

## **Counselor's Corner 12/9**

### **Helping Children Manage Conflict**

Helping children learn to manage conflict effectively will also help them to experience more fulfilling friendships and enjoy better social experiences, both at school and outside of it. Of course, how well children are able to resolve conflict is directly related to their age, stage of development and life experiences - for example, a young child may not know how to compromise without assistance or have the emotional capacity to empathize with the needs of others. Equipping children of all ages with the strategies shared below will help them become more effective at resolving conflict and being a good friend.

### **Learning to Manage Strong Emotions**

While children have the right to feel strong emotions such as anger and frustration, it is important that they learn that yelling or being physically hurtful or intimidating does not help to resolve conflict. Helping children learn simple strategies for remaining calm, such as taking a deep breath or stopping and counting to ten is an important part of the process of effective conflict resolution.

### **Talk and Listen**

Help your child to recognize the value of using words and speaking nicely to solve conflict. Work together to develop a phrase that they can say to a friend to help start the resolution process, for example, "Let's talk about this and find a way to work together." Learning to say how they feel and what they wish would happen, rather than attributing blame and overly focusing on the cause of the conflict, are also great skills to have.

### **Being a good listener**

Being a good listener is also important. Helping children learn to listen to each other can be difficult, especially when they are very young or emotionally upset, and often times when they are tired or upset trying to talk it through will not work well. In these instances, it is often best to wait until your child is calm before proceeding with any positive conflict resolution strategies.

### **Problem Solve Together to Find a Solution**

Initially children will need help to navigate the process of brainstorming potential solutions together, with the aim being to find a solution that makes everyone happy. For younger children, keep the options limited and simple. For older children, remind them that everyone has the right to be heard and that no idea is a silly idea.

### **Encourage Fairness**

Talk regularly with children about the benefits of being kind, being fair and sharing with others, and catch them doing the right thing as often as you can - rewarding positive examples with lots of verbal encouragement. While young children find it difficult to understand why they need to 'take turns,' they will often be more willing to share when encouraged to let the other child have a turn once they are done - this gives the child a sense of control over the situation and the act of sharing, rather than it being something they are being directed to do by an adult or peer.

### **When Nothing Else Works**

Teach your child that it is okay to walk away when nothing else works, and that they should feel safe to come to you or another trusted adult to seek assistance resolving difficult situations.

### **Role Play Friendship-Related Scenarios**

Use role play to help your child feel more comfortable employing the strategies outlined above. Taking time to actually talk through and act out potential scenarios that might develop in the playground or on a

play date will help your child feel more confident to use these conflict resolution strategies as needed.

### **Encourage Imaginative Play**

Imaginative play provides a powerful safe haven for children to work through overwhelming emotions, to make sense of things they have seen, heard or learned from others, and for processing social interactions, including conflicts. Having the space, time and freedom to play imaginatively, provides children with a sense of power - they feel in control, capable of figuring things out, of thinking things through and solving problems. My girls both love playing with figurines and I regularly see elements of their real life experiences re-enacted in imaginative play.