

## Working Towards Peaceful Solutions

“You two, stop fighting!”, “Behave yourselves and do not bother each other.”, “What happened again between the two of you?”,... As a parent of two or more children, we might hear ourselves say these phrases several times in a given day. We hope and wish that our children can resolve their conflicts peacefully. For most of us, peaceful conflict resolution between siblings is not what we studied at school or even at university. We don't quite know how to handle it. The following principals might help us bring up the next generation a little more equipped to deal with this than us:

1. We are in control: children's actions are often driven by their emotions and feelings and their feelings are often a product of their thoughts. Help your children understand that they each have the choice to think and do what is right. They are in control of their actions. It is not acceptable to be violent just because you were provoked. Encourage them to stop and think through the consequences of their action before reacting with violence.
2. Ask, listen and find a solution: many conflicts start and escalate because we do not ask for clarification and do not take the time to listen. When conflicts arise between siblings, coach them through a fact finding consultation. Facilitate a respectful sequence of questioning and listening as each one takes turn to express his/her side of the story. As they grow, they will adopt this peaceful way of resolution of problems and can do it on their own for others, too. But, most importantly, try and model this yourself!
3. Look for the gift: conflicts and difficulties among siblings are wonderful opportunities for them to learn and develop their virtues like sharing, peacefulness, respect, detachment, forgiveness, etc. Help your children think of the virtues involved in the given conflict situation. Ask “What virtue would help you?” and “What virtue do you need your brother to practice?” If children are too young to name the virtue themselves, you can help them by saying: “So, are you saying you need your brother to respect your stuff and not touch them without your permission?”.
4. Acknowledge effort: encourage any effort that children make to peacefully resolve a conflict even if it falls apart halfway. These skills develop gradually and need lots of supportive coaching from you. Do not give up and go back to the old ways of forceful peacekeeping. Persevere and empower your children to become peacemakers. It can change the world!
5. Expose your children to peacefulness: be aware of the influence of the media, entertainment, toys and books on how your children resolve problems. Choose those that model compassion and peacefulness. A child that watches Power Rangers or Batman will likely not see peaceful consultation as the first choice to resolve a conflict. Tell stories to teach children about peacefulness. Invite them to reflect on their choices to resolve a conflict and to see the power of choosing the peaceful way.

The following is an example of a short story that can help 7-11 year old children to reflect on peaceful solutions to conflicts. Some questions have been provided to assist you as a teacher or parent to help children understand the consequence of their choices.

*Joy stepped back from her drawing and took a look. She smiled. It looked great. The colors she had chosen really went well together. The garden she had painted was just like the one in her dream. Joy had dreamt she was in a very peaceful garden two nights ago. The garden was full of flowers, different colored tulip flowers. There were all kinds, red, yellow, orange and even black ones, all arranged in an attractive design. The garden was by a large lake. On the lake, two swans swam gracefully from one side to the other. One was black and the other white. In her dream, the sun was just rising and was making the lake's water shimmer with gold color. It was all a stunning sight. When joy woke up from*

*the dream, she didn't want to forget the beauty of the garden. She decided to paint it, the lake, the swans and all the details of her dream, so she can hang it in her room and enjoy looking at it. Yesterday, as soon as she returned from school, she started drawing. She drew the tulips, the sun and the lake. Today, she just had to draw the swans and then it was finished. She wished she could paint better so it could be as beautiful as the one she had seen in her dream. The garden did not quite look as beautiful as the one she had seen. The black paint used for the black tulips had smudged a little into the orange tulips. But she had been working hard on her painting and she was a little tired. She could hear her younger brother John and his friend playing and laughing in the yard. It sounded like they were having fun, running around in the snow and having a snow ball fight. She thought she would like to go outside and enjoy the fresh snow, too. She would just paint the swans and then go, she thought to herself. She was proud of her own self-discipline. She was just about to dip her brush into the black paint that all of a sudden the door burst open and John came running in laughing and out of breath. He went to hide behind Joy saying: "Joy help me, he is going to get me with a big one." Before Joy could tell her brother not to play inside and especially in her room where her painting was, the door flung open again and John's friend ran with a snow ball in his hand and on the sight of John, he threw the snow ball at John with all his might. The snow ball went flying in the air, but instead of landing on John, it fell right on Joy's painting.*

*Joy looked in horror at the snow ball melting, mixing with the paint and the water drops ruining her beautiful garden. There suddenly was a heavy silence. John and his friend realizing what had happened froze in their spots. Joy could feel her body heating with anger and her heart sinking with sadness. She looked at her brother and his friend. How could they do this to her painting after all that work she had put into it?*

Stop the story and invite the children to think of how they would complete it. Ask what do you think Joy is feeling? What is John feeling? Do you think Joy has a choice on what to do now? What are her choices?

Take time to explore some of the choices children come up with. Use questions such as what do you think would be the result of doing that? How would Joy feel about her choice the next day? What would be the likely response of John and his friend to Joy's action? What would they have learned from it? You can then conclude by reading the following version of the story's ending if desired:

*Joy was angry and very sad about her beautiful painting. She felt her tears falling on her cheeks. She loved that painting so much. She was going to hang it in her room and enjoy the peacefulness of it. Now she cannot do that anymore. She felt the urge to scream at her brother and tell him how careless he was. She felt like saying : " You are not allowed to come into my room anymore." and calling him unkind names. Then she looked at John. He was not moving. His eyes were looking at Joy with fear and sorrow. His eyes reminded her of how she felt a month ago when she herself accidentally broke her father's antique statue while chasing John around the house. She remembered her own fear and sorrow. Then she remembered how thankful she felt when her father forgave her and gently reminded her to walk instead of running in the house. Joy thought for a moment. She could not put the painting back together again. She was very sad, but also could see that John and his friend were also feeling very sad and remorseful. She sat down. She said: "John, I worked on this painting for two days. I feel very sad." She started crying. John and his friend came over. John's friend said: I am very sorry. I was not thinking. I wish I could undo what I just did. Can I do anything to make it up to you? Joy looked at his sincere eyes. She could not do anything about her painting, but she could choose what to do and say to John and his friend. She remembered the garden in her dream, the beautiful flowers, the swans and the peaceful water of the lake. She felt her anger and sadness slowly melting away. She could try and draw it again. This time maybe she would try not to let the black paint smudge over the orange tulips. She wiped her tears. She calmly said: "Please remember not to bring snow into the house anymore." She saw the look of relief and gratitude in John and his friend's eyes. John quickly went to his room. A few minutes later he came back and handed her a card with a drawing of a rose on the outside. Inside, it said: "I am very sorry about your drawing. Thank you for your understanding and*

*forgiveness. I love you very much. John”*

*Joy smiled. She was happy that she had managed to stay peaceful. She felt much closer to her brother now. She smiled and said: “Let’s all go out and make a snowman together.”*

**By: Shiva Yan for The Children’s Virtues Development Project**

**Picture: Courtesy of The Family Learning House**