

Building Conflict Management [Intermediate]

Does your child have difficulty understanding someone else's point of view during a disagreement? Do they struggle with explaining their feelings respectfully when experiencing a conflict? Maybe they don't know that there are many ways to respond to a conflict and that they can choose their response. Learning **conflict management** strategies can help your child better manage conflicts.

Definition: **Conflict management** is knowing how you usually respond to conflict, knowing the reasons behind specific conflicts, and taking steps to resolve conflicts (Noonan and Gaumer Erickson, 2017).

Students use **conflict management** strategies to make effective choices in conflict situations.

Student Impacts: Teachers providing **conflict management** instruction and classroom practice observe student growth, including:

- Increased ability to compromise and collaborate with their peers
- Prosocial behavior
- Improved communication
- Increased self-awareness and self-reflection

Research in **elementary** and **secondary** education identifies proven student impacts from teaching **conflict management**.

Teaching **conflict management** helps students adapt to social norms and interpret others' verbal and nonverbal communication (Burdelski, 2020).

Intervening as early as preschool is important because poor conflict management can escalate into aggression if left unaddressed (Leff et al., 2001; Levine & Tamburrino, 2014).

Students who learn and use constructive, solution-oriented approaches to conflict build stronger relationships and reduce feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Wang et al., 2020).

Conflict Management Strategies

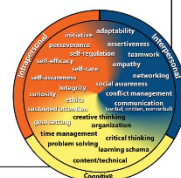
To **manage** conflict, I can...

1. Explore conflict responses 
2. Pause and ponder 
3. Manage my anger 
4. Uncover reasons for the disagreement 
5. Voice my perspective 
6. Seek to understand perspectives 
7. Listen and summarize 
8. Plan my response 
9. Find a solution 
10. Help others find solutions 



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Learning conflict management helps children maintain strong relationships with others and respond to disagreements in ways that lead to more favorable outcomes. Conflict happens every day, and the way we respond to conflict is a choice. Understanding this helps children learn to express their feelings and ideas respectfully. They become more accepting of others who have different feelings and ideas.

Watch the one-minute video [What Is Conflict Management?](#) with your child. Afterward, share an example of a time when you responded to a conflict inappropriately and it negatively affected the outcome of the situation. Contrast that example with one where you managed a conflict effectively and compare the two outcomes.

Ask your child to respond to these questions to help generate a meaningful discussion about conflict management:

- When have you experienced a disagreement with someone and had big feelings, like anger or frustration?
- How did you choose to respond to the disagreement?
- What was the outcome?
- What might you do differently next time you experience a similar disagreement?

Emphasize that conflict and disagreements happen to everyone and what we choose to do during a conflict affects what happens next. For example, responding by raising your voice and calling someone names could make the situation worse and lead to hurt feelings. Responding by walking away could also have negative consequences, like not being able to resolve the disagreement and not getting something you want or need.

Explain that you are going to help them learn and practice some strategies to work through conflicts effectively. Even though most of us don't like conflict, learning conflict management can lead to positive outcomes, like better friendships, an increase in our understanding of others, and an improvement in our ability to explain our thoughts and feelings respectfully. Four strategies to teach your children are **explore conflict responses**, **voice my perspective**, **seek to understand perspectives**, and **listen and summarize**.



Explore Conflict Responses

Remind your child that the way they respond to a conflict is a choice. Learning about the different ways to respond to a conflict will help them choose the best way to react when they experience a disagreement. Watch the video [Explore Conflict Responses](#) with your child. There are five different conflict responses. These include responding like a shark, a turtle, a teddy bear, a fox, or an owl. As your child watches the video, ask them to listen for each type of conflict response. After the video, ask:

- Which of the conflict responses have you used during a disagreement?
- What could be the disadvantages of usually responding like a teddy bear?
[Possible response: you always go along with what the other person wants, and it could make you feel bad; your ideas wouldn't be heard; people could take advantage of you.]

- What could be the disadvantages of usually responding like a shark?
[Possible response: you could hurt others' feelings; people would be afraid of you; you wouldn't have any friends.]
- Which response do you feel is most likely to lead to a favorable outcome when you are in a disagreement with someone?

Emphasize that when they experience a disagreement, they can choose their response and that it is important to stop and think about the different ways they could respond. There are times when each response is appropriate. For example, responding like a turtle is appropriate when they don't care about the outcome. Responding like a shark is appropriate if someone is getting hurt and you need help.

Tell your child to recall a recent disagreement they experienced with a friend or sibling. Ask:

- What was the disagreement about? What did each person want?
- Which conflict response did you choose?
- How did the conflict response you chose affect the outcome?
- Which conflict response will you choose the next time you experience a similar disagreement?

Remind them that there are times when they will want to respond like a shark, a turtle, a teddy bear, or a fox but that responding like an owl is usually the most effective. It allows each person involved in the disagreement to respectfully explain their feelings and together decide on what to do next.



Voice My Perspective

When your child can express their thoughts and feelings about a conflict, it improves their ability to communicate with others and promotes meaningful interactions. Learning to ***voice their perspective*** will also help your child be more accepting of others' point of view during a disagreement.

Show your child the video [Voice My Perspective](#). Then discuss the strategy:

- What do you do when you ***voice your perspective***?
[Possible response: you calmly explain your feelings and why you feel that way.]
- What is the prompt you can use when you want to voice your perspective?
[Possible response: I feel _____ because _____.]
- Why is it important to ***voice your perspective*** respectfully during a conflict?
[Possible response: it helps others understand you and keeps you from saying things you don't mean when you have a disagreement.]

