

Coaching Children Through Conflict

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As parents, we are often the first responders to our children's complaints about how other children are treating them at home or at school. At Sunnyslope, we teach students how to handle problems when others do things they don't like. These are some strategies you can reinforce at home that will help your child become more confident in handling conflicts.

One strategy is to **ignore the upsetting behavior**. Ignoring means to pay *no* attention at all. This involves looking away or moving away when possible. Pretend that their behavior was not seen or heard. This strategy takes patience because sometimes, you must ignore multiple times before the offender loses interest. Often, when the offender doesn't get the desired reaction (annoyance, irritation, or attention), he or she will stop. This strategy works best with less serious offences and is something you can roleplay at home for practice.

A second strategy that we teach at Sunnyslope is to **be assertive**. Tell the person that you don't like what they have done. People who are assertive, speak up in a strong but polite way. If something is important, assertive people stick up for themselves in a way that is respectful to others, but also let those people know that their actions are wrong or bothers them. At Sunnyslope, we practice using the phrase, "Please stop." We stress that they don't use a harsh "bossy" voice or angry tone. Shouting or using angry words in response to an offense often makes things worse.

Another strategy we teach is **using an "I-statement."** For example, "I don't like it when people tease me about my height." "I need some quiet to concentrate on what I'm doing." "I feel mad when people ignore me." "I don't like when people use that kind of language around me." Using an "I-statement" is being assertive and tells another person how you feel about a situation or what you need without criticizing or blaming. **Avoid using "you-statements."** These statements place blame and often escalate the tension. For example, "You never listen to me." "You are rude." No one wants to be blamed for something they're doing wrong. However, using an "I-statement" doesn't blame someone for what is happening but still ensures the concern is heard.

Finally, we coach students to **get help from a grownup**. Students are encouraged to talk to a trusted adult when they are unable to solve a problem using these strategies. Generally, we ask them to first talk with the adult supervising the area where the conflict began. If having trouble on the playground, first speak with a playground teacher. If that doesn't work, schedule an appointment with the counselor or classroom teacher to discuss the problem further. Grownups are often able to help students make a plan for future incidents and can follow up with intervention or discipline with the other children as appropriate.

Thank you for listening to and supporting your children as they learn to navigate relational challenges. These skills are developed with time and practice and are equally important as academic content. Thank you for partnering with us to ensure all our Superstars learn to be respectful citizens who honor and appreciate one another.