

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
NOVEMBER 2020 MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

No one likes dealing with conflict, but arguments and disagreements are a fact of life. Not dealing with conflicts can have a negative impact on relationships. Skills for resolving conflict are important for children and teens to learn so they can resolve issues now and as they grow into adults.

- ❖ **Tackle feelings first** – Conflict brings out intense emotions that can be hard for children to handle. Parents can start by helping children identify the emotions they are having. You can ask older children to name the feeling(s) they had during the conflict. Visual tools like a chart of different facial expressions can help younger children match their feelings to faces. A feelings chart can be found at the following link <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/printable-emotion-faces.pdf>
- ❖ **Help children develop a toolbox of coping skills** – Children need to calm down before being able to problem solve about the conflict itself. Calming strategies could include splashing cold water on their face, taking deep breaths, listening to music, exercising or playing with a pet.
- ❖ **Pinpoint the source of the conflict** – Once calm, the next step is figuring out exactly what the problem is. Sometimes the actual conflict might be the result of a deeper issue, like a child feeling left out by a friend. Helping them get to the root of the issue will make it easier for them to resolve what is *actually* wrong.
- ❖ **Brainstorm solutions** – Children of all ages can benefit from having someone to bounce ideas off. Think of several possible solutions. Then look at the pros and cons and together pick the solution that seems best. It is okay to not know what the best option really is! Let children know that the goal is to make their best effort, not to solve everything perfectly right away.
- ❖ **Step Back** – Conflicts often feel big and immediate. Get a different point of view by taking a step back. Some tips you can encourage your child to try include:
 - **Think beyond this one incident** - Suggest your child consider the rest of their relationship with the person and remind them that one behavior does not define the entire person.
 - **Put themselves in the other person's shoes** - Imagining what the other person is feeling is a great way to help children develop empathy.
 - **Consider the whole situation** – Many things affect how your child responds. Everything from the time and place of the conflict, along with the nature of their relationships to the other person, helps guide their response. Helping children take a step back to consider all these things will help them learn to handle conflict more successfully.
- ❖ **Practice effective communication** – Resolving conflict means children can better communicate their feelings without lashing out or placing blame. Some ways to develop these skills with your child when they are calm include practicing using “I” statements to name feelings. For example, saying, “I felt embarrassed when you posted that on Instagram” is more helpful than saying, “You posted that picture just to embarrass me!” Also suggest they write down some things they want to say ahead of time to help them get their points across. They can then role play or practice these tricky conversations with you first. You might be able to offer some suggestions on their nonverbal communication as well.
- ❖ **Show them how it is done** – When you have a conflict of your own (especially one with your child), put the ideas described here into practice. If appropriate, you can even talk your child through how you solved the conflict. It is important for them to see you succeed – and make mistakes along the way – so they know solving conflicts is doable, even when it is hard.