Emphasize that they should identify specific emotion when they need to explain their feelings. Using words like "mad" or "sad" may not describe their actual feelings. For example, they may tell a friend that they are mad that the friend didn't save a seat for them at lunch, but the underlying emotion is probably disappointed or hurt.

Explain that ***voicing your perspective*** can be difficult and practicing the strategy when they aren't involved in a disagreement can help them remember to use it when they have a conflict.

Tell them that they are going to practice using the [Feelings Chart](#) to **voice their perspective**. Work with your child to generate a list of topics for which your family members have different opinions. Examples might include favorite sports, musical genres, foods, or hobbies. After you have brainstormed a list of topics, take turns **voicing your perspective** about each topic using the prompt “I feel _____ because _____.” Remind them to use specific emotions like frustrated or excited rather than sad or happy when they are **voicing their perspective**.

After practicing the strategy **voice my perspective**, refer back to the disagreement you and your child discussed while **exploring conflict responses**, or ask your child to recall a recent disagreement. Ask:

- What was your perspective during the conflict?
- How could you **voice your perspective** the next time you experience a similar conflict?

Encourage your child to use the strategy **voice my perspective** anytime they are interacting with others. Learning to **voice their perspective** will help them maintain friendships and reduce the likelihood that they say or do things they don’t mean during conflicts.



Seek to Understand Perspectives

Once your child understands how to **voice their perspective** and has practiced using the strategy, they are ready to learn the strategy **seek to understand perspectives**. Children who practice trying to understand others have increased empathy. They are also better at understanding what caused a disagreement.

Explain that **seeking to understand perspectives** means that you can understand how a conflict appears to another person. Seeking to understand others will help them determine why a conflict has occurred and figure out what they need to do to resolve a conflict. Inform your child that we all have different points of view based on our experiences. Watch the video [Seek to Understand Perspectives](#). Afterward, discuss the video:

- What do you do when you **seek to understand perspectives**?
[Possible responses: you put yourself in the other person’s shoes; you think about how the other person might feel.]
- How will seeking to understand others help you the next time you have a disagreement?
- When would it be important to **seek to understand perspectives**?
[Possible response: when you don’t understand why the other person is mad at you or what caused the argument.]

Tell your child that they are going to watch another video where they will learn more about **seeking to understand perspectives** and empathy. As they are watching the video, they should listen to what to do when **seeking to understand perspectives**. Watch the video [Empathy](#) with your child. Then discuss the video:

- What do you need to do when you **seek to understand perspectives**?
[Possible responses: listen closely, pay attention to what the other person is saying.]
- When has someone shown empathy for you?
- When have you had a different perspective than your friend?

Provide your child with the scenarios below and ask them to practice seeking to understand the perspectives of each person involved:

- If your parents make a rule that you can't be on your phone after 6:00 p.m., what could be your perspective? What could be their perspective?
- If your teacher asked you to stay after school to work on your math homework, what could be your perspective? What could be her perspective?
- If your friend doesn't want to play basketball with you at recess, what could be your perspective? What could be his perspective?

Reinforce the idea that **seeking to understand perspectives** will help your child determine the reason a conflict has occurred and some possible actions they can take to begin resolving the conflict. Remind them that during a disagreement, each person will likely have different perspectives and they will need to think about the other person's point of view.



Listen and Summarize

Listening and summarizing what was said improves understanding of others and shows respect during discussions. Watch the video [Listen and Summarize](#) with your child. Afterward, discuss the strategy and why it is an important part of managing conflict:

- What do you do when you **listen and summarize**?
[Possible response: 1. make eye contact with the other person, 2. listen carefully to what they are saying, and 3. use their own words to repeat back what they told you.]
- How would **listening and summarizing** help you during a disagreement?
[Possible response: it would help me understand the other persons' perspective, and they would feel better because I was listening to them.]

Remind your child that they can use phrases like "It sounds like ..." or "In other words ..." to help them summarize what the other person has said. Ask your child to tell you about their day so that you can model **listening and summarizing** for them. Be sure to make eye contact, listen carefully, and use your own words to summarize what they have said.

After modeling **listening and summarizing**, ask your child to practice the strategy while you tell them about a disagreement you recently experienced. As your child is **listening and summarizing**, be prepared to support them by reviewing actions they should demonstrate and phrases they can use to get started.

Discuss how this strategy could be used during a disagreement and emphasize that taking the time to listen closely to the other person's thoughts and feelings is an important part of conflict management. Encourage your child to practice the strategy anytime they work with others, listen to their friends tell stories, or have discussions with you.

Next Steps

- Practice **exploring conflict responses** by referring to characters in books or videos. Talk about how different characters responded to a conflict. Determine what impact acting

like a shark, a turtle, a fox, a teddy bear, or an owl had on the conflict. Did it make the conflict worse? Did it help to resolve the conflict?

- When your child experiences conflict, remind them to **voice their perspective** respectfully, and help them plan how and when they will convey their perspective to the other person.
- During family discussions, encourage your child to use the prompt “I feel _____ because _____” to provide them additional practice of the strategy **voice my perspective**. If your child struggles with naming their emotions, post the [Feelings Chart](#) where it is accessible to them and prompt them to use it.
- As your child experiences disagreements or struggles with understanding others’ point of view, remind them to **seek to understand perspectives**. Discuss how the other person might feel and what led to their actions. Remind your child that asking the other person to explain their feelings will help them understand how to begin resolving the disagreement.
- When your child tells you about their day, model the strategy **listen and summarize**. Then ask them to practice the strategy as you tell them about your day.