

Building Conflict Management [Primary]

Does your child struggle to work through disagreements? Do they have difficulty managing their anger and clearly expressing their perspective? 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 appropriate 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

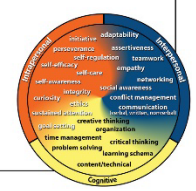
To manage conflict, I can...

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 fact helps children learn to express their feelings and ideas respectfully. They become more accepting of others when they have different feelings and ideas.

Watch the one-minute video [What Is Conflict Management?](#) with your child to learn more about conflict management and why it is important for children to learn. 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?

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 so they can 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. The four strategies you will help them learn are **explore conflict responses**, **pause and ponder**, **plan my response**, and **manage my anger**.



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. Although there are five different conflict responses, you will focus on exploring three conflict responses. These include responding like a shark, a turtle, or an owl. As your child watches the video, ask them to listen for how a shark, a turtle, and an owl might respond to a conflict. After the video, ask:

- If you were acting like a shark during a disagreement, what would you do?
[Possible responses: yell, shout, only care about myself, not care if I hurt others' feelings.]
- Describe a time when you acted like a shark during a conflict.

- If you were acting like a turtle during a disagreement, what would you do?
[Possible responses: hide, avoid others, not want to talk about it.]
- Describe a time when you acted like a turtle during a conflict.
- If you were acting like an owl during a conflict, what would you do?
[Possible responses: think about the other person, explain my feelings, work to make things better.]
- Describe a time when you acted like an owl during a conflict.

Tell your child that when they experience a disagreement, it's important to think about what may happen if they respond like a shark, a turtle, or an owl. They should choose the best response for the situation. Emphasize that there are times when it is appropriate to respond in each way. For example, you would respond like a shark if someone was getting hurt and you needed help. You might respond like a turtle if you didn't care about the outcome and didn't have strong feelings about the situation.

Explain that they are going to play a game where they practice responding to a scenario as either a shark, a turtle, or an owl. On three pieces of paper, write "shark," "turtle," and "owl" or draw these animals, one animal per card. Turn each piece of paper over so the word or drawing is facing down. Read the first scenario below to your child. Then ask them to choose a piece of paper. Ask them to respond to the scenario as the animal represented on the paper. After each scenario, discuss how the type of response could affect the outcome. Repeat this process for each scenario.

- You and your friend are arguing about whether to play video games or ride bikes. You really want to play video games.
- Your friends are playing outside, but your mom said you need to read your book before you can play with them.
- You and your sibling are having a disagreement about what to watch on TV.
- Your teacher says you need to stay in from recess because you forgot your coat and it's really cold outside.

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



Pause and Ponder

Review the conflict responses shark, turtle, and owl and remind your child that they can learn to choose how they respond to disagreements. Tell them that you are going to teach them a new strategy that will help them choose the best way to respond to a conflict and decide what they want to do next. The strategy is called ***pause and ponder***.

Show your child the video [Pause and Ponder & Plan My Response](#). Then discuss the strategy:

- What do you do when you **pause and ponder**?
[Possible response: you think about the disagreement, name your feelings, and then decide what you want to do next.]
- When have you responded to a conflict in a way you wished you hadn't?
- What could you do next time you experience big feelings during a conflict?
*[Possible response: I will **pause and ponder**, think about my feelings, and decide what to do next.]*

Explain that **pausing and pondering** gives us time to calm down and think about what to say and do next. When we respond to conflict inappropriately, it can make the situation worse and hurt others' feelings. When we **pause and ponder**, we think before we act.

Tell your child that you are going to watch another video with them. While watching, they are going to practice **pausing and pondering** to decide what the character should do next. Watch the video [Conflict Resolution Scenarios](#). Pause the video after each scenario and ask your child what they might be feeling in that situation. Discuss the questions asked in the video. When it is difficult for them to decide what to do, discuss how each response could affect the outcome. Encourage your child to use the strategy **pause and ponder** anytime they experience a disagreement. Learning to think about their actions and feelings and appropriate ways to express them will improve their ability to manage conflict.



Plan My Response

Once your child understands the different ways they can respond to conflict and they **pause and ponder** to consider how each response could affect the outcome, they are ready to use the strategy **plan my response**. They can use this strategy to plan what they will say and do as they are experiencing a disagreement. When they plan their response, they choose to respond like a shark, a turtle, or an owl. They imagine themselves responding as each animal, including the words and actions they will use.

