Strategies for Solving Behavior Problems in the Classroom

1. Establish positive relationships with each child
2. Plan to prevent problems with toys and materials, schedule, group times and space
3. Act in consistent positive ways with children
   a. Create a secure feeling
   b. Support families and cultures
   c. Help children become friendly and cooperative
   d. Solve problems with a positive approach
   e. Teach children to identify feelings and express them appropriately
4. Help children with particularly challenging behaviors to acquire social skills and self-regulation

Steps for Effective Problem Solving

1. Stop and calm down. Do whatever it takes to get yourself feeling neutral. Take a few deep breaths. Relax; count to 10. Get a drink of water. Remove yourself from the group and close your eyes for a minute. Remember, no one can use thinking skills to solve problems or conflict when they are feeling angry, upset or hurt.
2. Get together to figure out the cause of the problem. What is the problem about? You may want to take turns describing the problem and sharing your feelings, wants and opinions related to the problem. Listen without interrupting. Don’t talk about solutions until you agree on what the problem is about.
3. Brainstorm ideas for solving the problem. Make a list of all the possible solutions – practical and impractical. Don’t judge yet.
4. Evaluate the ideas for solving the problem. Choose the best idea(s) and use them to plan a course of action.
5. Put your plan into action. Decide on a time and place to check your progress – how is your plan working? Do you need anything else?
**Checklist of Common Causes of Conflicts in Pre-School Programs**

Use this checklist to identify possible causes of conflicts in your program:

- Inappropriate or poorly planned program activities for the age of the children
- Inappropriate use or lack of suitable space, equipment or supplies
- Poor handling of transition times – too much waiting between activities
- Failure to spot or anticipate problems about to happen
- Lack of understanding of children’s needs, resulting in a mismatch between the children’s capabilities and the expectations of the program
- Personality or temperament clashes among children or between staff and children
- Overly competitive atmosphere
- Intolerant/unfriendly atmosphere
- Poor communication (by children and/or adults who can’t or don’t express needs appropriately, can’t observe, don’t know how to listen)
- Misuse of power by staff – expectations too high, too authoritarian or controlling
- Too many unreasonable rules – failure to involve children in shaping rules
- Absence of problem-solving skills
- Lack of clarity about what the expectations are, how things are organized, what the limits and boundaries are
Techniques Staff can use to Diffuse or Reduce Conflict Situations

- **Get your own feelings under control.** Act with firmness and authority if needed. But never vent your own anger towards the children.
- **Ignore the behavior.** Assume it won’t get worse and don’t fuel it with your attention.
- **Intervene immediately if children are in danger or hurting each other.** Help them find ways to use words to talk through their issues.
- **Redirect children.** Help children get involved in a different activity. Invite them to help you with a chore. Help them start a new game.
- **Help children withdraw temporarily if they are out of control.** Help them think of ways to cool off and “get themselves together”. This is especially helpful when children are very angry, crying or having a temper tantrum.
- **Use special signals.** Use eye contact or gestures to alert a child of the need for self-control. This is most effective if you and a child have agreed on the special signal in advance.
- **Move closely to children when you see signs they may be losing control.**
- **Show interest.** If children look bored, sad, upset or angry, engage the child in conversation. Let them know you are interested in their problems, concerns, fears, ideas, etc.
- **Use humor.** Make a joke to ease the tension. Be sure to use humor with sensitivity. Never use humor to make fun of children.
- **Give assistance.** Offer help and support when children might not understand directions or feel frustrated.
- **Change the routine.** Break the tension with a change of pace if an inappropriate activity or schedule seems to be causing the problem.
- **Remove objects that cause problems.** Put away or move objects that seem to bring out negative behavior and provoke conflicts.