

RESILIENT KIDS

NEWSLETTER by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

Developing conflict resolution skills

Teaching kids to deal with conflict effectively and peacefully is perhaps the biggest challenge facing adults today. Children's disagreements both at home and at school can be noisy, physical and psychologically hurtful. The approach to conflict resolution learned and practised in childhood often stays for life.

Conflict is part of daily living. Effective people resolve conflict in ways that protect relationships, honour feelings and lead to a resolution. They neither avoid conflict nor do they use power to dominate others or win conflict.

It is useful for parents to provide a process for children to resolve individual differences peacefully and effectively. When two children have a disagreement that is upsetting to one or either then they may need adult assistance to resolve the conflict. One process that is both easy to learn and highly effective is the Face-Up conflict resolution process that is a variation on some common processes in use.

In the **Face-up** process children face each other and maintain eye contact. This helps for greater openness and understanding. It generally requires an adult to be present as a third party so parents may need to stick around to make sure it works effectively.

The steps involved in the Face-up process:

1. **Safety first:** To ensure safety and integrity it is important that both children are calm. Give

them time and some help to regain control if they are angry or upset.

2. **Feelings second:** Using I-messages children tell each other how they feel about the situation. "I feel awful when you don't share your toys. I really feel like losing it because it is not fair." Focus on the feelings and don't let it get into recriminations or accusations.
3. **Repeat third:** Sometimes this process is enough to get a resolution or at least an apology. Repeat this procedure if necessary so both children feel they have been heard.
4. **Resolve fourth:** State the problem as you see it or as children identify it. Sometimes children just want to state their case and they will make their own suggestion about resolving it. "You can play with my old toys but I don't want you playing with my new toys for a while. They're special." "Okay."
5. **Make-up fifth:** An apology or an agreement is often enough however sometimes damage may need to be repaired or a follow-up talk from a parent about better behaviour may be appropriate.

Teaching children some simple rules for resolving conflict and a process such as the one above may well be one of the best investments in time and energy that a parent will make.



TRY THIS...

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

To promote conflict resolution skills in children try the following four strategies:

1. Teach children some simple **rules** for resolving conflict (e.g without hitting and without namecalling).
2. Explain to your children about **I-messages** and identify them when they are used. I-messages state how a person feels about a situation as well as why they feel that way. They are nonjudgemental and non-accusatory. E.G. "I hate it when you tease me like that because I feel so silly." "When you break your promises to me I feel so let down because I get so excited and worked up."
3. Get children to agree on the **problem** when they come for help to resolve a conflict.
4. Ask children to **tell you** what they did when you notice they resolved a potentially difficult situation peacefully. "Have you guys been going to conflict resolution classes behind my back? How did you work that one out without arguing?" It is quite powerful when children tell you in their own language how they did something.

ACTION PLAN

First Step . . .

Next Step . . .

For more ideas about promoting resilience in children visit www.parentingideas.com.au

QUOTE

"We must be prepared to be part of the cure and not remain part of the problem." SOURCE UNKNOWN

WHAT'S YOUR CHILD LIKE?

HOW EFFECTIVELY DOES YOUR CHILD RESOLVE CONFLICT?

DOES HE

1. Usually resort to power or physical means to get his way? **Yes [0] No [2]**
2. Deal with problems verbally and calmly? **Yes [2] No [0]**
3. Give some ground rather than stubbornly stand firm over every issue? **Yes [2] No [0]**

4. Move on quickly and maintain friendships after a conflict? **Yes [2] No [0]**
5. Say very little but simmer over conflict and disagreements? **Yes [0] No [2]**

SCORE:

- 10:** A real peacemaker. Perhaps headed for a career in diplomacy!
- 6-8:** Still wearing conflict resolution Learner Plates but moving in the right direction.
- 0-4:** Hmmm! Needs some work.