



Conflicts. They can be a big source of stress not only for children, but for caregivers and teachers. However, they can be an excellent source of growth when seen as such. Conflicts can be stressful for the adults in charge because children's negative emotions can often contact our own emotions, and that can bring up a desire to "fix" the problem, to prevent children from feeling negative emotions. Or perhaps

they remind us of our own histories with conflicts, and the ways they may or may not have been handled well by the adults in our lives. But when adults can use their own tools to calm their own emotional reaction, they can make the space for conflict to be seen as a healthy opportunity for learning and growth.

Conflicts are an excellent opportunity to learn peace-making skills, negotiation, and senses of fairness and equity. For example, feeling like you have enough crates can often be a source of conflict in the outdoor play yard. One day, this caused a lot of arguing. I had everyone put the crates back and we sat down to talk.



"So how did that work?" I started. Not well, was the consensus. "Let's try a different way. What should we try?"

"I know!" Said Donovan, "everyone should get the same amount." So we divided the crates evenly among the people who wanted to build with crates (tying in a math exercise while we were at it). This meant





everyone got three crates. As they started to build there was a big chorus of "I don't have enough!" "I need more to make a castle!" So we gathered again.

"How did that work?" Not well, was again the consensus. "What was the problem?" People agreed that no one had enough crates to build with. "What if we tried it this way," I started, "Maddie what do you want to build?"

Maddie said, "A tent."



"Who is excited about building a tent with Maddie?" Harper was. Then I asked the next person the same question, until everyone was happy with a building project. Afterwards, we talked about why that way worked better. "Because we can share crates!" chimed Gretchen.

In this instance, the teacher supplied a solution which ended up working. However, in many cases, when given the space children will supply their own solutions. This doesn't mean there was never a conflict about the crates again. However, this is an example of a conflict that is rich with learning opportunities. Everyone had the opportunity to see growth mindset

modeled by trying different things until it worked for everybody. By being asked how to solve the problem instead of told how, children learn that their ideas and voices are valued. By asking them to identify problems and solutions, they are learning skills of evaluation and creative thinking.

Social conflict isn't the only kind that is essential to learning. In the wonderful book "Are You Listening? Fostering Conversations That Help Young Children Learn," by Lisa Burman, she talks about the importance of intellectual conflict to create new pathways of thinking. "Without an unfamiliar experience, an alternative perspective, new information, or a different idea for the learner to connect to her existing schema or prior knowledge, there is no shift in understanding."

Here are some examples of open-ended language to use when solving conflicts:

How can we solve this?

How did this problem begin?

How did you feel about that?

What else can we try?

What can you do to make it better?

What about that was important to you?

What are your thoughts or questions about helping kids with conflicts?

Have a wonderful weekend!

Warmly,

Aria



### **Activities**

Color mixing my colors

Sensory play dough

Baking soda and  
vinegar experiment

### **Materials**

Painting supplies

“Colors like me” paint

Baking soda, vinegar,  
watercolors, and

pipettes

Play dough and

loose parts