

Fact Sheet—You're the Mediator

Conflict between siblings or young friends can often seem like a no-win situation. Children can yell, cry, hit or run away. Conflict resolution provides a way to make peace when tempers flare.

As the person in charge, you are the mediator. You can help settle the argument. Follow these key steps to a peaceful solution.

- 1. Stay calm.**
 - Get down to the children's level and talk to them quietly and calmly.
- 2. Let them know you understand their feelings.**
 - Describe what they are feeling. Tell them it is okay to have these feelings. Don't ask questions until the children have calmed down.
- 3. Find out information.**
 - Find out what happened to make each of them upset. Encourage them to take turns as they describe their wants and needs. Focus on observed behaviors and help the children resist making judgments. For example, encourage them to say, "You took the candy" instead of, "You're a thief."
- 4. Repeat what you find out.**
 - Practice active listening. Use clear statements to retell what you heard each of them say. Define the conflict as a problem to solve together, not a battle to be won by one person.
- 5. Ask for ideas to solve the problem.**
 - Have the children take turns offering solutions to the problem. Do not judge the solutions offered. Examine the consequences of each solution offered. Listen for win-win solutions, which are compromises that let each child get something that he or she wants. You may have to suggest some possible solutions. For example, slice the last piece of cake in half to share; let one child play on the computer for 30 minutes, then let the other child play for 30 minutes; or play a game together so that both children get to play with the truck.
- 6. Stay close by for support.**
 - After the children agree, make sure that the solution is carried out, the problem doesn't return and that the children remain calm.

7. Praise children for playing well together.

- Focus on the child's behavior and make sure children know that they should be proud that they solved the problem for themselves.

If you find that the children you babysit often have conflicts and do not understand how to solve them, you can share the following good books about friendship and solving problems.

- *It's Mine!* by Leo Lionni (Dragonfly Books, 1996)
Three little frogs learn that their endless bickering isn't what's most important.
- *Let's Be Enemies* by Janice May Udry; illustrated by Maurice Sendak (Harper-Trophy, 1988)
James and John were best friends until...
- *How to Lose All Your Friends* by Nancy Carlson (Puffin, 1997)
Simple instructions on how not to be friends, including "Don't share your toys."
- *Words Are Not for Hurting* by Elizabeth Verdick (Free Spirit Publishing, 2004)
Using the right combinations of just 26 letters, you can hurt someone's feelings or solve a problem.
- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (Chronicle Books, 2000)
A great way to get rid of an enemy, but what happens when you find out he's really your friend?
- *Being Friends* by Karen Beaumont (Dial, 2000)
Two children like so many different things, but they both like being friends.