



Resolving Conflicts – Promoting Peace

Conflict has many negative connotations, evoking images of violence, aggression, hatred, turbulence and even war. Parents and caregivers value peaceful environments and want their children to lead conflict-free lives. Yet a certain amount of conflict contributes to children’s social development, problem-solving skills and emotional security. Children learn to become peacemakers when they deal effectively with the inevitable conflicts in their families, child care centres, schools and neighbourhoods. If children’s lives were totally devoid of conflict, they would not learn how to become peacemakers. Parents and caregivers can take the following concrete steps to help children learn the conflict resolution skills needed to create a more peaceful world.

Six Steps to Successful Conflict Resolution

1 Focus and calm children

- Keep children involved in the conflict together with you, while you soothe and focus them.
- Comfort children who are distraught.
- Wait for children to be moderately settled before you begin the conflict resolution process.



4 Let children negotiate a variety of solutions to the problem

- Allow children to propose a variety of suggestions for solving the conflict.
- Consider the ages and developmental levels of the children. Very young children will probably lack the cognitive flexibility and language skills necessary for resolving their conflicts alone.
- Parents or caregivers need to take an active and directive role when helping very young children resolve conflict. Ask children how they think that they can solve the problem. If the children offer no suggestions, provide some and gauge their reactions.
- As much as possible, children over three years of age should be encouraged to negotiate their own solutions.

2 Give attention to each child

- All children in the dispute — “victims” and “perpetrators” — need to know that you are there to assist them equally.
- Children who are the “victims” need your attention first.

5 Empower children to reach their own solution to the conflict

- Encourage older children to reach their own solution to the conflict. Parents and caregivers can gently direct the negotiation process, but the actual solution should come from the children’s own problem-solving efforts.
- Adults are often more involved in generating a solution with younger children. Ensure that young children are satisfied with the resolution.

3 Help children to understand and state their problem

- Help children understand that the conflict is a shared problem, with two sides.
- Ensure that each child has a chance to state their perceptions of the problem, including the causes and the effects. What happened (effects)? and why (causes)?
- Help children to examine the entire problem. Children often know what happened (the effect, such as being kicked), but may not know why this happened (the cause, such as a retribution for earlier name calling).

6 Monitor mutually agreed-upon solutions

- Ensure that children follow through with their negotiated solutions.
- If the negotiated solution is not working, begin the conflict resolution process again.

Remember, the end goal of conflict resolution is empowering children to reach their own solutions.

Violence is the outcome of extreme conflict situations. Violence in children’s disputes can be avoided when parents and caregivers use the six conflict resolution steps *before* the conflict escalates to the extreme. Children who learn to negotiate in a peaceful and competent manner develop valuable communication skills necessary for their future social problem-solving.