

# Early Years Library

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INTRODUCTION  
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Social and Emotional Learning** Series

## RESOLVING CONFLICT

What do we  
mean by  
resolving  
conflict

Children can learn practical skills to manage conflict in a healthy way. Dealing with conflict builds on children's communication skills (listening to others and expressing their own needs in a respectful way), empathy (putting themselves in someone else's shoes) and problem-solving. It can be difficult to resolve conflict when emotions are strong, so children should be supported to regulate their emotions first.

Why is it  
important

Quarrels and disagreements are normal in any relationship — for adults and for children. Learning how to deal with conflict helps children navigate squabbles and equips them with strategies to deal with bigger conflicts as they get older. Children develop confidence in their abilities when they see the positive impact of their problem-solving skills.

### Speaking up during conflict

Provide children with the words to assert themselves and express what they want or need when they find themselves in a conflict situation. Children can practice using phrases that will help them to express their needs when a conflict arises.

#### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use a puppet to show how to speak up during conflicts and prompt discussions about conflict
- Use stories to discuss conflict situations, exploring how characters feel and what a character might say to address the conflict situation

#### Inspiring Ideas

- Use puppets to model a phrase children might use when they find themselves in conflict with someone else. *"Stop! I don't like that."* Support children to practice saying this phrase assertively so that they have a simple method of dealing with conflict. *"Well done for telling your friend about your feelings."*
- Act out a puppet or cuddly toy taking a ball from a child and have children practice speaking up assertively. *"I didn't like it when you took my ball. Please can I have it back?"*
- When children find themselves in a conflict situation, support them to identify how they are feeling. For example: *"I feel sad because I am being left out of their game."* Gently encourage them to speak up: *"I'd like to join in with your game, please."*

#### Tip

Provide phrases that are easy to remember when they find themselves in a conflict situation.

#### Tip

Reinforce appropriate ways to speak up during conflict: *"Well done, you have said what you want in a strong and respectful way."*

# RESOLVING CONFLICT

## Finding solutions for conflict

Support children to identify different ways to solve conflicts and decide on the most appropriate solution. This might include learning how and when it is appropriate to accept when something may be their fault and how to say sorry.

### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use pictures representing conflict situations and ask children to identify what is happening, brainstorm different solutions and choose the best one.
- Discuss what it means to say “it was an accident”, why it is important to admit a mistake, to tell the truth and how to apologise.
- Use stories to discuss how children would feel before and after resolving the conflict

### Inspiring Ideas

- Show a puppet in a common conflict situation: *“Someone else is playing with my favourite toy!”; “They pushed in front of me while I was waiting for my snack!”* Talk about the different actions the puppet could take to resolve the situation and the pros and cons of each idea. As a group, decide what the puppet should do next.
- Tell a story of an everyday accident, and ask children how everyone might have felt. *“What happened? Was it an accident? How do you think everyone felt?”* Brainstorm ideas for helping people to feel better, for example, *“It was an accident, I’m sorry.”*
- Let’s Talk! *“Can you think of a time when someone has been unkind to you? What did you do? Can you think of another way to solve the problem? One way to solve the problem could be to ask for help.”*
- When two children begin to disagree, support them to think of different ways to solve the conflict and to put one of the solutions into practice. *“We could combine our building blocks to make an even taller tower!”; “We can take turns playing with the new doll.”*

#### Tip

Provide children with opportunities to practice finding solutions when they are not part of the conflict (with role play and puppets) before encouraging them to practice it in real life.

#### Tip

Encourage children to think of a solution instead of you doing it for them. *“Let’s put on our thinking caps and figure out together what we can do to solve this problem.”*

#### Tip

Let children hear you saying sorry and explaining what you are sorry for to help them understand how and when they might apologise.