

Explore: Conflict Resolution

There is not one “right” way to help children resolve conflicts, but there is a simple method that works.

- 1) **Cool down:** when two children experience high conflict, provide your cue that it’s time for them to cool down.
For some children, this might be a phrase (i.e., “deep breath”) or a spot in the room where they feel calm and safe. Each child is different. You may want to involve the children in a classroom activity where they identify their cool-down strategies.
- 2) **Communicate:** after the children have calmed down (i.e, they’re not hitting or yelling at each other), they calmly state their case to each other.
Ground rules:
 - Active listening (no interrupting, no disrespectful body language, polite language)
 - One child speaks at a time (you may want to start with the child who feels their rights were infringed)This is a very important step, and while it can be hard to fit into the day, the benefits are lasting. In some schools, older children who have effectively learned these methods can serve as unbiased moderators.
- 3) **Restate:** after the first child has stated their view, the second child restates what they heard. This skill-building step does not require the child to agree with what they heard, only to restate the problem they heard as described by the other child. In many cases, they may need to clarify. This step takes practice!
- 4) **Communicate:** now the second child states their view, while the first child uses the same ground rules for polite, active listening.
- 5) **Restate:** the first child now has a chance to restate what they heard from the second child’s perspective. Steps 2 - 5 can be repeated until each child believes their perspective has been restated clearly.
- 6) **Children find a solution:** This step is rewarding and empowering for the children! No adult intervention required, though you are welcome to give your view if the solution puts a large burden on you (i.e., teacher supplies class with fresh modeling clay, daily). If a child responds impolitely to another child’s suggested solution, ask the child to voice their objection again, politely. This is another great life-tool.

In this process, there is no “bad” or “wrong” kid, only two children solving conflict in a highly sophisticated manner. Since conflict is a normal part of life, the earlier children learn these

skills, the better. As you are working with school-age children, use your judgment to decide what works best in your classroom. Remember that as a school-age staff member, you are not only helping children resolve their conflicts, but teaching them the important skills of resolving them on their own.

After thinking about the process described above, write down your initial thoughts and ways you can incorporate this conflict resolution technique into your program: