

# Replacing Time-Out



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## Part Two—Using Guidance to Maintain an Encouraging Classroom

Daniel Gartrell

**T**he first part of this article (in the November 2001 issue of *Young Children*) argues that time-out, as a typical form of traditional classroom discipline, punishes children for making mistakes in their behavior. As punishment, time-out does not help young children learn positive alternatives from their mistakes (Schreiber 1999).

Instead, “Replacing Time-Out: Part One—Using Guidance to Build an Encouraging Classroom” (Gartrell 2001) explores the need for teachers to build encouraging classrooms that reduce *mistaken behavior* by holding developmentally appropriate expectations for children and by teaching democratic life skills. In such classrooms children learn to solve

problems intelligently and ethically. When adults teach children to solve social problems, rather than punish them for having problems they have not yet learned to solve, they are using *guidance*. When teachers use guidance to help children with more serious problems, they are using *comprehensive guidance*.

Some adults use guidance only in mild conflict situations, such as two children arguing over who has the largest piece of playdough. These adults believe that when conflicts are more serious—such as one child pushing another off a chair to grab the playdough—“discipline” becomes necessary. This article might well be subtitled “All Guidance, All the Time.”

### **A model for social problem solving**

The guidance alternative to traditional discipline is social problem solving. The premise of social problem solving is that, because young children are just beginning the

process of learning democratic life skills, they naturally make mistakes. Adults use social problem solving to teach children the democratic life skills they need to learn from their mistakes (Gartrell 2001).

The second part of my article explains four basic guidance techniques that together sustain encouraging preschool and elementary classrooms, places where all children feel welcome despite the conflicts that some experience. All four techniques use the process of social problem solving. They help teachers refrain from making moral judgments about children so they can focus instead on teaching the democratic life skills children need to be productive citizens and healthy individuals.

The four guidance basics are

- **classic conflict management**

Used when two or more children experience conflict with one another, such as two children aggressively preventing another child from joining their play.

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### • guidance talk

Used when one or two children have a conflict directly with an adult, such as when they skip out instead of cleaning up, or when they need additional teaching after a conflict is resolved (for example, after a child is hurt during a conflict).

### • class meeting

Used when children experience social conflicts that may impact the whole class—for example, when children begin calling each other “butthead” or use the climber in ways that might cause others to fall.

### • comprehensive guidance

Used when a child experiences serious mistaken behaviors that continue over time (such as repeated tantrums or withdrawing behavior).

There are many published models for social problem solving, ranging from as few as three steps to as many as 20 or more (Gartrell 1998). While most models are designed for addressing conflicts directly between children, many can be adapted for use in any situation. I suggest an informal five-step problem-solving model of conflict management (Gartrell 2000). I call it the five-finger approach because each step can be represented by a finger.

**1. Cool down** (thumb). If necessary, the teacher calms down all parties (including her- or himself) and sets the scene for the mediation process. Note that the teacher may temporarily separate or remove children as part of this step—but only as a cooling-off period that leads to mediation, not as a punishment.

**2. Identify the problem** (pointer). The children (with help from the teacher as needed) put the problem into words and agree on what it is.

**3. Brainstorm solutions** (tall guy). The children (with the teacher’s help as needed) come up with possible ways to solve the problem.

**4. Go for it** (ringer). The parties decide on one solution and try it. The teacher works for agreement on the solution, even if she or he must suggest it. Often, before a solution is implemented, the teacher has a guidance talk with the children, reviewing what happened, talking about alternatives for next time, and discussing ways to make amends.

**5. Follow-up** (pinky). The teacher follows up by encouraging, monitoring, and if necessary guiding the children as they try the solution. A

guidance talk with one or more children may also be a part of this step.

With adaptations depending on the situation, the five-finger approach can be applied to all four types of conflict situations.

## **Classic conflict management**

When a conflict happens, under traditional discipline the typical teacher reaction is to comfort the “victim” and punish the “perpetrator.” Part One discusses the impact of punishment on the child causing the conflict (Gartrell 2001). A child cannot be “shamed into being nice.” The child learns no positive alternative behavior and is likely to internalize a mix of negative emotions that may make it even harder to “be nice” next time. If the teacher continues to view the child as “not nice,” the danger of a negative self-fulfilling prophecy being ingrained becomes real.

It is important to note that the child who is victimized also suffers. He or she has little opportunity for justice beyond comforting by the authority figure and the occasional forced apology. Too often the victim stays a victim (in the child’s own eyes and the eyes of others), vulnerable to future violence (Nansel et al. 2001). By failing to teach the victimized child to be rightfully assertive, traditional discipline may actually perpetuate, rather than reduce, bully-victim relationships.

