



## Conflict Summary

### Why Conflict?

There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and growing your child's skills to manage conflict provides a perfect opportunity.

**Tip** These steps are done best when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parenting relationship will support these steps.

### Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *"What gets you really upset or mad at a friend or a relative?"*
- *"What feelings do you experience?"* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *"How does your body feel when you're upset?"* (Name the ways that your child physically experiences being upset whether it's a red hot face or a racing heartbeat.)
- *"Have you hurt another person's feelings when you've argued? How did that feel?"*
- *"How might you have argued differently to express your needs but not harm the other person?"*

### Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

Hang up a picture of a traffic light to teach constructive conflict management skills as a game. Role play and make it fun. Here's the process.<sup>1</sup>

- Red Light - Stop and calm down.
  - Parent: Stand at one end of the room or yard and turn your back to the players. Have your children call out one common problem they face, and then they can start running toward you.
  - Flip around to face them and say, "Stop!" with your hand held out flat.
  - Now, ask everyone to breathe slowly, deeply to practice calming down.
- Yellow Light - Feel, communicate, and think.
  - The children walk and move toward you in slow motion.
  - Feel. Children say the problem and how they feel about it. Parents can respond by rephrasing what their children said into an "I-message" such as, *"I feel frustrated when you take my school supplies because I need to use them."*
  - Communicate. Set a positive goal together such as, *"We want to make sure everyone has the school supplies needed at homework time."*

- Think of lots of solutions. Make sure all players get to contribute an idea for solving the problem. Then, think of the outcomes or consequences of various choices. Ask, *“What might happen if we try....?”*
- Green Light - Go, try, and reflect.
  - Players can run toward you, tap you, and then pick a solution or idea most, if not all, liked. Go try it out.
  - Be sure to reflect on it later: *“How did it go? Would you change anything?”*
  - Teach your child to repair harm. A critical step in teaching children about managing conflict is learning how to repair harm when they've caused it.

**Tip** If your child struggles giving you a feeling word, then offer them options and ask which ones fit their true feelings. This helps expand their feelings vocabulary.

### Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child the chance to take steps to meet their big challenges, taking responsibility for their own relationships - even when you know you could do it faster and better.
- Be sure and consider how you can create the conditions to support their success (like offering coaching or guided open-ended questions to prompt thinking) so that your child learns to become their own best problem solver.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your child has caused harm, they need your guidance, encouragement, and support in following through to repair it.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid offering direct solutions, going directly to the other in the conflict, or solving a problem for your child.

### Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” statements like, *“Show me you can work out your argument with your sister.”*
- Recognize effort by using “I notice” statements like, *“I noticed how you talked to your sister about how you were feeling and then worked with her on a way to come to an agreement. That's excellent!”*
- When you can see your child is frustrated or feeling incapable, proactively remind your child of their strength. Whisper in your child's ear, *“Remember how you talked to your sister yesterday? You can use that same strategy with your friend today.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges.
  - *“How are you feeling about your free time at school?”* Offering a chance to talk about lunch and recess gives insight into your child's social challenges.
  - *“Seems like you are holding onto angry feelings toward your friend. Have you talked to him yet? What options do you think you have?”*
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

**Trap** Don't move on or nag. Children often need more time to deal with their feelings and approach someone with whom they are upset. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they can address their problems on their own with your support. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to work through their problems.

## Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *"I noticed you talked to your sister to try and work it out after she hurt you. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

## Reference

1. Weissberg, R.P., Jackson, A.S., & Shriver, T.P. (1993). Promoting positive social development and health practices in young urban adolescents. In M.J. Elias (Ed.). *Social decision making and life skills development: Guidelines for middle school educators* (pp. 45-77). Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publications.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Conflict Summary. Ages 5-10*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.