

Handles Conflict Appropriately

What does “Handles Conflict Appropriately” mean?

This skill is about children’s ability to manage their emotions and behaviors when problems arise with their peers. There are classroom expectations for how to deal with conflicts, such as using kind words and kind hands. When conflicts come up, a child demonstrates the ability to control their emotions and follow the classroom expectations. The child uses appropriate strategies to try and resolve the conflict. The child may also seek the help of an adult if they are unable to resolve the conflict on their own. This is an important skill because it shows that children can control themselves in difficult situations and are learning how to have positive relationships.

TIPS for FAMILIES

How can I explain this skill to my child?

Let your child know that conflicts are normal and are going to happen at home and at school. We all get angry and upset with other people every now and then. Resolving conflict is about finding a way to work with others to get over bad feelings and get back to being friends.

Explain to your child that there are lots of ways to handle different conflicts. Some conflicts are small, like someone not sharing a toy, and you can learn to walk away from these problems. Other conflicts are more serious, like hitting or kicking, and you can get help from an adult to solve the problem.

What are some things I can do to help my child learn this skill?

TIP1

Talk to your child about what feelings look and sound like. Being able to identify feelings helps your child recognize and manage them when they face a conflict. Here are some ideas you can use to start teaching your child about feelings:

Ways to help children learn about emotions:	Example:
When reading stories or watching TV, ask your child to identify how characters feel and why they think the character feels that way.	“How do you think Clifford felt when his friend went home?” “How do you know Clifford is sad?”
Use pictures, puppets, or yourself to act out feelings. Then ask your child to name the emotion.	You make a sad face and crying sounds. “How do you think I feel right now?”
Ask your child to act out an emotion and give them a mirror so they can see how their face looks to others. Then ask your child to make an “I statement” about their feeling.	“Show me one of your feelings.” “Tell me what your feeling was by saying ‘I feel _____.’”

TIP2

Teach your child to use their W.I.T.S.! Talk to your child about how they can handle different conflicts by using their W.I.T.S. Explain what each letter of W.I.T.S. stands for and walk your child through examples where each strategy could work. For example, you can ask your child which one of their W.I.T.S. they could use if someone bumped into them.

1. **Walk Away:** Teach your child to remove themselves from minor conflicts (for example, a child not sharing). Tell your child to take a deep breath and walk away if they feel upset about something small.
2. **Ignore:** If your child can't walk away from the problem, like another child teasing them on the school bus, they can choose to ignore it. Often, a child may do something simply to provoke a reaction from someone else. Ignoring it will often cause the peer to stop.
3. **Talk it out:** Some conflicts are larger or happen over and over, like a child consistently refusing to share. Tell your child to let the other person know what is bothering them. Conflicts can often be resolved when children talk about their feelings and try to find a way to resolve the problem.
4. **Seek help:** If a conflict gets worse, keeps happening, or children feel unsafe, tell them to talk to an adult (e.g., if one child is hitting another). More difficult problems may require an adult to step in and guide children to a solution.

This strategy was adapted from: Dailey, A. L., Frey, A. J., & Walker, H. M. (2015). Relational aggression in school settings: definition, development, strategies, and implications. *Children & Schools, 37*(2), 79-88. To learn more about W.I.T.S., go to: <https://witsprogram.ca/>

TIP3

Walk your child through these four steps to resolve conflict. When your child seeks your help in resolving a conflict, it can be useful to have a process for working through the problem. Guide your child through the four steps below when conflicts come up.

Steps to help your child learn how to resolve conflict:

What do I say?

1. Calm down: To work through a conflict, your child needs to be calm. Recognize your child's feelings first, so they know they are being seen and heard. Then ask them to breathe deeply to help them calm down. Show them how to take deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. They can pretend that there is a balloon inside their belly that they are slowly filling and emptying. Have them hold their hands in front of their bellies to show the size of the balloon as they breathe in and out.

"I see that you are very upset. Take some deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Pretend you are filling up a balloon very slowly. Now push the air out of the balloon. Keep going until you start to feel a little better."

2. Describe the problem: Ask your child what happened to get their point of view. They can draw a picture of the problem if they can't say it in words. Ask your child questions about their feelings and the feelings of others involved in the problem to help them recognize these emotions.

"Tell me what happened."
"You seem like you're too upset to talk. Can you draw a picture of what happened?"
"How did you feel when that happened?"
"How do you think your friend felt?"

3. Brainstorm: Ask your child to think through a few possible solutions to the problem and then ask them what would happen next.

"Let's think of ways to solve this."
"What do you think would happen if you tried that first solution?"

4. Agree and try: Your child needs to feel that the solution to the conflict is fair. They also need to understand that the others involved should agree the solution is fair. Once everyone agrees, the children can put the idea into action.

"We have a few different ideas. What do you think would be fair for everyone?"
"Would your friend agree?"
"Once everyone agrees that the solution is fair, go try it out."

How can I encourage my child when I see them trying to learn this skill?

Acknowledge your child for their efforts! For example, say, “Blake, you did a great job talking through that problem with your friend,” or “Jayden, aren’t you proud of yourself for walking away when you got mad instead of hitting someone?” It is especially important for children who have difficulty dealing with conflict to be acknowledged for their efforts to control their emotions and work through problems. Even small improvements should be praised. For example, if your child consistently hits others when they get angry, and you see them working hard not to hit someone, praise their efforts to control themselves even if the conflict was not resolved.

To learn more about the tips and where they came from, please visit our references page: ckphilly.org/citations