Because conflict management is guidance, the teacher focuses on making both parties equal contributors to a peaceful settlement through mediation. (In *mediation*, a third party helps others settle a conflict; in *negotiation*, the parties resolve the conflict themselves.) During the mediation the teacher puts aside who is to blame and who is victimized (Carlsson-Paige & Levin 2000) and encourages both



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parties to see themselves as full citizens of the classroom community, capable of solving their problems together and learning from their mistakes. Over time the teacher shares authority for the mediation with the children, gradually moving them to negotiate their conflicts on their own (Wichert 1989). The teacher often ends or follows the mediation with a guidance talk, especially if harm was caused during the conflict.

After successful conflict mediation, in contrast to punitive interventions, teachers often see the children who were just arguing resume play together (Gartrell 1998).

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Conflict management as a primary intervention technique helps create classrooms that are not just orderly, but encouraging and peaceable as well (Wichert 1989). Classic conflict management is so key to moving beyond traditional discipline, including time-out, that it is the “featured technique” of this article.

### The technique at work

The following anecdote about a preschool conflict illustrates conflict management at work. Vivian, a student teacher, attempted for the first time to mediate a classroom conflict. Here is her account:

During my observation, I watched and listened to two children arguing about how much time each could spend using a keyboard and earphones in the music center.

Ennis said he was upset with Callie because she was taking too long in the area. He said she had forgotten to set the timer for 10 minutes and had been there a lot longer.

*Callie:* I set the timer. Look at it if you don't believe me.

*Ennis:* You just set it a few minutes ago when I asked you how much time!

*Callie:* I'm staying until the time is up.

Next, Ennis hit Callie on the back. Then Callie kicked at Ennis from her chair and her earphones fell around her neck.

I had stayed close, but not too close during the entire argument, hoping that maybe the children would be able to work out their problem. Now I went over, asked them both to sit on chairs, and helped them calm down. I asked Ennis what happened. He told me his version of the events I had observed. I responded, “That is a problem, but I can't let you hit other students, and I won't let them hit you. Let's hear what Callie has to say.” She told me her side.

I told Callie she should set the timer before she starts playing the keyboard so that she doesn't forget, because other children do not want to be left out. I asked both children, “How can we fix this so you don't fight?” The two children seemed too upset to respond, so I suggested, “How about if Callie sets the timer for 5 minutes to finish up, and then Ennis can set the timer for the full 10 minutes?” They agreed, and I reminded them that next time they should remember to set the timer at the start of their turns. A few minutes later the timer rang and I observed Callie give the earphones to Ennis. (Gartrell 2000)

The dispute between Ellis and Callie was about privilege—who has the privilege of using the keyboard for how long. (The issue of when privilege is fair and when it is not is a common source of conflicts in early childhood classrooms.) Vivian used high-level mediation here—that is, she felt the children needed her direct leadership to solve the problem. She knew that when teachers try to mediate conflicts, they don't have to do it perfectly. Let us explore how she used the five steps of conflict management at the high (active coaching) mediation level:

**1. Cool down.** Vivian has both children sit down before beginning the mediation. She doesn't need to remove them from the situation, but sees they need help cooling down before they can talk.

**2. Identify the problem.** Vivian hears both children's versions of what happened. They both pretty much agree what the problem is and don't dispute Vivian's restatement. The agreement is apparent later when they also agree on a solution. At this second step, Vivian has a brief guidance talk about their behavior. Teachers often wait until the conflict is mediated to have this talk. Before a conflict is resolved, feelings of guilt can inhibit reaching a solution.

**3. Brainstorm solutions.** Vivian invites the children to give ideas for “how to fix this so you don't fight.” One reason she uses high-level mediation is that the children seem “bummed out” and are not ready to suggest solutions.

**4. Go for it.** Vivian suggests a solution that the children agree to. A key difference between conflict mediation and traditional discipline is that the teacher does not force a solution. If the children don't accept a solution, the teacher goes back to step three. Children often come up

with a different solution from the “ideal” one the teacher has in mind. Teachers should try to use the children’s ideas, even when they believe justice is not completely served. If the children work it out and agree to it, the solution is logical to them and they benefit from the process. The end of step four is the usual place for a guidance talk, occasionally including follow-up with one or both children later.

**5. Follow-up.** Vivian observes the children put the solution into practice. As mentioned, the relief of successfully resolving a dispute sometimes brings the children back together in the activity. But any mediator would settle for the peaceful exchange of the keyboard when the timer rings—with no further need for adult intervention. When following up with a guidance talk, a teacher might start with encouragement of how the children implemented the solution peaceably. (Gartrell 2000)

### Guidance talks

Guidance talks between a teacher and child occur either during or after the last steps in conflict management or, when appropriate, instead of conflict management. Some conflicts are directly between

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a child and a teacher, especially over program expectations such as using equipment safely, starting an activity, or resting. The guidance talk, held privately to avoid embarrassment, differs from the age-old lecture. Instead of an adult talking *at* a child, the guidance talk is a conversation *with* the child. Its purpose is to teach the child that he or she can respond differently in conflict situations and to coach the child on specific alternatives.

In holding a guidance talk, the teacher

- discusses what happened and conveys an understanding about why the behavior was mistaken. For example, she helps the child understand it is okay to feel frustrated when the top of the glue bottle comes off with the glue, but it is not all right to throw the bottle and accidentally hit a friend.
- helps the child understand how all parties in the situation may have felt. (A goal of guidance talks is to build empathy.)
- brainstorms with the child alternative acceptable behaviors to use the

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next time a similar situation arises. “Next time, you can say, ‘That makes me angry!’ Or come to me and say, ‘Teacher, help!’ And I will.”

- asks how the child can help the other child feel better or how the situation can be made better. (Note, this is different from forcing an apology. Neither children nor adults

benefit when they are pressured to “say you’re sorry” before the issues and feelings around them are resolved. When children are helped to resolve the conflict and invited to participate in the reconciliation, they are usually much more able than adults to for-

give and forget.) If the teacher and child can’t think of a way to make amends, the teacher can suggest that the child think about it and come up with an idea later. Children usually do come up with their own ideas for getting back together. Friendly relations are important to young children—they just have to get over the conflict first.

## Learning from Vivian's Experience

- Vivian does not intervene right away. Da Ros and Kovach (1998) point out that adults frequently intervene too quickly, even with toddlers. Although it takes fortitude, adults sometimes wait until minor hitting occurs, which is what Vivian does here. With a real threat of physical harm, however, it is important to act quickly to de-escalate the situation.
- When one or more children lose emotional control, conflict management is still necessary. But people cannot talk through a problem when they are upset! This is why the first step is so important. Even the teacher may need a moment to calm down. Once in control of her own emotions, the teacher separates the children, helps them cool down, and mediates.
- Vivian does not take the keyboard away from the children, a common reaction under traditional discipline. Instead of making loss of the keyboard a punishment, she makes access a part of the curriculum, using it to teach the children democratic life skills.
- She does not force an apology. When people are expected to apologize before they are ready to, they usually carry unresolved negative feelings, which may come out later. Successful conflict management increases the chances of authentic reconciliation.
- Vivian uses a guidance talk during step two, rather than at the end of the process. However, teachers do not have to follow the steps to the letter for mediation to succeed. (Certainly, children's own efforts at negotiation may not be by the book.) The proof of the carrot cake is in the eating. Vivian's first try at conflict mediation is a success—as first mediation efforts of most of my students are—and a gnarly old professor cannot ask for more than this.

### Self-removal

As a result of guidance talks and developing trust between child and teacher, a strategy for “next time” might be self-removal by the child (Marion 1999). Teachers need to work closely with the child and classmates so self-removal does not have the stigma of punishment. (One teacher set up an attractive “peace island” in a corner of the classroom. She tells the children that whenever they need to get away, they can travel to the island. The teachers watch for island visitors and offer their assistance as appropriate.)

Common reasons that a child removes himself from a situation are to work through an impulse or regain emotional control (Marion 1999). As such, self-removal is often a targeted response used with some children rather than a more general problem-solving approach. Just as conflict management follows a cooling-down time, self-removal is usually followed by a guidance talk. An effective form of self-removal is for the child to voluntarily leave a situation and approach the teacher for assistance. Self-removal is not the final step in a child's learning to manage emotions. But for children

who need it, self-removal is an important step.

### Class meetings

Some readers may remember group punishments from their own school experiences. Perhaps everyone had to put their heads down on their desks or stay in at recess because a few children were aggressive on the playground or too loud in the hall. The guidance alternative to group punishments is the class meeting, which uses the five steps of social problem solving, formally or informally, to resolve the situation (Gartrell 1998).

