



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 adult-adult conflict. In an early care environment, the focus is often on reacting to behavior management issues, which can involve both child-child and adult-child conflict. While it is important to intervene properly as issues arise, it is even more important to teach children the social and emotional skills necessary to solve their 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 families. Therefore, 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.

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 family-teacher conflicts

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Additional Resources:

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Defining and Understanding *Conflict* in the Early Learning Environment

Conflict (n):

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Not all conflicts involve fighting and shouting.

Not all conflicts involve anger.

Inner Conflicts Count, Too

Furthermore, inner conflicts can easily create conflicts with other people.

Important Note about Conflict Resolution and Age Ranges

Conflicts in the Classroom

Indeed, there should never be a verbal or physical quarrel between an adult and a child.

However, as a teacher, it is essential to remember that ***conflict resolution begins long before there is an actual conflict in the classroom.*** It begins when the teacher understands that:

a)

b)

Character Education

Character education includes

Character education is

Character education is an umbrella term for various concepts and value systems revolving around:

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Problem-Solving Vocabulary

Here is a good list of problem-solving vocabulary words used to 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.)

Analysis	Possible cause
Argument	Persistence
Brainstorming	Problem
Focus	Problem Types
Form vs. Content	Reference Material
Group vs. individual goals	Reading Comprehension
Ideas	Research
Investigation	Sleep on it
Mental Block	Solution
Mental Toughness	

Strategies for Promoting Social and Emotional Intelligence

Studies show that children with strong social and emotional skills are better able to:

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In his book *When Nothing Else Works*, developmental psychologist William DeMeo suggests that teachers can promote social-emotional intelligence in children by being

DeMeo outlines specific strategies to promote social and emotional intelligence:

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Self-regulation or **self-control** involves

What can you do?

Model self-control in your words and actions and provide many opportunities for children to practice with you and their friends throughout the day. You can:

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Communication

Author Pam Schiller, in her book [Seven Skills for School Success](#), describes this as

A **communicative child** understands how to:

Schiller notes that a communicative child:

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Communication encompasses so much that

Dr. Schiller describes ***five basic practices for promoting effective communication:***

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Modeling Communication

Here are some strategies for modeling communication:

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Talking about Communication

Talking about communication can help foster it:

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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.

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Other ways to practice communication include:

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Acknowledging Communication

Acknowledging communication can motivate children to advance their communication skills:

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Reflecting on Communication

Ask children to reflect on what they know about communication. This reinforces existing skills and encourages children to use their communication skills to solve problems and conflicts.

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Resilience

Authors Newman and Blackburn describe **resilience** as:

The **resilient** child is

That is resilience,

Healthy resiliency requires complex coping mechanisms and communication skills.

Resilient children:

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Some research has focused on the presence of risk factors associated with more emotional problems and lower academic achievement:

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Typically those children share these **three protective factors**:

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Internal Strengths

Authors Heidemann and Hewitt outline the following **ten strengths** in their book *The Optimistic Classroom*:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Caregivers can help children develop these inner strengths by modeling how to be _____, how to _____, how to show _____, and how to maintain a _____.

Positive Guidance and Behavior Management

Positive guidance is

Establishing Positive Guidance Practices

In their article *Planning for Positive Guidance: Powerful Interactions Make a Difference*, authors Danielle Degel Sanchez, Deborah Steece-Doran, and Judy Jablon give some of the following recommendations for setting up a learning environment that focuses on positive guidance:

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Teacher Self-Awareness

Bruski wants teachers to consider the following questions:

1.

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

What Are Your Goals for Children?

In developing behavior goals for children, teachers often think in terms of these themes or categories, among others:

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Too often, when faced with challenging behavior from young children (through age 8), teachers and caregivers immediately take a _____, giving punishment and negative consequences that may be inappropriate or counterproductive for children of that age or developmental level.

If they sit too long, unwanted behavior is sure to follow. To expect otherwise is not based on what we know about child development and developmentally appropriate practices.

What Causes Challenging Behavior?

Challenging behaviors often serve a function. There are four main reasons they occur, as outlined in DeMeo's *When Nothing Else Works*.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4.

13 Intervention Strategies

DeMeo also outlines the following **13 intervention strategies or positive guidance techniques** that you can try when children display challenging behaviors. The strategy you use will depend on the child, the severity of the behavior, and the child's age and developmental level.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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11.

12.

13.

What Next?

Try the following steps from the [Extension resources](#) to defuse a tantrum:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

What about Older Children?

Additional Conflict Resolution Strategies

As a teacher, these conflict resolution strategies will probably be used most often for helping to resolve peer-to-peer conflicts. Still, they can be useful for all kinds of conflicts, including:

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Conflict resolution involves

However, with appropriate guidance from adults, **children can be taught to solve their own problems through conflict management or social problem-solving (details are found in upcoming sections).**

Mediation Steps

Mediation is a form of

The mediator helps to identify and reconcile major differences between the two parties.

