

# All About HighScope

9

## Resolving Conflicts

*Practical summaries of HighScope's history, educational approach, and curriculum*

### How does HighScope support young children in resolving conflicts?

Conflict is inevitable during the course of children's play. When something gets in their way — another child wants the same toy or a group of children disagree on how to play or who gets to play — children become frustrated and angry. This does not mean they are being bad, selfish, or mean. They simply have not yet learned how to interpret social cues (facial expressions, tone of voice, body movements), understand other viewpoints, or match their behavior to the situation.

HighScope teachers understand that children need help learning how to work out their disagreements together. In fact, we view conflicts as valuable learning opportunities through which we can help children develop social skills and become more aware of the impact their actions have on others. Rather than punishing or rewarding children to influence their behavior, we use a *six-step approach* to problem solving and conflict resolution.

### What is HighScope's six-step approach to problem solving and conflict resolution?

*Step 1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions or language.*

When we see children in the midst of a conflict, we use calm voices and quiet body movements to reassure the involved children, as well as those watching from the side, that things will get worked out to everyone's satisfaction.

Conflicts are valuable learning opportunities through which children can develop important social skills.

HighScope's six-step approach to conflict resolution helps children experience cooperative solutions.

We begin by gently reaching out to children who are upset or angry and by stopping any hurtful behavior. If the conflict involves a toy or some other material, we hold onto the item so the involved children can focus on the problem instead of on the object.

***Step 2. Acknowledge children's feelings.***

We recognize and accept what the children are feeling by using simple, descriptive words ("You seem angry" or "You look very sad"). This eventually helps children to let go of angry or hurt feelings, although such feelings may increase briefly before they subside. Children need to express their feelings before they can think clearly about possible solutions to the problem.

***Step 3. Gather information.***

When approaching children involved in a disagreement, we tell them we want to hear from every one of them. We ask open-ended questions beginning with "what" and "how" that help children describe the actions or materials that are part of the problem. (Young children do not have the understanding needed to answer "why" questions.) We listen carefully to the details in the children's explanations because what they say holds the key to finding the solution. During this step in the

process, we make it a point to avoid taking sides or assuming we know what happened. We also don't characterize certain children as "troublemakers."

***Step 4. Restate the problem.***

Using the details and needs described by the children, we restate the problem in simple words. If necessary, we seek additional information to make sure the description is an accurate statement of what happened. We try to use the children's words but may change them a bit to make things clearer. If necessary, we also rephrase hurtful words. (For example, "She can't play with me because I hate her" could be restated as "You are very angry and you want to play alone.") We check with all the involved children to make sure they agree that the problem has been described accurately from their perspective.

***Step 5. Ask for ideas for solutions, and choose one together.***

During this step, plenty of time is allowed for the children to think of a solution. We respect and explore all of their ideas, even if they seem unrealistic, and we help them think about how each idea might play out (the cause-and-effect relationships involved in each solution). If the children either cannot come up with an idea or cannot agree on one, we ask if they would like to hear our idea. We make the solutions concrete and practical because young children are not able to deal with abstract concepts. For example, if someone suggests "we can share," we help them define what it means to share. ("I'll have it for

three minutes and then you'll have it three minutes. We can use the egg timer to know when to switch turns.") This step allows all the children involved to feel satisfied with the solution. Solutions children come up with may not always seem fair or logical to adults, but if they are safe solutions and agreeable to the children involved, that is what really matters.

**Step 6. Give follow-up support as needed.**

When children have agreed on a solution, we recognize this accomplishment with a simple statement such as "You solved the problem," and we help them begin to carry out their solution. If it becomes apparent that one child is not satisfied and still feels angry, we return to earlier problem-solving steps and check with each child to make sure no one remains upset. Once the solution is in effect, we follow up again a short time later to make sure that no further conflicts have arisen and that all the children are reinvolved in their play.

**What do children learn from the conflict resolution process?**

As children gain practice with this process, they often begin to use one or more steps on their own. Adults may approach a group to help solve a problem, only to hear the children say "We already solved it!" In mastering the conflict resolution process, the children have learned how to

- Express needs and strong feelings
- Hear and respect others' points of view
- Express ideas and experience the give-and-take of relationships

- Develop a desire for participating in positive social behaviors
- Feel in control of the solution and outcome
- Experience successful cooperative solutions
- Develop trust in other children and adults
- Make constructive choices
- Experience feelings of competence

**How can families use this process at home?**

As children learn these techniques in their HighScope program, families may see them using the steps to resolve conflicts with siblings and playmates at home. As parents (and teachers) help and support them in this process, they may also find themselves using similar steps to resolve their own conflicts with family members, co-workers, and friends, as well as disagreements with their children. We remind parents not to be discouraged if success is not instant. These steps take practice but they can be learned by everyone. Since HighScope teachers have received training in this problem-solving approach, they will be glad to help families apply it at home.

By mastering the conflict resolution process, children experience feelings of competence and self-control.

# Steps in Resolving Conflicts

1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.
  - Place yourself between the children, on their level.
  - Use a calm voice and gentle touch.
  - Remain neutral rather than take sides.
2. Acknowledge children's feelings.
  - "You look really upset."
  - Let children know you need to hold any object in question.
3. Gather information.
  - "What's the problem?"
4. Restate the problem.
  - "So the problem is . . ."
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together.
  - "What can we do to solve this problem?"
  - Encourage children to think of a solution.
6. Give follow-up support as needed.
  - "You solved the problem!"
  - Stay near the children.

#### All About HighScope

*Series Author:* Ann S. Epstein, Ph.D.  
*Series Editors:* Linda Koopmann and Marcella Weiner

Published by HighScope® Press,  
 a division of the HighScope® Educational  
 Research Foundation

734.485.2000  
 600 North River Street, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-2898

Orders: 800.40.PRESS; FAX 800.442.4FAX

**Web site:** [www.highscope.org](http://www.highscope.org)  
**Questions:** [info@highscope.org](mailto:info@highscope.org)

Copyright © 2008 by HighScope Educational Research Foundation. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording, or any information storage-and-retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher. The name "HighScope" and its corporate logos are registered trademarks and service marks of the HighScope Foundation.



**HIGHSCOPE**  
**PRESS®**

## Special Rightsholder Terms & Conditions

This license from the HighScope Educational Research Foundation allows the User to make photocopies of the following document for 90 days from date of purchase (\_\_\_\_\_):

FILL IN DATE OF PURCHASE

**All About HighScope 9: Resolving Conflicts**

**ISBN:** 978-1-57379-373-5

**Publisher:** HighScope Press

**Rightsholder:** HighScope Press

**Author/Editor:** Epstein, A. S.

**Limitations on use:** This license expressly excludes (a) the posting of this document to a Web site, intranet, extranet, or e-mail; and (b) the republication of this document in a different form.

For additional questions, contact the HighScope Educational Research Foundation.



**HIGHSCOPE**  
**PRESS®**