflict: Suggestions for families

The skills needed for resolving conflict effectively are complex

They involve managing feelings, understanding others, communicating effectively, developing options and making decisions. Parents and carers play an important role in helping children resolve conflicts. You can also play a critical role in establishing positive guidance that teaches children the skills needed to resolve conflicts effectively.



How you can guide children's conflict resolution

Set the scene for cooperation

Show how to cooperate and respect others through your own approach. Ask children to help solve the conflict and express confidence that they can work it out cooperatively. It is very important that children approach the conflict in a positive way, and believe that they can work together to solve it.

Help children handle emotions

Children may need encouragement and help to stay cool in a conflict – especially if they feel they are being accused or blamed. They may feel anxious and need support to stay calm if they feel intimidated. In conflicts that are particularly heated, children may need to have time away from each other to cool down before going on to work out ways of resolving the conflict. Taking time to calm down can help children overcome the tendency to react aggressively or withdraw from the situation.

Encourage empathy and respect for others

Teach children to listen to and understand the needs and concerns of the other person. Help them to ask why the other person wants something and consider what it might be like to be 'in their shoes'. Learning to understand the other person's perspective is a critical foundation for conflict resolution and for building positive relationships.

Practise communication skills

Effective conflict resolution relies on clear communication of feelings and wants. This can be especially difficult when under pressure in a conflict. Learning to speak clearly and respectfully takes practice. You can help children practise what to say to initiate conflict resolution, for example: "If we talk about this, I'm sure we can sort it out." Practising assertive ways for children to express their wants and concerns is also particularly helpful, for example: "I want you to ask before using my things."

Encourage creative solutions

In conflicts people often get stuck in their own positions and can't see other options. This is why it is so important to get creativity going when thinking of possible solutions. The brainstorming rule, that no-one is allowed to say that something won't work, is intended to help with getting creative. Steer children back to the point if necessary, but leave evaluation of the ideas they come up with for later. It's okay for adults to help children think of alternative solutions if it helps them to get creative.

When enough is enough

Some conflicts are too big for children to work out. Sometimes children are not ready to sort them out and the conflict continues to escalate. If children's conflicts become very intense or lead to physical aggression, then it is important for an adult to step in. When a mutual solution is not possible you can still help your child to think through the alternatives that are available to him or her and choose the best one.

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This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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