Here are **six simple mediation steps:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

These steps used for young children are very similar to the steps used by adults to resolve disputes in labor relations, diplomacy, law, and education.

Lifelong Social Skills

The following guidelines, outlined in the resource *Early Childhood Building Blocks: Social Problem-solving in Early Childhood*, by Michelle Beery, provide children with the social and emotional environment they need to develop strong and beneficial social skills for a lifetime:

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6 Steps for Social Problem Solvers

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

The Teacher's Role in Conflict Resolution

The teacher's role in conflict resolution is:

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It can sometimes be a challenge to take a role in conflict resolution. Author Cindy Finch, in her article "Children and Conflict in the Classroom," recommends the following strategies for teachers:

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As a teacher, you can establish a good environment for conflict resolution by:

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Steps in Resolving Conflicts

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Peer-to-Peer Conflicts

Peer-to-peer conflicts are

Friendship

Studies show that **children who have friends are more likely to be self-confident and perform better academically at school than those without friends.**

On the flip side, **feeling rejected by others may lead to significant distress, and children could end up feeling lonely and unhappy with themselves.**

Building Positive Social Skills

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

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Poor social skills are illustrated in these behaviors:

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Positive vs. Negative Outlook

Evolving Concept of Friendship

Important Note about Fighting

It is never okay to allow children at any age to fight.

There are several common reasons, as outlined in the article "Rivalry among Children in Child Care," why children may show rivalry or begin bickering or arguing:

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There is no question that friendships offer children companionship and fun, but the list of benefits is much longer. Through interacting with friends:

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Aggressive Behavior

Tips for Reducing Aggressive Behavior

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Addressing Biting

Experts agree that biting is a developmental phenomenon, and it typically happens at predictable times for predictable reasons tied to children's ages and stages.

There are three types of biting:

Investigative/Exploratory

Action/Reaction

Purposeful

There are many possibilities for biting, and in helping biters work through their behavior, you will want to consider the following:

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Don't Minimize It Too Much

Some things to consider when addressing biting situations:

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Talk to Families!

Bullying

Profile of a Child that Engages in Bullying Behavior

Someone that Bullies:

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Profile of a Victim of Bullying

Profile of a Victim of Bullying:

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What can you do to prevent bullying?

In addition, watch for pre-bullying behaviors such as:

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Watch for actual bullying behaviors such as:

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Watch for these specific signs that a child is being bullied:

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Watch for these signs that a child is a bully:

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Learn how to handle bullying by fostering emotional intelligence and developing awareness to interact positively and constructively.

Promote Emotional Intelligence

If children have good emotional intelligence, you will notice:

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This determines:

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Ultimately, the fundamental skills we can give children include helping them to:

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Colleague Conflicts

Conflict is classified into the following four types:

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In the article "Got a Conflict with a Colleague? Here's How to Resolve it Now!" author Beblon Parks outlines strategies you can use if you have a conflict with a colleague.

- 1.

2.

3.

Family-Teacher Conflicts

Keyser notes that typically most conflicts between families and teachers fit into one or more of these categories:

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Inadequate communication is the most common reason for conflict and often the easiest to solve.

Some possible resolutions to mutual conflicts between families and teachers are:

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Personal Conflicts

The transitions children face can be loosely categorized as:

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Fortunately, there are strategies that you can implement to help children when transitions must happen. For example:

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GUI102: Conflict Resolution in the Early Childhood Environment Try This! Activities

Try This!

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.
- Show how to express feelings and deal with anger.

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.

Try This!

Plan for Tantrums

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 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. So make sure rules are important and minimal. And be sure to be consistent with consequences.

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.

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.

S-T-O-N-E-S has the following meaning:

Stop any hurtful actions and approach calmly, place yourself between the children at their eye level, use a calm voice and remain neutral.

Talk to each child about their feelings.

Offer to help by gathering information, showing them how to listen with respect and courtesy.

Nutralize the problem by restating it.

Everyone shares their ideas, and the children decide on a solution.

Support and follow up with the children.

Try This!

Model Friendship

A good role model teaches by example. For 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 10 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
- Do not 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 discussing what not to do, ask the children for their suggestions and bring up the following things if they do not touch upon them.

Help them word them in positive ways.

- Do not brag (Recognize others' accomplishments).
- Do not call names (Call each other by their names).
- Do not hit (Keep your hands to yourself).
- Do not take toys from another without asking (Ask others for toys).
- Do not take over (Allow others to lead).
- Do not 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 hear a difference of opinion, which could be enlightening for everyone.

What is Friendship? This makes a good essay topic or a skit or short story subject.

A child’s response to this question will undoubtedly evolve as the years progress.

Try This!

Reducing Rivalry

Teachers can be a source of rivalry as children (at any age) seek 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. This may be possible during drop-off and pick-up routines.
- 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.

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.
- Do not look at the situation as a win or lose. Instead, 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.

In her book [*From Parents to Partners*](#), author Janis Keyser has made a few suggestions:

- 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.