

Ask It Basket 2020

**Parent Workshop Led by Athena Primary Lead Guides
Wednesday, January 29, 2020**

MEETING MINUTES

Kimberly on: How we Solve Conflict at School

We view conflict as an opportunity for social emotional growth, not as a problem.

We welcome conflict between children. The conflict is what led up to the action/behavior; our goal as parents and teachers is to get to the root of the conflict and the root of the behavior. It is always a teachable moment.

If we are conflict averse, we rob the children of developing the skills they need to navigate the world of humans.

Thwarted desire is different from **unmet desire**. Unmet desire is “I want to go to Hawaii”. We need to assume that most conflicts arise from a thwarted desire, when one child has a solid plan that they are acting out in pursuit of a goal and another child prevents the attainment of that goal. Like when a child is going for the bucket in the sandbox, and someone takes it first.

Remember that it is very rare for any child to hurt another child verbally or physically with zero provocation or a prior misunderstanding.

Executive functioning is not fully developed until about 24 years of age; when we ask children to “be nice” or “you know better”—we are asking them to do something they are not yet able to do.

When approaching children in conflict, we don’t necessarily focus on the action that resulted in needing adult intervention; the real conflict likely occurred before the action. First, we ground ourselves before approaching the children. We move slowly toward the conflict instead of heightening energy by running; the louder they are, the calmer we are. We get down to their eye level.

First, we check to ensure that everyone is physically OK (even a scrape or potential bruise can wait for first aid while the children are reassured that they are both safe and will be heard). We don’t assume there is a ‘victim’ and a ‘perpetrator’, and we are careful not to take sides.

We practice “active listening”, and we show the children how to do the same.

If they don’t have the language, we give it to them. They do not yet know how to name their emotions; we give the vocabulary to them. We ask the other child to mirror the statement back to the child. We keep working on it until they get it right, with lots of support. We ask them to repeat:

“I didn’t like it when you took my bucket.”
And then coach the other children to reflect back:

“I hear that you didn’t like it when you took my bucket.”

Active listening. We stay in there until both parties have been validated; both parties have mirrored back. Then we make a plan for the future:

“Next time he takes the bucket, what will you do?”

“What would make you feel better next time? If they want a turn with the shovel, how do you want to be asked?”

We become their prefrontal lobe for them.

Four to five year olds: we stand back. We give them little help, a gentle nudge, help them along...

Five year olds: we ask critical questions to get them going but they solve their own problems. They also help resolve problems with children who are younger.

Make sure both parties leave the interaction feeling validated, heard, mirrored and taken care of.

Avoid the "I'm sorry", "Say you're sorry" script—it does not yet have true meaning for the children at this age. As they deepen their capacity for empathy, they will learn about apologizing; for now the important messages are around being able to identify and articulate the feelings for themselves and others; practicing solving problems, setting boundaries, and asking for what they need in a respectful way.

Drew on:

What to do when your child comes home talking about the same child in a negative way?

Why is your child giving you this information?

Because we love our children so much we may start to have some anxiety around the situation or at least want to know what to do and how to help.

Parents, you are the safety net and their favorite people. They want to vent and to share everything with you. They want **to vent, be validated, and be heard**. In general that is the most important thing you can do – just be a soft landing for them to process their thoughts and feelings.

“That sounds like it was really difficult; tell me more about it. It sounds like you were really brave, and that you were supported by your community.”

“How did that make you feel? Sad. You must have felt so sad.”

They want to feel heard by you and want their feelings validated.

Be mindful of your own reaction—be careful they are not too big. As parents we get triggered, we want to help solve the problem for them. But we can actually perpetuate the situation and add extra energy, making the problem worse. They may want to do it again, to feel that energy from you. They may even say the same thing to you the next day to see if they get a similar response.

When talking about the other child involved in the situation, be careful to humanize them, rather than demonize them. We need to remember that the other person is also a child, and that they are practicing something too. You can remind your child that, “your friend is working on ____, just like you are working on ____.”

