



Tips on

Resolving Conflicts



Here are some things to remember when helping young children solve their problems.

? What is the difference between punishment and discipline?

Punishment assigns blame and motivates with fear. It can also be painful or humiliating. Fear and punishment can actually block children from learning. So even though it may seem to work in the short term, it usually does not change children's behavior in the long term.

Discipline helps children see the consequences of their actions (e.g., a child who writes on the wall is required to help clean the wall). Discipline is a better way to encourage long-term change because it provides an opportunity for learning.

? What is the difference between discipline and conflict resolution?

Discipline holds children responsible for their actions and makes clear what is not permitted; conflict resolution teaches children skills and focuses on what they can do rather than what they can't do.

By itself, discipline rarely provides children with skills that they might use to avoid repeating a mistake, and it often involves taking away choices. Conflict resolution helps children see alternatives and gives them a chance to practice making better decisions.

Practicing Conflict Resolution

Conflict occurs naturally in a typical child's day. Having some conflict is a good thing. It helps children learn and grow. The job of a caregiver is not to get rid of the conflict or to expect children to handle problems that they are too young to handle. Instead, it is to provide the skills they need to work through problems in safe and effective ways.

After first making sure that everyone is safe, a person using conflict resolution techniques approaches every problem situation with two questions:

1. What are each person's needs and how can we best meet those needs?
2. Are children learning or practicing skills that might, in the future, help them solve a similar problem by themselves?

! Exploring Ways to Resolve Disputes

You've probably used lots of different ways to solve a problem and correct children's behavior. Think about what you might do (or have done) if this happens:

Two children are fighting over a toy. Do you:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A) try to distract one of them by offering a different toy? | D) tell them to stop fighting, warning them of punishment if they continue? |
| B) take away the toy, telling them that that if they can't share, no one will play with it? | E) suggest that they share or take turns? |
| C) ask who had it first? | F) none of the above |

Each of these approaches shows a different way to solve a problem. See if you can match these approaches to items a-e listed above.

Which one would you use?

___ 1. The "punishment/blame" approach. Identifies who has broken rules and gives out punishment. Intervention often includes questions like, "Who started it?"

___ 2. The "reason with them" approach. Gives reasons for rules and consequences of behavior and assumes that children will choose to act "reasonably." Intervention often

includes reminders of reality such as, "People can get hurt when you hit."

___ 3. The "remove the source" approach. Identifies possible sources of problems and gets rid of them. Intervention often includes things to prevent possible problems, such as making sure there are enough yellow crayons for everyone before asking children to draw pictures of the sun.

? As you think about how you answered the multiple-choice question, look at each choice from a conflict resolution perspective by asking:

- Whose needs are met if I use this strategy?
- Does this strategy help children learn or practice skills that might help them productively solve a similar problem by themselves in the future?

? Next, take a moment to ask:

- How were my answers influenced by my childhood experiences?
- How did my parents and teachers resolve conflicts?

Looking at how we solve our own problems – including what we saw our parents and teachers do – can help us understand our current practice. When we understand why we do what we do, it is easier to get rid of practices that do not work and keep those that do work.

Answers: 1. C,D 2. E 3. A,B

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