

Suggestions for Parents or Leaders

One of the first things that should be understood about disagreement is that disagreement is okay and normal. A disagreement does not indicate that anyone is bad, wrong, or stupid. Disagreements can be very positive because they allow people to bring problems and feelings into the open so that they can be solved.

Use this outline to help children understand what to do when they feel unhappy with someone.

1. Think about it. Ask yourself: Why am I feeling this way? What is the disagreement about? Why might the other person be acting this way? Is it something I can ignore or solve myself? Am I doing something to create the problem?
2. Talk about it privately. Listen. Choose a good time and place. Tell how you feel and specifically why you feel that way. Listen carefully to the other person's feelings and try to understand why he/she is feeling that way. Never interrupt the other person when she is talking.
3. Look for solutions. Together think of ways to solve the problem. This might include doing what you or the other person wants, finding a compromise, thinking of other ideas, or agreeing to disagree. Choose one solution and act on it.
4. Ask for help if you need it. Tell your problem to an adult you trust and ask him/her to help you find a solution.

As each step is discussed, the children may use puppets or role playing to show different ways in which they can carry out that step. It will be easier for the children to visualize if they are given a specific situation to deal with as they go through the steps; e.g., someone cuts in line at the drinking fountain, or your brother borrowed your crayons without permission and broke them.

The children's knowledge of these steps will have no meaning until they begin to practice the steps themselves. To do this:

1. Refuse to hear children's tattling or complaints about each other until they have attempted to solve the problem themselves (except in emergency situations).
2. If the child has not yet attempted to follow the problem solving steps, remind him/her to do so and be sure he remembers how.
3. Supervise the child's attempts to follow the steps, if necessary. Many times children can solve the problem alone when reminded, but occasionally (especially at first) they may need some kind of supervision. The leader may need to ask the child to wait until a time when he/she can sit down with them, or he/she may supervise the problem-solving discussion by standing nearby and listening "with one ear" while supervising the rest of the group.