At this age, children do not have the brain development to “bully”. They can’t premeditate something that is going to hurt someone. At this age, they are just trying things on. They are scientists. They are not being picked on, but they might be experiencing repetitive behaviors. They might continue to do the thing that got a big reaction out of you over and over to get another big reaction. If a child sets a boundary, and the other child is not respecting the boundary, then the teacher steps in to work with the child—it’s no longer the other child’s work to continue to set the same boundary.

Three year olds especially don’t have the language skills to communicate so it’s not out of the norm for them to be physical. Not that it’s okay, but it’s still within the developmental norm and time frame. Up until around almost five it’s very difficult to take another person’s perspective. So we’re literally giving them scripts and language. Children can have patterned behavior, where they get stuck in a loop of repeating actions, but don’t have the ability to plan out ahead of time to go after a specific person.

By four to five, they may want help solving the problem. Let’s make a plan. Role play. Practice. Go through the physical actions and words to give the neurons an opportunity to set.

“How do you think we could solve this? What’s the next step?”

Five year olds have more practice so we’re more in the role of a mediator. With five year olds we observe and see if we need to step in to help.

Each case will be unique, but each time, try to empower them to think:

“What can I do in this situation?”

Know that we have solved about 95% of the problems at school in the moment. A huge part of our day is aiding the children in how to converse and solve problems with one another, how to

read cues or notice a feeling on someone's face. We typically suggest that parents do not implement a consequence at home for something that occurred earlier in the day at school; the children will not connect the consequence to the action at this age with that much time passing between.

Very young children are still forming their sense of time. You may be hearing something over and over that actually happened once; or the order or sequence of events may be out of order. Oftentimes they repeat something that has already been solved.

And similar to siblings, it may happen more often with 'best friends'. They feel it's a safe place to try things out. Children usually try on new behaviors with the people they are closest to.

We want to hear about the messages, especially the repetitive ones, which are coming home. Please send us an email and let us know what your child is processing at home. We want to know if the pattern continues so that we can make choices in the classroom that will give each student some breathing room along with their practice. Please be careful not to talk with a teacher or another adults about the children in front of the child.

Susanne on: Grace and Courtesy

"Grace and Courtesy": a Montessori concept that encompasses the ground rules of a classroom—breaking down the social rules, like how to blow your nose, how to push in a chair, how to roll a rug, how to move through the environment. We talk about these and teach them in tiny, incremental steps.

We set up ground rules in the classroom that everyone can agree on and we make a commitment to those values. For example: Be kind. Be gentle. Be safe.

So much falls under these three guidelines. These are the only guidelines in our classroom—all the other ones can fall inside these three categories.

Try to phrase things in the positive. Rather than, "we don't hit our friends", try: "we are gentle with our friends' bodies". Instead of "don't run with scissors", we would say, "we walk carefully with scissors".

To replicate this system at home, have a family meeting, get everyone's buy-in, and have an agreement on the rules. Then the decisions being made at home can be filtered through this lens.

Goal setting in the classroom:

At circle time, we talk about what goals we are working on and how to support each other. "I'm working on not hitting when I'm mad." We talk about it as a group. "Can anyone think about how we can support little Johnny when he's mad?"

Phrase in the positive; let them know what you expect to see, rather than what you don't want to see.

Sometimes we expect children to do things that they don't know about yet. We never make rules that they don't understand. We make the rules together; we need buy-in and they need to understand why the rule exists.

We allow the children to come up with their rules as needed to help navigate social things that come up in the class community. For example, in Mandy's class one year the children came up with a rule, "we only laugh if someone passes gas if they also laugh." It's about respecting each other, respecting our environment, respecting ourselves.

Have clear communication with the children about when a plan will change.

Acknowledge feelings while also setting a boundary: "You are so mad and I'm happy to hear about it, but not like this..."

Veronica on: Setting Rules and Boundaries at Home

The child has a natural sense of order and they thrive in a predictable environment.

Rule setting at home:

Set a structure for everyday so that it is the same day in and day out. Make a structure together. Have a family meeting. Give the child ownership and buy-in when making schedules and rules. Make it visual—this age group needs to see their steps more than hear them. They won't remember the next day what comes first, second, etc.

Try putting a structure on the fridge. Can be made with pictures, clip art, etc.

