

## Building Conflict Management [Secondary]

Does your child struggle to get along with siblings or classmates? Do they sometimes avoid conflict while ignoring their own needs? Maybe they don't know that experiencing conflict is a common part of life. Learning **Conflict Management** Strategies can help your child navigate disagreements with less stress and in a way that results in a better outcome for all involved.

**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, 2016).

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 

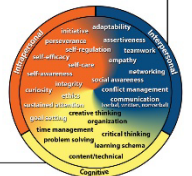
9. Find a solution 

10. Help others find solutions 



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Learning conflict management helps children maintain strong relationships with others and respond to disagreements appropriately. Understanding that they have a choice in how they respond to conflict helps children choose effective resolution strategies that allow them to work through conflicts, manage their emotions, and understand others' perspectives.

Watch the two-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 couldn't clearly explain how you felt or what you wanted?
- How did you choose to respond to the disagreement?
- What was the outcome?
- How would learning strategies to help you navigate disagreements help you?

Emphasize that conflict and disagreements happen to everyone and that what we choose to do during a conflict affects what happens next. For example, responding to a conflict by avoiding it and hoping it will resolve itself can have negative consequences, like not getting what you want or need and allowing others to take advantage of you. Responding in an opposite manner, by yelling and threatening the other person, also has negative consequences, like damaging the relationship and hurting the other person.

Tell your child that you are going to help them learn and practice strategies that will help them work through disagreements effectively. Emphasize that even though most of us don't like conflict, learning to manage conflicts appropriately can lead to stronger relationships, increase their understanding of others, and improve their ability to express their thoughts and feelings respectfully. Explain that the four strategies you will help them learn and practice are **explore conflict responses**, **plan my response**, **find a solution**, and **help others find solutions**. Additional strategies are explained on the [primary](#) and [intermediate](#) parent guidance pages.



### **Explore Conflict Responses**

Remind your child that how they respond to conflict is a choice. Improving their ability to manage conflict starts with understanding the different ways they can respond to conflict, including the benefits and drawbacks of each style. When they understand the different ways they can respond to conflict, they can choose a response that is appropriate for each conflict they experience and is more likely to result in the outcome they prefer. Watch the three-minute video [Explore Conflict Responses](#) with your child. There are five conflict responses: shark, turtle, owl, teddy bear, and fox. As your child watches the video, ask them to listen for each conflict response. Afterward, ask:

- Which of the conflict responses have you used during a disagreement?

- If you responded to a conflict like the competing shark, what would be the disadvantage?  
*[Possible responses: it could damage your relationships; you could hurt others' feelings; people would be afraid of you; you wouldn't have any friends.]*
- If you responded to conflict like the accommodating teddy bear, what could be the disadvantages?  
*[Possible response: you always go along with what the other person wants; it could make you feel bad; your ideas wouldn't be heard; people could take advantage of you.]*
- 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. It is important to stop and think about the effect each response will have on the outcome of the disagreement. There are times when each response is appropriate. For example, responding like the competing shark is appropriate if someone is getting hurt and you need help. Responding like the avoiding turtle is appropriate when they don't care about the outcome. It is also important for them to realize that they may respond to conflicts differently based on who is in the conflict with them. They could usually respond like a shark with their sibling but respond like a teddy bear with their friends.

Tell your child to reflect on 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?
- How does understanding the different responses help you?

Ask your child to summarize about what they have learned about conflict management so far. Be sure they recall the key concepts below:

- Conflict is common and happens throughout life.
- Learning conflict management can lead to stronger relationships and better communication.
- There are five conflict management styles, or ways you can respond, and each type has benefits and disadvantages.



### ***Plan My Response***

When your child understands the different conflict responses, including the benefits and disadvantages of each, they can plan how they want to respond to a conflict based on their relationships and how much they care about the outcome. They can use the strategy ***plan my response*** to think through each response and the likely outcome. ***Planning their response*** will help them choose the most appropriate response and avoid escalating a situation by responding inappropriately.

Show your child the two-minute video [Plan My Response](#). Then discuss the strategy:

- What does **planning your response** help you do?  
*[Possible responses: it helps you stop and think about how you want to respond; it helps you choose the best response for the situation.]*
- Why is it sometimes difficult to **plan your response**?  
*[Possible responses: it takes time; you have to stop and think; sometimes your emotions take over, and you just respond how I feel at the time.]*
- Why is it important to **plan your response**.  
*[Possible responses: it keeps you from saying or doing something you wish you hadn't; you avoid damaging relationships; it helps you express your feelings and ideas appropriately.]*

Emphasize that **planning your response** has four steps:

1. Decide how you feel about the situation. How much do you care about the response, and how much do you care about the person involved?
2. Decide the response you will use. Will you respond like a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox?
3. Plan what you will say. Use the prompt, "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_" to help you.
4. Plan when you will respond. Will you respond as soon as possible or wait until later?

Ask your child to think about a situation when they are likely to experience a conflict. For example, maybe they usually experience conflict while deciding what to do with friends, or maybe they usually experience conflict while playing sports. Tell your child that they are going to **plan their response** to a potential conflict so that they are prepared and respond appropriately. Ask your child to use the four steps to **planning your response** and plan how they will respond to the conflict they have predicted.

