GUI102- Conflict Resolution in the Early Childhood Environment - Handout

Welcome to GUI102

Childcare professionals must approach the topic of “conflict resolution” from multiple perspectives. There are many types of conflict: child-child conflict; adult-child conflict and also adult-adult conflict. In an early care environment, the focus is often on reacting to issues of behavior management, which can involve both child-child and adult-child conflict. While it is important to properly intervene as issues arise, it is even more important to teach children the social and emotional skills necessary to solve their own conflicts. This will prepare them as they grow into adults and have to handle adult conflict. In addition, educators need to be aware that adult-adult conflict can and does occur with peers, supervisors and parents. Learning and employing effective strategies for conflict management is essential to running a high quality early learning program. This course offers strategies and practices for addressing and resolving a wide variety of social, emotional, and behavioral conflicts likely to arise in the early childhood environment.

✔ Course Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Define conflict
- Define character education
- Recognize Social-Emotional Intelligence strategies and skills
- Identify traits of a communicative child and practices for improving communication skills
- Identify strategies for promoting resiliency
- Identify strategies for developing and maintaining positive guidance practices
- Recognize characteristics of developmentally appropriate behavior interventions
- Identify appropriate conflict resolution strategies to use in early learning environments
- Identify characteristics of a child’s concept of friendship during various developmental stages
- Identify strategies for reducing and responding to aggressive behaviors, including biting and bullying
- Identify causes of and strategies for resolving colleague-colleague and teacher-parent conflicts

References:

Defining and Understanding *Conflict* in the Early Learning Environment

**Conflict (n):**

*Not all conflicts involve fighting and shouting.*

*Not all conflicts involve anger.*

**Inner Conflicts Count, Too**

**Important Note About Conflict Resolution and Age Ranges**

This course focuses on conflict resolution in the early childhood environment, and it is important to note that this range includes children up to age 8. Therefore, this course is not just for preschool teachers but for elementary, as well. In fact, although many examples focus on younger children, most strategies are perfectly suitable for older children and adults. Teachers will certainly use different practices and approaches with younger children, but overall, the goal is really the same: do what you can to minimize the potential for conflict, resolve it as best you can when it does happen, and teach children how to solve these problems on their own.

**Conflicts in the Classroom**

**Character Education**
Problem-Solving Vocabulary

Here is a good list of problem-solving vocabulary words used to both describe and conduct the problem-solving process. Think about ways you can incorporate these words into your curriculum goals. (You may want to teach some words directly and tuck others away in the back of your mind, depending on the age/developmental level of your children.)

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Strategies for Promoting Social and Emotional Intelligence

What can you do?

Communication

Modeling Communication

Here are some strategies for modeling communication:

Talking about Communication

Talking about communication can help foster it:
Practicing Communication

The overall goal here is to encourage children to practice communicating in a variety of contexts. They are building vocabulary and social skills.

Acknowledging Communication

Reflecting on Communication

Try This!

Try these strategies to help children handle anger:

- Talk about and label emotions
- Talk about and express feelings
- Express anger by stamping feet
- Draw a picture or write a story to communicate feelings
- Go somewhere quiet to calm down
- Reduce stress by listening to music
- Express anger by pounding on clay or splashing in the water table
- Release anger through physical activity
- Role model how to express feelings and deal with anger

Resilience
**Internal Strengths**

**Try This!**

**Coping Techniques**

Stress is a part of life and young people do not automatically know how to handle it effectively. Eventually, people need to learn to think and talk their way through problems. However, sometimes—before you can do any meaningful talking or thinking—you just need to release the negative energy!

You can help children cope with stress by offering the following sensory or physical activities:

- **Paper ripping** – provide old newspapers and magazines for children to rip up or crumple into balls and throw into a container. The sound and feel of the ripping and crumbling takes the edge off the stress.

- **Finger painting** – provide a large piece of paper and finger paint. Allow children to use their fingers, hands, elbows or feet to create a masterpiece. The coolness and texture of the paint is relaxing.

- **Active play** – running, climbing, dancing, jumping and singing are good ways to defuse stress.

**Positive Guidance and Behavior Management**

**Environment Factors**

**Teacher Self−Awareness**
What Are Your Goals for Children?

What Causes Challenging Behavior?

13 Intervention Strategies

What Next?

Try This!

Plan for Tantrums

Extension resources provide the following guidelines. Tantrums are a normal part of development but if they seem to be happening too often in your program you might want to consider the following:

- **Observe children’s tantrums.** When and where do they occur? Who is involved? Look for patterns in behavior that may give you clues when one is about to happen. This preemptive, proactive approach can stop most tantrums before they start.
- **Set realistic limits and stick to a regular routine.** A tired or hungry child is only one bad step away from a tantrum.
- **Give children warnings before you end an activity.** Warnings help children get ready to change activities and give them a chance to finish up what they are doing.
• **Challenge children without frustrating them.** Children learn new things when they are challenged, but be sure you know their abilities so they are not overwhelmed and frustrated.

• **Choose your battles.** Children like to test limits and might have a tantrum when you enforce them. Make sure rules are important and minimal. And be sure to be consistent with consequences.

**What about Older Children?**

**Additional Conflict Resolution Strategies**

**Mediation Steps**

Here are six simple mediation steps:

1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions
2. Acknowledge children’s feelings
3. Gather information from both parties
4. Restate the problem, in your own words
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together
6. Be prepared to give follow-up support

**Try This!**

**Analyze It**

If children are arguing over supplies, toys, or space, Lillian Katz and D.E. McClellan recommend asking, “What have you tried?” In asking this question you are giving responsibility to the children to come up with alternative solutions themselves. This approach empowers children and can provide a very effective intervention.