Example:

"Take your shoes off and put your backpack away."

When you get home, you can say: "Check your list," rather than nagging.

Transition times. Meals. Give them a job that stays the same. For example: "Your job is picking out the plates for dinner."

Give them their own clipboard with their own checklists. They don't need a reward system. They love checking boxes. They are in a sensitive period for order.

Boundaries:

Listen to the way our children are treating us and speaking to us. If they are not treating us with kindness, love and respect; that is the time to set a boundary.

"I noticed you were running in the house. Why do you think that is not safe?"

Family Values:

Help them identify their values. Bring their behavior back to their values.

Tone:

It's normal to have anxiety about how to communicate important messages. On the one end you don't want to say something serious like "I don't want to be hit" in a sing-songy voice; that is confusing and won't land. Also don't lose it. That won't land either. Be conscious of tone.

Be matter of fact: "this really hurts; I don't like that. I'm not available to be spoken to like that."

Consequences:

Plan them in advance. Talk to your partner, co-parent, and babysitters about your consequences. "In our family, we take five. They can read a book or play in their room", or whatever is a good first step in your family, and everyone uses the same first step. Consistency is key.

The way you respond to your child teaches your child how to respond to others. Ask yourself: "What would I want my daughter to do in this situation? How would I want for her to respond, if she got punched in the stomach?" So if, as a parent, your child hits you, think about how you want them to respond if they get hit.

Christina on: Tantrums

Tantrums are a healthy release of feelings, and a natural part of our development. Adults do it too.

Stay calm and grounded; our energy feeds them. Validate their feelings. "You really wanted your sandwich in a square and I cut it in a triangle and you are really mad about it!" Roll out the red carpet for the feelings. It helps them learn that feelings are okay and not to be feared. We all get angry and sad.

Be really present. Be present with your body language and your facial expression. First, just breathe and take care of yourself.

They are in their "dyno brain" and they are not able to reason in that space. You can simply say: "I am here for you." Wait for them to get back into their body. When their prefrontal cortex is accessible to them they will come back. Wait to have a redirection message until they are back in a calm space.

Connect before you redirect.

Find empathy when a child is in tantrum—all the chemicals flooding their brain are keeping them from being rational. They are receiving a rush of cortisol and they can't think straight.

Hand model of the brain. They "flip their lid". How does it feel when your lizard brain is in control? Show them the hand model of the brain—the brain stem, the thumb is the lizard brain,

the four fingers folded over is the prefrontal lobe controlling their reasoning. See this [link](#) to watch the video of the hand model of the brain.

Practice skills for helping them to regulate, for getting out of the dyno brain. If it is time sensitive, or you are in a transition that needs to happen (brushing teeth, getting shoes on to get out the door), with confident momentum move through the task that needs to be completed. Follow through on your boundary, but also being really present and acknowledge their feelings at the same time.

Role model and be honest about how we are taking care of ourselves. They are going to do what we do, not what we say. Let them know when you flip your lid, and then talk through how you are going to take care of yourself. "I need to take some space to breath and regroup before I can talk to you; I am going to go to my room and close the door for a few minutes."

What is the difference between a tantrum and a behavioral issue? A tantrum, they cannot control. When they are acting out, that is a teachable moment. A better word for a tantrum is an emotional release.

When they come out of a tantrum: "That was really hard. Let's make a plan for when you feel that coming on again." And then make a plan for next time. It typically takes about 20 minutes to come out of the dyno brain and back into a place where they can hear your words and can reason with you and make a plan.

Lisa on: Nutrition

How do we set boundaries around sugar? Talking about healthy boundaries around food.

It's our job to create boundaries but we also need to remember that we can pick our battles, and focus on what is most important.

Food connects us. It helps us slow down. Brings us closer together.

Find what works best for your family and be confident in that. If you have a meal as a family, use that opportunity to slow down, talk about the food, why we eat what we are eating. If you don't have much time, just take a minute. Take a small moment to be together.

What's good for you is what you are doing. Just be confident about what you are doing. If you have a goal of something you want to change, work toward it, but in the meantime, be grounded in what you are currently doing. Don't be hard on yourself; you are doing your best.