Tell your child that they are going to watch the video [Pause and Ponder & Plan My Response](#) again. This time, ask them to pay close attention to what the girl does when she experiences a disagreement with her friend. After the video, ask:

- What did the girl do when her friend Amelia started to draw the poster without her?
*[Possible responses: she **paused and pondered** and thought about what would happen if she acted like a shark, a turtle, or an owl.]*
- How did she decide to respond?
[Possible response: she decided to respond to her friend by acting like an owl.]
- Why do you think she decided to act like an owl?
[Possible response: so she wouldn't hurt her friends' feelings and would still be able to work on the poster.]

Emphasize that using the strategy **plan my response** helps them think about what they want and choose a response that is more likely to result in a favorable outcome for them. Explain

that their response should be based on how strongly they want or need something. For example, your child might not care that a classmate cut in front of them if everyone was lining up to go home anyway. In this case, your child would probably choose to respond like a turtle because they wouldn't have strong feelings about the situation. When they **plan their response**, they also consider how strongly they feel about something.

Tell your child they are going to practice the strategy **plan my response**. You will read a few scenarios, and they should **pause and ponder** and imagine what could happen if they responded like a shark, a turtle, and an owl. Then they should **plan their response** by discussing the words and actions they would use.

- You and your sibling are arguing over whose turn it is to pick up the toys. You picked up the toys yesterday and want her to know that it is her turn today.
- Your friend borrowed your basketball and lost it. You're really upset, but you know that your friend didn't do it on purpose.
- Your teacher asked you to help another student find their library book during recess, but you would rather play on the monkey bars.

Remind your child to **plan their response** anytime they need to think about the possible outcomes for a disagreement and aren't sure about what they want to do. **Planning their response** will help them clearly communicate their feelings and what they want to happen.



Manage My Anger

Remind your child that they have been learning to manage conflict. Tell them that you are going to help them learn another strategy that they can use when they experience a disagreement or anytime they have big feelings. The strategy is called **manage my anger**. Watch the video [Manage My Anger](#) with your child. Afterward, discuss the strategy and why it is an important part of managing conflict:

- How do you know when you are experiencing big feelings like anger?
[Possible response: your body gives you signals like a racing heart and cheeks turning red.]
- What do you do when you **manage your anger**?
[Possible response: you know when you feel angry, and you do things like take a deep breath to calm yourself.]
- Why is it important to **manage your anger**?
[Possible responses: so you don't hurt others; it keeps you from getting in trouble.]

Emphasize the actions mentioned in the video to help **manage anger**—taking deep breaths, going for a walk, or drawing your feelings—can all be used as calming techniques when your child feels anger or other strong emotions.

Show your child the [Feelings Chart](#) and remind them that anger is the emotion that we might show on the outside but that there are usually other emotions we are feeling on the inside, like hurt, frustration, and embarrassment. Provide them with a personal example of when you felt anger and other emotions. As you are sharing your example, emphasize how you thought about

what you were feeling, why you were feeling that way, and how that led you to identify the other emotions you experienced. Point out each emotion you felt on the [Feelings Chart](#).

After sharing your example, remind your child that we all have times when we experience big feelings and many different emotions at once. Practicing the strategy **manage my anger** will help them sort through their emotions and learn to calm themselves instead of responding inappropriately when they have big feelings.

Tell your child that they are going to watch a video that will show them techniques for **managing their anger**. Show the video [Anger Management Techniques for Students](#). Afterward, review the different techniques for **managing their anger**. They are:

1. Relaxation skills (e.g. tensing and relaxing muscles, spending time in nature, deep breathing)
2. Distraction skills (e.g., drawing, writing, listening to music)
3. Movement (e.g., walking away, running, biking)
4. Thinking skills (e.g., changing your thoughts, telling yourself positive things)
5. Communication skills (e.g., talking about feelings, using “I feel” statements)

Ask your child to choose two or three techniques that they feel comfortable using and that are appropriate for them to do during school or at home. Tell your child to draw themselves demonstrating each of the techniques they have chosen. Post their drawings along with the [Feelings Chart](#) where they can refer to them when they experience big feelings.

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, or an owl had on the conflict. Did it make it worse? Did it help to resolve the conflict?
- When your child experiences conflict, remind them to **pause and ponder** to identify what they are feeling and think about what they want to do next.
- Share scenario in which your child is likely to experience a conflict and ask them to **plan their response** by imagining what could happen if they acted like a shark, a turtle, or an owl. Encourage them to demonstrate the words and actions they plan to use the next time they experience a situation similar to the scenario.
- Anytime your child needs to calm themselves, refer them to their drawings of techniques for **managing their anger**. Encourage them to draw new techniques for **managing their anger** and keep those posted in an area of your home where your child can refer to them as needed.
- When your child experiences big feelings, remind them that they can feel many emotions at once. Encourage them to use the [Feelings Chart](#) to help them sort through their big feelings.