

Learning to Resolve Conflicts



Students who get along with others and feel safe at school are more likely to do well in class. And while classmates won't always see eye-to-eye, learning to resolve conflicts can build life skills such as communicating, compromising, and dealing with angry feelings. Here are ways to help your child handle everyday disagreements and more serious situations, including bullying and cyberbullying.

Practice listening skills. When children really listen to one another, misunderstandings can often be prevented. Play the "parrot game" to show your youngster how easy it is to forget what someone said.



First, ask him to tell you about his day. Try to repeat word for word what he said. When you finish, ask him to point out details that you missed. Switch roles, and describe your day for him to repeat. Then, explain that people can get into arguments when

one person misunderstands or forgets what the other says.

Suggest that your child remember the parrot game when he and a friend are talking about something that could lead to an argument. He can repeat what he thinks he heard: "You said you are going first this time, and I get to go first next time, right?" He'll learn to communicate clearly and avoid some arguments.

Draw a "do-over." Picturing a different ending to a disagreement with a friend can help your youngster handle similar situations in the future.

Ask her to draw what happened, and have her describe the picture. You might ask, "What are you and your friend doing? How are you feeling?" ("She's saying I cheated at Monopoly. I feel mad.") Then, help her make another drawing that shows how she and her friend solved the problem. Ask, "What are you doing differently in this picture? How do you feel here?" ("We both agree to take our last turn over. We feel happy.")

The next time your child sees her friend, encourage her to share her pictures. Your child might say, "I like the second one much better. Let's try that the next time we argue."

Write about it. Sometimes when people get upset, they struggle to find the right words. When your youngster argues with a friend, encourage her to take a break until she knows what to say. She could tell her friend, "I need a few minutes to calm down. Let's talk later," and walk away.

Suggest that she write on one side of an index card why she is upset ("Jen won't let me have a turn on the computer") and why she thinks her friend is upset ("She doesn't want to stop playing online Scrabble"). On the other side, she can write down ideas for how they could both feel better ("use a timer," "find something else to do together").



Writing will help your youngster cool off. And when she and her friend have a problem in the future, she'll have ideas for resolving it.

Show empathy. Teach your child to look at a situation from the other person's point of view. Understanding a friend's feelings can soften your youngster's hurt or anger.

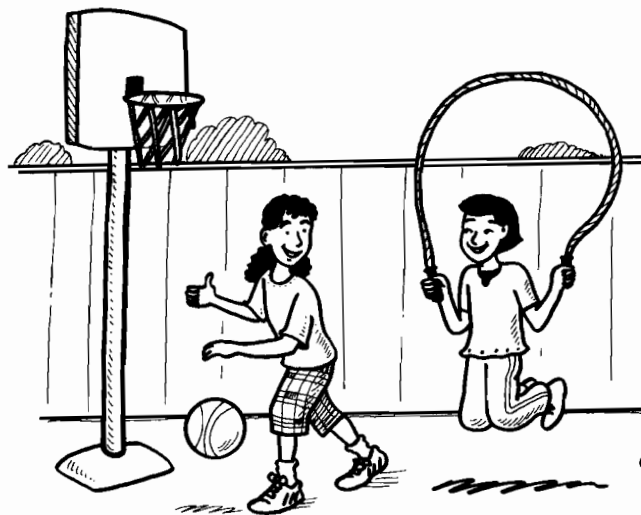
Role-play a situation in which he is upset but reacts to a friend with empathy. For instance, maybe he shared the news of a good test grade with his friend, who responded, "So what?" Your child's feelings will probably be hurt, but looking for the reason behind his friend's words may help. He might say, "You seem upset this afternoon," and his friend may confess that he got a low grade on the test. Then, your youngster could suggest that they study together next time.

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Also, work with your child to develop a list of ways to respond when a friend upsets *him*. (“I’m sorry you feel that way,” or, “Can you explain why you said that?”)

Agree to disagree. Your youngster may be surprised to learn that it’s okay if she and her friends don’t always agree. In fact, different opinions are part of what makes each person unique.

Say your child’s best friend is upset that they rarely play together at recess. Your youngster prefers to shoot



baskets while her friend would rather jump rope. Suggest that she say, “I love doing things together that we both enjoy. But I really look forward to basketball. Let’s be partners in science lab later, okay?”
Remind her that feelings aren’t right or wrong, so the goal is to figure out what the problem is and come up with a plan to make everyone feel better.

Handling bullying

Even children with good conflict-resolution skills might struggle with bullies. That’s because your youngster is unlikely to be able to reason or compromise with a bully—and he shouldn’t try. Help stop bullying with these suggestions.



1. Take bullying seriously. If your child tells you that he is being bullied, talk to him about what happened and who was involved. Make it clear that keeping himself safe by asking for help is *never* tattling. Offer to talk to his teacher or school counselor, but don’t insist on doing so (unless you feel your youngster is in danger).

2. Work on strategies. Pretend to be the bully, and help your youngster practice different ways to handle the situation. For instance, he might simply shrug and walk away. Suggest that he show confidence by making eye contact with the bully and keeping his head held high. The two of you can also come up with things your child can say that will show the bully he isn’t intimidated (for example, he can matter-of-factly say, “I really don’t care”). *Note:* He should keep in mind that the bully wants a reaction and may get angry when he doesn’t get the one he hoped for. To stay safe, your child should walk toward an adult or a group of friends.

3. Build self-confidence. Children who feel good about themselves and have friends tend to have fewer problems with bullies. Self-esteem is especially important if your youngster is being excluded from a group—a common form of bullying. Ask your child what he likes about himself. Maybe he’s

good at playing chess, for example. You might look for a chess club where he can meet others who share his interest.

Note: Your youngster may not tell you when he is being bullied, so look for signs. He might become quiet and anxious, try to stay home from school, or avoid spending time with classmates. Keep talking to him, and let him know that you are always willing to help if something is bothering him.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullies use computers to threaten or harass others. Here is how your youngster can handle cyberbullies—and avoid being one herself:

- Teach your youngster Internet safety rules. If she uses instant messaging, she should not open IMs from people she doesn’t know. She should never share personal information (name, address, school name) with strangers. If a classmate sends her a threatening IM, she needs to tell you right away and then block the sender. And if she sees a threatening or an embarrassing post on an online bulletin board, she should have you help her report the user to the board’s moderator.
- Discuss online manners with your child. For instance, it’s important not to type anything that she would not say in person. If she’s talking to a friend and they start arguing, she should say good-bye and log off. It’s better to solve problems in person, since typed words can sometimes be misinterpreted. And she should never post mean statements or private information about a classmate online. Remind her that once she types something, she can’t take it back.



Tip: To learn more, your youngster can take the Web safety quiz at www.stopcyberbullying.org.

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