Involve the child:

"Can you please chop this one carrot? We are having one carrot in the salad and I need for you to cut it." Get creative about how to talk about what you are eating.

Baking is great to do with your child. They love to use their hands, to measure stuff.

If you like to garden, grow a few herbs. Or even your root vegetables.

Go to the farmer's market. Talk to the farmers. Talk about how food doesn't come from grocery stores.

Go to the library and check out a cookbook together.

Go on a scavenger hunt at the farmer's market.

Let them watch you eat and watch you enjoy your food.

If you are a family that eats out a lot, talk about the menu; the way it is organized; do you know what an appetizer is?

Food Education:

Children love to learn how food affects our body and why we eat these foods. Why we need water. Talk about ingredient lists. Count the number of ingredients.

Sugar:

Our bodies do need a certain amount of sugar to grow. If it feels like a struggle, talk to your child about why: "It speeds up your body, it speeds up my body, then we get grumpy, then we fall asleep. That's boring."

Talk about how to incorporate sweet fruits. Dates and other dried fruits are great for kids.

Rather than talk how bad it is for them, maybe talk about how you love it too but you'd rather eat...

Be careful about rewarding your child with sugar.

Trust that you know what's best. There are many ways that sweet things can be good for you.

Good foods help your child stay regulated and strong.

Use fun terminology: "Let's fuel up! Let's boost up!"

Take the stress out of food consumption. Let it be. Their palates will continue to change; keep eating in front of them—eat your veggies. They will keep changing. Keep in mind that they are eating a variety of things at school as well.

Post Workshop Q&A:

Consequences. What should they be?

Bedtime routines can be difficult. Here are some scenarios:

Be careful that we don't make a consequence for everything. Most children desire our attention. So you could try, for example: if you are trying to get your child in the bath and they are resistant, or doing many things other than get in the bath, rather than threatening a consequence, you could say something like: "These are the three things you need to do: bath, brush teeth, and get on your PJs. Nothing else is available to you, including me, until you do these three things." Then walk away—remove yourself. "I'm going to walk away, I'm not available until you complete those three things."

"Here's the plan: you are going to do it when you are ready."

If they hit you, you could say: "You can't be with me. I don't let people next to me who hit me."

“We are getting in the bath in five minutes. You can get in the bath on your own, or I can help you.” Leave the room and trust they can do it. If not, come back and let them know you will be putting them in the bath.

“Ok buddy, I’ll be in your room reading in ten minutes. If you want to hear the story, come join me but only after you brush your teeth.”

“I’ll be leaving your room in eight minutes. If you want to be a part of this you need to come in, but you haven’t brushed your teeth yet.”

Followers—children who follow you around the house.

“This is me taking care of myself right now. I’m going to go into my room and close the door. It might feel scary for you but that is what I am going to do. I will come out as soon as you are ready to engage in a calm manner.”

Sometimes they just need you close to them. They are attention seeking. Maybe you can sit next to them while they put on their PJs. What is the underlying need? Do they need attention? Do they need a few extra minutes to finish something? What is the root of the behavior?

If they need a little physical touch, give them what they need before the transition. For example, maybe you agree to snuggle on the couch for five minutes before bath.

Draw out the transition on a piece of paper. Every step. Create a visual.

Create a routine when you have siblings or when you have different days every day. If you feel a day is harder, draw a picture for them of what the plan is. Try to keep the last three things right before bed the same every night. Even if it is different time every night.

What is a good dinner time for children?

Every child and every family is different. 5:30 is a good time for dinner for children this age. If your family needs to wait to have dinner later so you can all be together, try giving them a substantial snack at 5:30 with the most important things you want for them to eat.

If a schedule prevents having dinner together, maybe try all having breakfast together. Or a special meal on the weekend.

I work from home and sometimes have a lot of work to do when the children are home.

Be compassionate with yourself. Kids are understanding when they know what is happening. Make a plan: we are going to connect, then work, then connect again. Again, draw out a plan. They don’t have a sense of time. Order a Time Timer from Amazon so they can see time moving.