**Lifelong Social Skills**

**6 Steps for Social Problem Solvers**
Try This!

The “Stones” Approach

Barbara Stephens takes an interesting approach in her blog with a unique way to remember how to put conflict resolution techniques into practice. She used the saying *Sticks and stones will break my bones....but words will never hurt me*...to create an acronym to promote peace. \textbf{S−T−O−N−E−S} has the following meaning:

- **S**top any hurtful actions and approach calmly – place yourself between the children at their eye level, use a calm voice and remain neutral.
- **T**alk to each child about their feelings.
- **O**ffer to help by gathering information, show them how to listen with respect and courtesy.
- **N**eutralize the problem by restating it.
- **E**veryone shares their ideas and the children decide on a solution.
- **S**upport and follow up with the children.

Peer-to-Peer Conflicts

Friendship
Building Positive Social Skills

Some positive social skills that you can encourage in young children are:

Poor social skills are illustrated in these behaviors:

Positive vs. Negative Outlook

Try This!

Model Friendship

A good role model teaches by example. Children may not have a chance to see you interacting with your friends in a social situation, but they can see how you act toward other teachers. Are you happy and willing to do favors for other teachers when they need it? Do you talk about other teachers behind their backs?

Beyond that, a teacher can pass along valuable lessons about how real friends treat each other. For instance, if a classmate is sick, you can promote empathy by encouraging children to make get-well cards.

Try This!

Friendship Poster

During group time ask the children what they feel it takes to be a friend. Take all suggestions and write them on a flip chart. Review the suggestions and choose about ten items to put on a Friendship poster that can be displayed in the classroom and referred to when children are having conflicts. You can also discuss and list things that they say they should not try to do.

Your Friendship Poster might include the following:

- Share your toys
- Listen to your friends
- Praise or compliment your friends
- Be aware of others’ feelings
- Don’t argue
- Be helpful
- Use your manners
- Try to understand others’ points of view
- Be honest
- Think about the best way to solve conflict for everyone involved

When talking about what not to do, ask the children for their suggestions and bring up the following things if they don't touch upon them. Help them word them in positive ways.
• Don’t brag (Recognize other’s accomplishments)
• Don’t call names (Call each other by their names)
• Don’t hit (Keep your hands to yourself)
• Don’t take toys from another without asking (Ask others for toys)
• Don’t take over (Allow others to lead)
• Don’t talk about your friends to others (Talk kindly about others)

Try This!

What Is Friendship?

For those who work with school−age and up, “friendship posters” probably are not particularly helpful or appropriate. However, older children might appreciate some frank, open, honest discussion on the topic. What does it mean to be a friend? You might actually hear a difference of opinion, which could be very enlightening for everyone.

What Is Friendship? *This makes a fine essay topic, or a subject for a skit or short story.* A child’s response to this question will undoubtedly evolve as the years progress.

Evolving Concept of Friendship

Important Note about Fighting

Try This!

Reducing Rivalry

Teachers can actually be a source of rivalry as children (at any age) vie for attention and approval. Here are some simple tips that may help you reduce rivalry among children:

• Set aside some one−on−one time with each child
• Recognize that each child is unique and may respond differently to activities, guidance strategies, and communication styles.
• Be positive and talk about each child’s strengths rather than focusing on challenges and refrain from comparing children.
• Emphasize cooperation through games instead of competition.
• Be realistic about sharing and encourage and model it for the children. Be sure to give positive feedback to children when they share.
• Read books about handling conflict and rivalry and talk about how the characters learned to get along.

Aggressive Behavior

Tips for Reducing Aggressive Behavior
Addressing Biting

Don’t Minimize It Too Much

Some things to consider...

Talk to Parents!

Bullying

Profile of a Bully

Profile of a Bully’s Victim

What can you do to prevent bullying?

Promote emotional intelligence
Try This!

**Workplace Conflict Resolution Strategies**

Use the following suggestions as a starting point for creating a Conflict Resolution Chart with your employees or classroom teachers. On chart paper list the following items and ask for other suggestions. Once everyone has an opportunity to list their ideas, consolidate common strategies and delete those that may not be realistic. Try to get about 10 strategies to post in the staff lounge or classroom.

- Attack the problem, not the person
- Focus on the issue, not your position about the issue
- Communicate your feelings assertively, not aggressively
- Never jump to conclusions or make assumptions about what another is feeling or thinking
- Listen without interrupting
- Forget the past and stay in the present
- Accept and respect that individual opinions may differ
- Don’t look at the situation as a win or lose, look for a compromise or collaboration
- If angry, separate yourself from the situation and take time to cool off
- When in conflict resolution start with a compliment
- Thank the person for listening

Try This!

**Teamwork**

You and your colleagues are all likely to encounter similar types of conflicts during the course of your work. Meet with your team of teachers or all school personnel to create a list of conflict resolution strategies that can be used with families. Author Janis Keyser has made a few suggestions in her book *From Parents to Partners*:

- Listen and ask open-ended questions
- Restate and reframe the parent’s ideas
- Find common ground
- State your position, idea, and feelings
- Give information as appropriate
• Give the parent the opportunity to respond
• Outline the conflict as differing viewpoints
• Invite, discuss, and choose possible solutions
• Thank the parent, and set up a time to check back in

Personal Conflicts