

Children: Resolving Conflict

Written by admin

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By Naomi Cassata



It is not uncommon for my five year old son to wonder into his eight year old sister's room, uninvited, to be greeted with, "Get out of my room!" He loves to spend time with her, and though she also enjoys time with him, playtime often occurs on "her time." It doesn't take long for the bickering to begin and her brother to retreat with hurt feelings. Often parents feel like the referee of their children's matters and every day is game day!

Children usually deal with conflict in two ways: Aggressively, through verbal outbursts, hitting, or manipulation; while others retreat by submitting to unreasonable demands, hiding their true feelings, or fleeing every time conflict arises. The later seems more appealing to parents, but dealing with conflict often requires facing it head-on.

Daily conflict between children will make any parent want to hide in their room, hoping it will all resolve on its own. A national poll stated that 64% of children deal with conflict, in the home, on a weekly basis and 54%, unsurprisingly, with their siblings. Unfortunately, children aren't born with a built in conflict-resolving ability. It is achieved over time. As parents, we can model forgiveness, respect, selflessness, and justice in the home and eventually these important life skills will help them throughout life.

The majority of conflicts are ignited in anger when two children can't get their own way. When my children argue over an object, the real problem stems from a stubborn/selfish heart. Instead of giving in to the "I had it first" or "I was here first" child, they both lose the privilege. Neither is willing to consider the other person and both need to learn the lesson of "loving their neighbor

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as themselves." Getting the focus off of "self," long enough to consider the other person, is always the goal. Many conflicts are rooted in selfishness, and when fully bloomed, end up dishonoring others.

When our children have conflict with others outside of the family, it's easy to become defensive and quickly side with our own flesh and blood. However, this teaches our children to play the blame game, never admitting their fault in the matter. No matter the instigator, it takes two to tango. Resolving conflict requires hearing both sides and responding justly. Encourage your child to see and admit their wrong in the situation.

Most conflicts can end before they even get started simply by the way our children respond verbally to each other. Teach your children that when a problem arises, think about the tone of their voice and the words they choose to respond with. Practice with practical scenarios and allow your child to respond with a hushed, gentle voice. It's hard to get angry when your tone is peaceful.

Sometimes conflict requires our children speaking the truth in love. Children who are inclined to avoid disagreements find it hard to express their true feelings during conflict. When things get heated, they flee the scene. This leaves the conflict wide open, without resolution. Being a peacemaker isn't always being silent in the face of injustice. When Jesus was questioned by the religious leaders, He always responded with truth.

Hearing only one side of a conflict tends to make the one telling the story the victim and the other person the actual problem. When my daughter would come home from school complaining about a friend that said or did something she wasn't happy about, I could see how she was looking for me to choose her side. At first I would listen quietly, sympathizing with her. But I soon realized that her continual repeating of tedious matters was actually contributing to bitterness towards her friend. There is a difference between informing the parent of what happened and freely slandering another's character. I changed my angle and we decided to start praying for her friends and saying one nice thing we liked about that person. Coming from this approach, caused her to think differently and less likely to condemn her classmate's character later.

Give your children time to resolve conflict on their own. When a problem arises, have them go into a room by themselves and talk it out. This isn't the same as "duke it out." Afterwards ask them how they resolved the issue. However, if they are too young to reason, go with them and guide them through resolving the issue. This will teach them to work out matters even when adults aren't present.

Dealing with conflict is difficult at any age, but training our children when they're young will make them better, spouses, friends, parents, bosses and neighbors later in life.

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