

Conflict Age 9 Summary

Why Conflict?

There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and growing your child's skills to manage conflict provides a perfect opportunity.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

STEP

1



GET INPUT

Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *“What makes you upset or mad at a friend or a relative?”*
- *“What feelings do you experience?”* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *“How does your body feel when you’re upset?”* (Name how your child physically experiences being upset, whether it’s a red hot face or a racing heartbeat.)
- *“Have you hurt another person’s feelings when you’ve argued? How did that feel?”*
- *“How might you have argued differently to express your needs but not harm the other person?”*

STEP

2



TEACH

Teach New Skills

Hang up a picture of a traffic light to teach constructive conflict management skills as a game. Role-play and make it fun. Here's the process.¹

- Red Light - Stop and calm down.
 - Parent or those in a parenting role: Stand at one end of the room or yard and turn your back to the players. Have your children call out one common problem they face, and then they can start running toward you.
 - Flip around to face them and say, “*Stop!*” with your hand held out flat.
 - Now, ask everyone to breathe slowly and deeply to practice calming down.
- Yellow Light - Feel, communicate, and think.
 - The children walk and move toward you in slow motion.

- Feel. Children say the problem and how they feel about it. Parents can respond by rephrasing what their children say into an “I-message,” such as, *“I feel frustrated when you take my school supplies because I need to use them.”*
- Communicate. Set a positive goal together, such as, “We want to make sure everyone has the school supplies needed at homework time.”
- Think of lots of solutions. Make sure all players get to contribute an idea for solving the problem. Then, think of the outcomes or consequences of various choices. Ask, “What might happen if we try....?”
- Green Light - Go, try, and reflect.
 - Players can run toward you, tap you, and then pick a solution or idea most, if not all, like. Go try it out.
 - Be sure to reflect on it later: “How did it go? Would you change anything?”
 - Teach your child to repair harm. A critical step in teaching children about managing conflict is learning how to repair harm when they’ve caused it.

Tip If your child finds it difficult to give you a feeling word, then offer them options and ask which ones fit their true feelings. This helps expand their feelings vocabulary.

STEP
3



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child the chance to take steps to meet their significant challenges, taking responsibility for their relationships - even when you know you could do it faster and better.
- Consider how you can create the conditions to support their success (like offering coaching or guided open-ended questions to prompt thinking) so your child learns to become their best problem solver.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your child has caused harm, they need your guidance, encouragement, and support to repair it.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid offering direct solutions or solving a problem for your child.

STEP
4



Support Your Child’s Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” statements like, “Show me you can work out your argument with your sister.”
- Recognize effort using “I notice” statements like, “I noticed how you talked to your sister about how you were feeling and then worked with her to agree. That’s excellent!”
- When your child is frustrated or incapable, proactively remind them of their strength. Whisper in your child’s ear, “Remember how you talked to your sister yesterday? You can use that same strategy with your friend today.”
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges.

- “How are you feeling about your free time at school?” Offering a chance to talk about lunch and recess gives insight into your child’s social challenges.
- “It seems like you are holding onto angry feelings toward your friend. Have you talked to him yet? What options do you think you have?”
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Trap Don’t move on or continue to repeat a request. Children often need more time to deal with their feelings and approach someone with whom they are upset. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they can address their problems independently with your support. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can solve their problems.

STEP
5



RECOGNIZE

Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your child is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your child’s efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your child’s behavior.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *“You took a deep breath when you got upset — that is a great idea!”* Recognition can include nonverbal cues such as a fist bump, high five, or hug.
 - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child knows what to expect, like *“If you share your new game with your sister, you will get 10 minutes of extra time to play.”*(if you XX, then I’ll XX) The goal should be to help your child progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a child’s internal motivation.
 - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren’t planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role is in a crisis (like in the grocery store checkout line and your children are arguing. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to buy a sucker if the children stop the arguing). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, give them a hug after reviewing the strategies on your child’s calm down strategies list. Or, after everyone is ready for school in the morning without conflict, take a few minutes to listen to a favorite song together.

Reference

1. Weissberg, R.P., Jackson, A.S., & Shriver, T.P. (1993). Promoting positive social development and health practices in young urban adolescents. In M.J. Elias (Ed.). *Social decision making and life skills development: Guidelines for middle school educators* (pp. 45-77). Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publications.

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