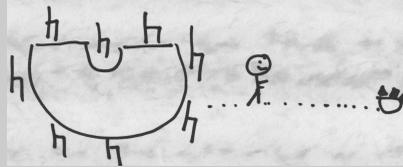


Using Social Stories to Help Resolve Common Conflicts

Talking about common conflicts in moments of calm — when they are not happening — can make it easier for children to think about the problem and offer solutions. “Social stories” are an effective way to bring up typical classroom problems, discuss children’s ideas for solving them, and turn them into “storybooks” the children can refer to when these conflicts occur again. Here is an example of a social story in which a child talks about joining others safely in play.

Children make a plan and start to play



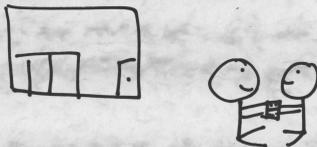
I Want to Play!



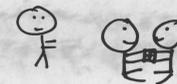
Sometimes children are playing and I want to play too.



At school children play



I want them to see me and to know that I want to play.



Using Social Stories to Help Resolve Common Conflicts (cont.)

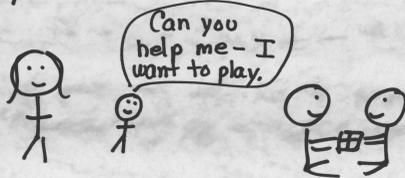
I could say...



It is okay to get excited, but when I hurt children and toys, children get up set



I could ask a teacher to help me play with children.



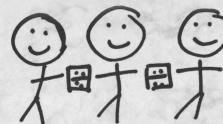
I will keep things and children safe. I will not throw, hit, or break things.



Sometimes I get really excited. Things break and children get hurt.



It's fun to play with children when we are all safe.



the end

in our classroom? How do you feel when it happens to you? How can we deal with this problem? Children offered various ideas, such as leaving more space between the people sitting together; saying the other person could sit next to him or her later or tomorrow; and picking someone they both liked to have sit in the middle. This “social story” was recalled whenever a comparable situation occurred later that year, and children were able to choose from solutions they had generated themselves.

Here are some other ways you can help children reflect on problem-solving techniques:

- ***Draw pictures and make “feeling dolls.”*** This is a nonthreatening way for children to represent and explore the feelings that are aroused in social conflicts.
- ***Pose simple and familiar “what if” situations, based on real events, for small-group discussion.*** Suggest situations you know the children will find unacceptable in order to elicit their ideas on how to solve the problem. For example, if children have been arguing over using the paint pumps, say, “What if I decided only teachers could mix paints?” Take advantage of the fact that preschoolers are beginning to develop a sense of humor. They can understand the absurdity of what you are proposing, but the light-hearted mood can also make it easier for them to join safely and comfortably in the discussion.

In Conclusion

Preschoolers’ emerging emotional and social abilities in other domains — dealing with feelings, empathy, community, cooperation, tolerance, and morality — also prepare them to resolve interpersonal conflicts. The role of the teacher is to guide, rather than control, the problem-solving process. Because the potential for conflict is normal and pervasive in the early childhood classroom, it is not surprising that many of the strategies used to prevent and handle these conflict situations also reflect general best practices. These factors include establishing a consistent daily routine, arranging and equipping the learning environment with interesting and plentiful materials, limiting the number and length of transitions, and setting clear behavioral expectations for children.

There are also specific techniques that teachers can use to mediate conflicts, notably a multistep approach that helps children cope with their feelings and arrive at mutually determined solutions. Establishing a classroom where conflicts are treated as educational opportunities and are peacefully resolved not only builds important social skills but creates a safe and supportive learning environment for all children.