

Helping Children Learn to Get Along



“Hey, I had that first!” “Tony hit me!” Do children’s quarrels leave you frazzled? Most teachers and parents feel that they must step in to keep children from hurting each other or being unfair. Getting along with others is a skill that can be learned. Be patient as you teach conflict resolution skills that help children form friendships and work successfully with others. Model the kind and empathetic behavior you want the children to practice.

Find out why the children are fighting.

Most children’s fights serve some purpose. One child may be trying to get adult attention. Another may be trying to get a friend or sibling to interact with him. A child may be acting out feelings she doesn’t have the words to express.

Identify the problem.

Ask each child what he or she thinks the problem is. Remind them of such rules as “No hitting. You may not hit anyone and no one may hit you.” Don’t spend time on finger pointing. Help those involved put their conflict into words: “It looks like Sara wants the truck right now, and so does Josh. Is that right?”

Help them cool off.

Without taking sides, make sure that all the children involved are calm enough to talk. You can tell the children, “When you feel less upset, it will be time to solve the problem.” Help the children find ways to calm themselves so they will be ready to solve the problem.

Generate alternatives.

Ask the children, “What can you do so you could both be happy?” You can record their ideas, but let them do the thinking. Usually, at least one child will make a suggestion. If the children can’t think of any ideas, consider throwing in a really odd one to get them started.

Evaluate alternatives and choose a plan.

Work on empathy and fairness. Ask the children to evaluate different strategies. For example, “Josh, can Sara play with the truck first, while you play with the cement mixer? We can set the kitchen timer for 5 minutes, and then you can trade toys. Does this seem fair to you?” The children can decide which action to take.

Follow up and reinforce good behavior.

Decide when you will check with the children to see if the plan is working. Acknowledge acts of kindness with a smile or a pat on the back.

Look for other ideas related to helping children resolve conflicts in these books: *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children* by Thomas Gordon (New York: Random House); *Kids Can Cooperate* by Elizabeth Crary (Seattle, WA: Parenting Press).

For related Web resources, see “Helping Children Learn to Get Along” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education



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