

# 5 Steps to Resolve Conflicts

from Sunshine Parenting – Audrey Monke

## 1- CALM DOWN

Give everyone a chance to take a breather from each other. Ask them each what they need to do to calm down. Some good choices are taking a break for a few minutes, counting to 10, or writing down some feelings. In any case, nothing coherent will come from trying to lead a discussion with upset, emotionally fragile kids. So ask them to figure out the best way to calm down before attempting to solve the problem.

## 2 - STATE & UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

Once calm has prevailed, talk to each child (either together or separately, depending on the circumstances) and help them state their problem. Stress the importance of being honest and admitting their role in the conflict (most problems are shared). Encourage them to use “I” statements to express their feelings. For example, “I felt left out and hurt because he wouldn’t let me play the card game, so I threw his towel to annoy him.”

## 3-APOLOGIZE WELL

“A good apology will communicate three things: regret, responsibility, and remedy. Apologizing for a mistake might seem difficult, but it will help you repair and improve your relationships with others.”

Encourage each child (or only one, depending on the circumstances) to come up with a good apology. I found a [great list](#) of what makes a “good apology,” so it’s best if the child can include all of these parts:

- Use the words, “I’m sorry.”
- Acknowledge exactly how you messed up. (As in, “I used unkind words that hurt you.”)
- Tell the person how you’ll fix the situation.
- Promise to behave better next time

Bad apologies, on the other hand, tend to suffer from these four shortcomings: Justifying words or behavior; Blaming the victim; Making excuses; Minimizing the consequences. (“It was just a joke!”)

## 4-PROMOTE SOLUTION FINDING

Empower campers/youth leaders to brainstorm solutions to their conflict. It’s so tempting as an all-knowing adult to generate solutions, but something the kids think up and agree upon on their own will more likely work. Encourage each child to listen carefully and to accurately paraphrase each other. Encourage them to speak to each other (not you) and to speak honestly and kindly. (For a sample dialogue format, see *Coaching Children in Handling Everyday Conflicts*).

## 5- FOLLOW UP

Follow up with the campers/youth leaders to see how they are getting along and if the solution they came up with is working. But if the “talk together/work it out” strategy isn’t working for this pair, it’s best to suggest my go-to strategy: find someone else to hang out with. Even if the kids appear to need a prolonged break from one another, they will still be required to speak in a kind and respectful way when they are interacting.