

Learning to value others

Some girls in Grace's year four class were taking turns at skipping. Grace watched them closely and decided she would like to have a turn too. She asked to join in but Sally said, "It's too hard for you."

Grace had an intellectual disability. This meant she sometimes took longer to learn things. She was also not as well coordinated in sports as the other girls. "Come on. Let me have a turn," said Grace. "Anyone can have a turn," said Deepa. "Have your turn after me." So Grace tried to skip over the rope, but it got caught at her feet. "Try again", a few of the girls said. "You have to jump just as it hits the ground." Grace tried again. They gave her extra tries because she was learning. On the last try she managed two skips in a row. "You did it," said Deepa. Grace was really proud. "I did it!" she said, "and you helped me".



Learning to see another person's point of view is important for getting along with others and building positive friendships. Understanding others helps children know what to do in social situations and is the basis for developing caring and responsibility.

It's not always easy for children to see the point of view of someone who is different from them. Being different could mean having a disability, coming from a different country, being a different age or gender, or having different values and interests. Children who are seen as different may be left out of activities. They may face discrimination because others think they are not as good, as talented, or as important as they are. Discrimination can have very negative effects on children's self-esteem and mental health.

Skills for empathy

Taking others' needs into account involves values of caring, compassion and acceptance of others. It also involves emotional skills for empathy. Learning to empathise with another person means learning to 'walk in their shoes.' It means being able to recognise and value their feelings and needs, even though they may be different from your own.

Skills for empathy develop over time and include:

- recognising your own feelings
- recognising others' feelings
- listening to others' opinions
- thinking what it would feel like if you saw the situation their way
- thinking how you can respond in a caring way
- doing something to help.

A little kindness can sometimes go a long way. Learning to skip has made Grace's day. Watching and supporting her has helped everyone else feel good too.

Some children find it easy to tune into feelings. Others need more guidance to learn empathic skills. Adults have an important role in supporting children to learn kindness and empathy.

Learning to resolve conflict

Van's friend Eli had come over to play. They played outside for a while and then decided to play a new game on the computer.

From the other room Van's father could hear the sounds of the computer and the boys. They were obviously enjoying the game. But after a while something changed. Eli was starting to get frustrated.

"It's my turn, Van," said Eli.

"Come on! It's my turn," he said again.

"Stop being such a pain. You've already had a turn," Van replied.

"But you've had more. You're hogging it!" said Eli. "No I'm not," said Van. "Anyway you always hog the games at your house."

"I do not!" yelled Eli.

It was getting serious, and Van's father decided it was time to help them sort it out. "What's going on, boys?" he asked them. "Nothing," said Van. "Van won't let me have a turn," said Eli. "I'm sure if we talk about this we can work it out," said Van's father.



Whether they get into an argument over a game, what to watch on TV, or whose turn it is to clean up, conflicts are common in children of primary school age. Conflict is a normal part of human relationships. Sometimes conflicts blow over, but sometimes they don't.

Adults may believe it's best to let children sort things out by themselves. The problem with this is that often children get into conflict because they don't have the skills to solve it themselves. If left alone the conflict gets bigger. Usually then the person who is louder, stronger or more aggressive wins.

The things that children get into conflict over may seem minor to adults but they are real issues for children.

Children do need adult help to solve conflicts. The best way to help them is not to simply tell them what they should do. It works better to act as a 'coach' and help children find a solution that suits everybody. When children work out solutions this way, they learn valuable skills that can help them resolve conflicts more effectively. With good coaching they can

learn to use the skills of conflict resolution even when you're not around.

Unresolved conflicts can spoil friendships and affect children's confidence. When conflicts are left simmering they can negatively affect children's mental health.

Helping children resolve conflict

Suggestions for parents and carers

The skills needed for resolving conflict effectively are **complex**.

They involve managing feelings, understanding others, communicating effectively, developing options and making decisions. Parents and carers play an important role in helping children resolve conflicts. You can also play a critical role in establishing positive guidance that teaches children the skills needed to resolve conflicts effectively.

How you can guide children's conflict resolution:

- **Set the scene for cooperation**

Show how to cooperate and respect others through your own approach. Ask children to help solve the conflict and express confidence that they can work it out cooperatively. It is very important that children approach the conflict in a positive way, and believe that they can work together to work it out.

- **Help children handle emotions**

Children may need encouragement and help to stay cool in a conflict – especially if they feel they are being accused or blamed. They may feel anxious and need support to stay calm if they feel intimidated. In conflicts that are particularly heated, children may need to have time away from each other to cool down before going on to work out ways of resolving the conflict. Taking time to calm down can help children overcome the tendency to react aggressively or withdraw from the situation.

- **Encourage empathy and respect for others**

Teach children to listen to and understand the needs and concerns of the other person. Help them to ask why the other person wants something and consider what it might be like to be 'in their shoes'. Learning to understand the other person's perspective is a critical foundation for conflict resolution and for building positive relationships.

- **Practise communication skills**

Effective conflict resolution relies on clear communication of feelings and wants. This can be especially difficult when under pressure in a conflict. Learning to speak clearly and respectfully takes practice. You can help children practise what to say to initiate conflict resolution, for example: "If we talk about this, I'm sure we can sort it out." Practising assertive ways for children to express their wants and concerns is also particularly helpful, for example: "I want you to ask before using my things."

- **Encourage creative solutions**

In conflicts people often get stuck in their own positions and can't see other options. This is why it is so important to get the creativity going when thinking of possible solutions. The brainstorming rule, that no-one is allowed to say that something won't work, is intended to help with getting creative. Steer children back to the point if necessary, but leave evaluation of the ideas they come up with for later. It's okay for adults to help children think of alternative solutions if it helps them to get creative.

- **When enough is enough**

Some conflicts are too big for children to work out. Sometimes children are not ready to sort them out and the conflict continues to escalate. If children's conflicts become very intense or lead to physical aggression, then it is important for an adult to step in. When a mutual solution is not possible you can still help your child to think through the alternatives that are available to him/her and choose the best one.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter trial. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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