

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH CONFLICT

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INTRODUCTION

As you return to your classroom, you are told that an argument involving your children occurred at recess. They are still bickering. You know from experience that it will take at least 20 minutes for them to calm down.

Two children have “fallen out” over something one of them said. Both children are in tears, and valuable time is needed to help to resolve their quarrel.

Are these scenarios familiar? How much time do you spend each week helping to settle disputes and friendship problems? It’s probably far more than you can afford. Dealing with enraged or upset children can be time consuming and stressful.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if children were skilfull enough to settle their disputes in a reasonable and independent manner?

This book is intended for teachers, teaching assistants, school administrators – anyone who helps children learn how to resolve conflict issues. It contains an invaluable program of activities that can be incorporated into your Circle Time and other classroom activities.

This book explains conflict resolution in simple, meaningful terms, teaching children the skills needed to resolve conflicts independently. By the end of the program, children should be able to make the following statements:

- I understand what conflict is and why it occurs.
- I know how to recognize feelings of anger and a desire to retaliate.
- I know how to negotiate.
- I know how to manage negative emotions.
- I understand that people have different views and needs that can be respected through listening, understanding, and negotiation.

Through a variety of games and activities your children are given opportunities to learn, consider, and practice the important skills necessary for conflict resolution. These enjoyable activities and games are designed to promote thoughtfulness, self-awareness, and cooperation.

You will see how to set up a successful peace process for children to use to resolve differences, including tips on what does and doesn’t work, and provided with useful resources that can be reproduced. The book also includes a section to help you deal with children who are frequently involved in disputes or who lack the opportunity to develop their social skills at home.

By teaching children conflict-resolution skills, not only will you be reducing the amount of time you have to spend sorting out quarrels, but you will also be equipping them with valuable skills for life.

Each session in the program is designed to build on the one before it. This should help children develop their understanding and skills systematically. However, if you do not want to run an in-depth program or if you have a specific need, you can select the activities and sections that you feel are of particular relevance to your children's needs.

CONDUCTING CIRCLE TIME

To lead the Circle Time sessions successfully, you need to understand the stages of a Circle Time as part of the Quality Circle Time model.

Meeting Up – Playing a Game

Always aim to begin a Circle Time with a warm-up activity. This helps everyone to relax. It is useful for the game to involve the children changing places, since this opens up the opportunity for new friendships and stronger group dynamics.

Warming Up – Breaking the Silence

In a Circle Time, everyone has the right to speak and the responsibility to listen. This stage should be a round using a sentence stem such as "My favorite sport is..." The leader introduces the stem, and it goes all the way around the circle, with each child completing the stem.

A small speaking object, such as a painted wooden egg or a soft toy, is held by the person who is speaking. This person has the right to speak without interruption. The object is passed to the next person once the holder has spoken. Any child who does not wish to speak may say "Pass" when the object is handed to him or her.

Some children may pass because they are unsure of what to say or are being uncooperative. Try to tell your group what the round is going to be about the day before the Circle Time so that they have a chance to prepare. They can write down their sentence if necessary.

If you work with young children, holding a number of smaller circles beforehand can be useful. You can use a puppet to explain the forthcoming Circle Time. A child can tell the puppet his or her sentence. If needed, the puppet can speak for the child in the bigger circle.

Opening Up – Exploring Issues

This is the most challenging stage, since it is when issues are explored in an open forum. This can include discussion, role play, creative activities, and puppets. This is the time when new skills can be learned, new insights reached, and plans agreed on.

Cheering Up – Celebrating the Positive

This stage affirms the work of the open forum. It should be a positive time that could be used as a way to highlight the effective use of the strategies learned as part of the conflict resolution program.

Calming Down – Bringing Children Forward

Using a ritual to close a Circle Time makes the transition to the next activity as calm as possible. This can be done by playing a quiet game, listening to relaxing music, or using a visualization. This gives space and time for the learning of the open forum to sink in.

These five stages are the foundations of Quality Circle Time. For the Circle Times in this book, we have focused on the opening-up stage to show how it can be used to explore conflict resolution.

WHAT DOES “FALLING OUT” MEAN?

This introduction to the program looks at the reasons why people sometimes “fall out” with one another.

Learning Goal

I know that feelings, thoughts, and behavior are linked.

Resources

A beanbag, a flipchart, and a pen

What to Do

Opening Activity

Start the session with the circle game Afloat in a Boat. Ask the children to sit in a circle and teach them the following chant:

*Thirty [or however many are in your group]
children*

*Were floating in a boat.
There was a loud shout
And one fell out.*

As you begin the chant, pass the beanbag to the child on your left. The children continue to pass the beanbag until the chant ends. Whoever is holding the beanbag at this point must move to the center of the circle. The chant resumes with the child to the left of the one who has moved.

Play more rounds like this, depending on how much time you have. Before the chant begins again, the children in the center are allowed to guess who they think will be out this time. If they are correct, they are allowed to rejoin the circle. Don't forget to adjust the number used in the rhyme each time.

Going Deeper

Remind the group that they have been playing an enjoyable game about people falling out of a boat. Ask them to suggest other meanings for



the words *falling out*. Make a list of their responses in the middle of the flipchart. They might include *quarreling*, *squabbling*, *breaking up*, *having an argument*, and so on. Draw a line around this list.

Ask the children to sit quietly and think about a time when they had a falling out with someone. This might have happened at school, at home, or in the park. Reassure them that you won't be asking them to tell anyone about this incident. Now, ask them to think about how the falling out made them feel. They can think about how it made them feel while it was happening, immediately afterwards, or when they had to see that person or those people again. Ask each child to think of a word to describe how he or she felt. Go around the group, and ask each child to contribute his or her word. A sentence stem might help with this – for example: "When I had a falling out, I felt. . ." Write the suggested words around the circled words on the flipchart.

If you have children who are reluctant to think of a personal experience of conflict, for whatever reason, ask them to think of an incident from a story or film and reflect on how the participants may have felt.

Time to Reflect

Ask the children if the words they have just provided describe pleasant or uncomfortable feelings. Do these words describe feelings that they would want to have or that they would rather avoid?

Read aloud the list of words that you circled and point out that when these things happen, we often end up feeling like the words outside the circle. Explain that a word that joins these words together is *conflict* and that you will all be

spending the next few weeks looking at ways to reduce the amount of conflict that happens and ways to make up if a conflict does occur.

Closing Activity




Ask the children to lie on their backs where they are sitting in the circle with their heads towards the middle. If space is tight, ask them to sit quietly with their hands in their laps, their eyes closed, and their shoulders relaxed. Tell the children that you are going to describe an imaginary journey. Use the following script:

Imagine that it is a beautiful, sunny day. You are lying on the deck of a boat that is gently bobbing up and down on a clear, blue sea. You can feel a warm breeze on your face. . . You drift towards some land. As you do, you can hear the sound of the waves breaking on a beach, people playing games, seabirds calling. . . You float towards a jetty, where your boat comes to rest gently. We're going to come back to the classroom now. I want you to stretch your arms slowly and carefully. Rotate your wrist joints. Stretch your legs and rotate your ankle joints. Open your eyes and smile at the people nearby.




Action Plan

Creative visualizations are a useful means to calm children who are angry, anxious, or worried. They work well to bring a discussion to an end when an issue has been explored or emotions have run high. Try to develop the use of these as part of your teaching.




A Cooperative Task

			
We all had a turn to speak.			
We listened to one another.			
We agreed on each item.			
We resolved any disagreements.			

A Cooperative Task

			
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