Emphasize that when they experience a conflict, taking the time to **plan their response** will help them choose the best one. They don't have to respond to conflict immediately. Taking the time to think about what they want to say and do will help them calmly express what they feel and what they want. It will also help them maintain their relationships and minimize the stress they experience when there is conflict.



### **Find a Solution**

The strategy **find a solution** is based on the negotiation process. The negotiation process can be appropriate for addressing conflicts with friends, family members, and employers. Learning the negotiation process is beneficial because the agreement reached between the two parties is more likely to last when both parties make decisions and benefit from the agreement. Going through the process of negotiation builds stronger relationships and trust, and it can result in creative solutions that help more than those involved.

Tell your child that they are going to learn more about the strategy **find a solution**. Ask them to reflect on how they have attempted to resolve disagreements in the past.

- When have you successfully resolved a disagreement with a friend?

- What did you say and do?
- Why do you think you were successful in resolving the disagreement?

Explain that the strategy **find a solution** is also known as negotiation and that it involves a seven-step process for working through a disagreement. Watch the three-minute video [Find a Solution](#) with your child. Afterward, ask them to recall the steps to **finding a solution**:

- What are the steps to **finding a solution**?  
*[Possible response: describe what you want and feel and why, listen to the other person's perspective, summarizing what they have said, come up with three possible solutions, and together choose the best solution for resolving the issue.]*
- What are some benefits to **finding a solution**?  
*[Possible responses: both people get what they want; it builds trust.]*

Tell your child that they are going to watch another video that will help them understand the importance of listening and communicating well during the negotiation process. Watch the video [Two Girls and an Orange](#) with your child. Then discuss the key points:

- What steps of negotiation were missed?  
*[Possible responses: neither one of them explained why they wanted the orange.]*
- Which steps did you observe?  
*[Possible response: they both clearly said what they wanted.]*
- How could following the negotiation process and using the strategy **find a solution** have helped the girls?  
*[Possible responses: if they had both explained why they wanted the orange, both of their needs could have been met; without following the process, neither of them got what they wanted.]*

Explain to your child that they are going to practice **finding a solution** and using the negotiation process. Brainstorm issues that you and your child disagree on and that you are comfortable negotiating. Some examples might include what to cook for dinner, which chores your child should do, curfew, or which classes they should take next year. After you have decided on a topic, review the steps for **finding a solution** using the handout [Find a Solution in 7 Steps](#). Follow the process until you have found a solution for the topic you agreed to negotiate. Afterwards, discuss the process:

- How did it feel to follow a process for **finding a solution** and resolving a disagreement?
- What were some of the benefits you noticed as you were going through the process?
- When will you use the strategy **find a solution**?

Help your child summarize what they have learned about negotiation by asking them to recall the steps of negotiation and explain why it is important to follow each step of the process. You can also ask your child to reflect on the benefits of negotiation.

## Help Others Find Solutions



The strategy **help others find solutions** is based on the practice of mediation. Mediation is a process where a mediator helps two or more people involved in a conflict negotiate a mutually accepted resolution.

Explain to your child that the collaborating owl and the compromising fox are two of the most difficult responses to conflict because both approaches require more time to come to a resolution. However, they can also be the most beneficial approaches because they strengthen relationships. Sometimes we need a third person to help us collaborate or compromise. When we need to involve a third person, we use the strategy **help others find solutions**. The third person is known as a mediator and helps the two people involved in a conflict follow a process similar to negotiation. Tell your child that they are going to watch a video that will help them understand how to help others find a solution. Watch the four-minute video [Help Others Find Solutions](#). Afterward, discuss the key points:

- What are important things that a mediator does when **helping others find solutions**?  
[Possible response: they follow the seven-step process, listen closely to each person, and encourage each person to be honest and ask questions.]
- How could following the process of mediation help you when conflicts arise?

Emphasize that mediators must be good listeners and remain impartial. They also help both parties identify possible solutions. Review the handout [Find a Solution in 7 Steps](#) and explain that a mediator guides the negotiators through the process, making sure they stay focused.

Ask your child to reflect on situations where using the strategy **help others find solutions** would have been helpful and to determine when they will likely use the strategy in the future:

- Describe a situation you have recently experienced when using the strategy **help others find solutions** would have been beneficial.
- What are some situations where you could use this strategy?

Remind them that being a good mediator requires them to listen carefully and follow the seven-step process. Using this strategy can help them resolve issues between friends, siblings, and others and helps them manage conflict more effectively.

## Next Steps

- Practice **exploring conflict responses** by discussing current events, sports figures, or celebrities that your child is interested in and determining what impact acting like a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox 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 **plan their response** by thinking carefully about when and how they want to respond to a disagreement. Help them consider the impacts of responding like a shark, a turtle, an owl, a teddy bear, or a fox and which response is more likely to resolve an issue.

- Remind your child that they know a process for resolving a disagreement and that they can **find a solution** using this process anytime they experience a conflict. Ask them to reflect on how well **finding a solution** helped them manage a conflict.
- During disagreements between siblings or friends, encourage your child to **help others find solutions** and practice being a good mediator. Discuss with your child your experiences with **helping others find solutions** at work. Emphasize that **helping others find solutions** can lead to stronger outcomes and relationships.