

Conflict Resolution

Let's face it, conflict is hard and is bound to happen no matter what ground rules are put into place. Whether it's on the playground or right in our own homes, **children** will clash. And while it can create challenging situations, it is a normal event that occurs between children. This is why conflict resolution is an essential life skill for them to learn. In order to help them, though, early instruction is key in making this a standard routine during disagreements with others.

Often when **children** are involved in conflict, one of two things happen. Either the parent rushes into save their child or the child goes to an adult immediately. And yes, when there is **physical violence** taking place, adults must intervene at once. But when children are arguing over a toy or whose turn it is, they should be given the opportunity to resolve the conflict on their own. Learning this skill is important in the development of friendships. Adults allowing time for this to take place is essential.

It is hard, though, for adults, especially parents to observe their child in the middle of conflict. The first thought it to jump in to alleviate any discomfort. However, doing this does not help children find their own **solutions**, a skill which is essential in learning conflict management. The best thing to do is observe from a distance and allow the process to happen and intervene if things get physical. Younger children will need more assistance when working through issues with others and, depending on their age, the degree to which adults assist them.

With children **ages 3-4**, they are still working on language development and are still egocentric so their conflicts usually result in something physical. Adults need to support them by helping them find the words they need to express how they feel about the situation. Children **ages 5-6** are better able to grasp concepts about communication but they are very concrete in their thinking so these skills must be taught in the midst of disagreements. As children get older,

they have the basic tools in place to handle more of the conflict on their own and involve adults only if they absolutely can't work it out.

The best way to start this learning process is by teaching calming techniques and showing empathy to each child. It's important that they have a safe space to express their feelings about the situation. However, it's even more important for them to not cast blame and, instead, admit to their part in the conflict since "who started it" doesn't really matter in the grand scheme of things. Help them use "I" statements in an effort to show respect for each other. Then, adults should **empower** children to brainstorm solutions that result in a compromise.

The Life SKILLZ curriculum, supplemental information in the SKILLZ program, encompasses lessons on things such as patience, respect, fairness, sharing, and cooperation that are all important in conflict resolution. SKILLZ instructors utilize these lessons in class and present the information in a way that is easily understandable by the **age group** it is targeted for. These skills establish a foundation for the higher-level skill of conflict management.

When children are given the tools to work through conflict at an early age, they develop a **greater confidence** to brainstorm solutions on their own. Early guidance by trusted adults will help set the stage for success in this area. When children can work through things on their own, they feel assured in their own judgments and therefore, help them develop strong **friendships** in the long run.