

Beyond Classroom Conflict

Elementary Edition

Expectations

On a recent Saturday morning I was struck by two themes that were deemed important enough for air time. First was the topic of forgiveness. The report outlined the wisdom and practicality of forgiveness while admitting the challenge. Another show talked about being honest with guests who visit your vacation home. The guest expert gave adults the advice to speak their wishes clearly while setting boundaries. Again, it was mentioned that this is often hard for adults to do. The consensus between the two segments was that dealing with others honestly and justly can be challenging and difficult.

Our expectations of children, however, are often much higher. Conflicts ensue because children do not respect the boundaries

of each other. Adults often wish they “would just get along.” A child holds a grudge against another child from a past wrong. A teacher says, “Just get over it!” Adults expect children to forgive and speak honestly with each other while those same adults may not have mastered those skills in their own lives.

As a teacher, consider the emotional framework of the child before making a blanket statement. Some children may set an importance on boundaries such as not wanting to be bumped into while walking in line. Help them communicate this desire to those around them as a way to avoid conflict. Do not assume they can accomplish this on their own. Instead, model language phrases that will help them develop those skills.

When restoring a relationship after a dispute, help the children work toward forgiveness. Instead of just assuming the children will forgive, lead them to face the issue. Ask, “Can you forgive him?” If the answer is no, suggest that he think about it because both children will begin to feel better if he does. This differs from demanding he apologize without explaining why. Forgiveness will help them move past the problem toward friendship. Guide the child to see the benefit of forgiveness instead of just expecting it to happen.

As you work with children to resolve conflict, consider the difficulty of what you are expecting the child to do. When there is resistance, guide the child to take a step instead of just commanding it.

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Nancy Nicewonger can help your class move beyond conflict through:

- Staff Development
- Teacher Training
- Parent Meetings
- Consultation
- Classroom activities

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Beyond Classroom Conflict

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An experienced teacher and administrator, Nancy Nicewonger has a desire to help children of all ages gain resources in conflict resolution that will stay with them for a lifetime of use.

After testing an approach to conflict resolution in both private and public school classrooms, Nancy created ***Beyond Classroom Conflict*** as a workshop for teachers. Teachers are given the tools to implement this approach with their students and families.

Nancy is also willing to serve as a mediator or consultant in order to help teachers transform their classroom into a positive culture of resolution. Nancy has a degree in elementary education as well as a Master's Degree in Conflict Resolution. Nancy can help your program make the most of your learning environment by establishing principles of conflict resolution.

Key to a sincere apology

Instead of demanding an apology, guide the child in this step. A sincere apology can help restore a relationship while also helping a child take responsibility for his actions. Taking extra time on this step may help the child learn what an apology truly means.

IDENTIFICATION:
Help the child identify the problem during his apology. "I am sorry I took your toy." "I am sorry I

called you that name." This step helps the child realize what was wrong and makes it more clear for the child that was wronged.

REINFORCEMENT:
Repeat the identification of the problem back to the child. Reflect the child's words to make sure you understand him and to let him hear the problem again.

RESTORATION:
Help the child make restoration for the wrong he committed. He can replace a toy if needed. He can get a band-aid or ice if needed. This will help the child see the consequences of his actions.

VERBALIZATION:
Encourage the child to say the apology out loud. This will engage his speaking and hearing. If he cannot or will not, say the apology for

him and ask if that is what he would like to say. If he nods, you can accept that with hope that he will say the words the next time. If he does not agree with the apology, you are still modeling this skill that will help him restore relationships.