

How can I help myself without adult support?

Best for ages 3-8. **The purpose of this conversation is to help children develop self-advocacy skills.**

Often, children rely on adult intervention to resolve conflict or friction, before attempting to resolve it on their own. This creates a dependence on adults and causes children to feel stuck or lost when confronted with a conflict without an available adult to intervene.

Many times, adults step in to help children resolve their problems in attempt to make them feel supported. When this happens prior to prompting the child to resolve the conflict on their own, it prevents the child from learning independent problem-solving skills, causing him/her to be stunted in this crucial area of social and interpersonal development.

When your child comes to you with a problem, the first thing to ask should be along the lines of, "What did you already try to do to work through this problem?" If the child has not tried anything on their own, support them while they identify their own solutions and encourage them to implement them prior to your involvement.

Only once the child has exhausted reasonable/age-appropriate attempts to resolve the problem, is it helpful and appropriate to step in.

- Note – this process is significantly more tedious than jumping in and solving your child's problem when they initially approach you, but it is a "short-term loss" for a "long-term win".

Ask your child to identify a recent conflict that s/he experienced (with an adult or a child). Explore the conflict with your child and walk through how the situation played out.

Help your child understand the importance of knowing how to solve issues on one's own. Process the value of being independent and explain that there may be times when there will not be an adult around who can help him/her when a conflict arises.

Teach your child some healthy self-advocacy skills that s/he could have used in that scenario/could use with future conflicts.

- Build on Nissan's themes from Foundations. Explore the importance of feeling identification and "I statements."
- Teach your child how to stand his/her ground appropriately, how to say "no" when necessary, how to avoid foreseeable issues when possible, how to engage in a fair compromise and how to walk away when s/he realizes the other party is not going to respect his/her self-advocacy.

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Sample conversation:

Parent: You are so good at expressing how you feel. I was thinking that you probably already know so many words to express different feelings! Can we try out some words and see if you can find examples to explain them?

Child: Well, last week my teacher started rushing me to finish my test again and she forgot that I now am allowed an extra 15 minutes.

Parent: Oh no! That sounds stressful. What did you do?

Child: Well, you weren't there, and the principal wasn't there so I didn't really know what to do. I just tried to finish up quickly but I don't think I got a good grade.

Parent: Wow, that is so disappointing. The older you get the less often I will be there in the moment with you when these things happen. Of course, I always want to support you and hear about what is going on, but I'm not with you a lot of the day! Would you like to learn some things you can do or say to your teacher on your own, if this happens again? Or any time in the future a misunderstanding like this happens?

Use this opportunity to teach your child some of the self-advocacy skills mentioned above.



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