Some teachers hold class meetings once or twice a week, others two or even three times a day (McClurg 1998; Harris & Fuqua 2000). The frequency depends on whether the meetings are used to discuss routine business in addition to problems that affect the class. Here are common guidelines for classroom meetings:

- One person speaks at a time.
- Everyone listens carefully and respects others' views.
- Everyone appreciates all members of the class.

While the teacher remains the leader during class meetings, many teachers share leadership with the children as the year goes on. Unlike group punishments, regular meetings make classrooms more democratic and encouraging.

Two former students sent me anecdotes of class meetings held

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to address a common problem: too much commotion while walking down the hall. In each case a preschool classroom was located at the end of a wing of an elementary school. Teachers in classrooms of older students complained to the principal about the noise made by the preschoolers when walking down the hall. Recognizing that young children and line-travel are not a natural match, each teacher discussed the problem with her class, asked for solutions, decided on one, and successfully tried it (Gartrell 1998).

In one case the children decided to be quiet mice, tiptoeing in the hall so the cat wouldn't hear them. In the other the children decided to be mother and father elephants, walking quietly so as not to wake up the babies. In this second situation, the principal came out of his office and loudly complimented the children on how quietly they were walking. "Shh," said one child, "you'll wake the babies!" These examples show that when teachers work with children to solve problems, rather than impose solutions on them, class meetings can contribute to a positive spirit of community.

### **Comprehensive guidance**

Serious mistaken behavior is the result of strong unmet emotional and/or physical needs that the child cannot cope with or understand (Heath 1994; Curry & Arnaud 1995; Gartrell 1995). When a teacher encounters a child whose unmet needs result in extreme and repeated mistaken behavior, guidance is both vital and difficult to use. When working with children who show serious mistaken behavior, the following considerations are important:

- **There is no such thing as a bad child.**

There are children with serious problems who need our help so they can solve them.

- **Children showing serious mistaken behavior often are the hardest children to like.**

Nevertheless, they are probably most in need of a helping relationship with a caring adult.

- **Children may show serious mistaken behavior in the classroom because it is the safest place in their lives.**

They are asking for help in the only way they can, even by using mistaken behavior.

- **The more serious the mistaken behavior, the more comprehensive the approach needed and the more people a teacher may need to involve.**

It is especially important to involve the family in helping the child learn to use alternative behaviors to meet his or her needs.

- **Children who show repeated aggressive and extreme behaviors are in danger of being stigmatized by peers and adults.**

Stigma means disqualification from full membership in the group

(Gartrell 1998). Ladd (1989) and Nansel and colleagues (2001) point out that an internalized pattern of rejection in childhood can cause lifelong social and emotional difficulties.

- **Teachers can reach out to children at risk for stigma and help them turn around their lives by building positive attachments with them, assisting them to find membership in the class, and teaching them democratic life skills.**

Such teaching, termed *liberation teaching*, is at the heart of what guidance is about (Gartrell 1998).

Generally, children respond positively when teachers build relationships with them and their families and create and maintain encouraging classrooms. But children with strong unmet needs may be too burdened to respond to everyday guidance practices. For example, in the case study in part one of this article, Jamal was showing stress from transition to and from foster care when he hit a classmate. After



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unsuccessful use of time-out, the teacher took several therapeutic actions that together helped the child. Children like Jamal, facing tough life circumstances, need comprehensive guidance that includes most or all of the following steps:

- **encouragement to build healthy attachments** with one or more staff. The person who builds this special relationship is often the lead teacher or another adult who gets along well with the child (Rich 1993). On occasion the person may be a specialist (Sang 1994). Jamal's teacher made time for him each morning, and this made a difference. A child must feel fully accepted before he can dare to change.

- **assistance in situations that may lead to loss of control**, before conflicts occur. For instance, a teacher might help a child recognize when she feels tense and encourage her to ask for assistance and/or use self-removal to leave a situation.

- **firm, friendly, consistent intervention** that may involve accompanied removal to cool down but always includes conflict mediation and/or a guidance talk (Marion 1999). This crisis intervention helps children understand what happened and how all parties are feeling; what

they can do instead next time; and how to make the other parties feel better (not through a forced apology).

- **meetings of staff, and of staff with families**, using the five steps of social problem solving to set a coordinated course of action (sometimes called an Individual Guidance Plan).

- **inclusion of other adults in the comprehensive plan** as needed. First and foremost, teachers need to involve families. The time to begin building relationships, of course, is at the start of the program or school year—not at the time of crisis. (I know a teacher who sends two notes home before school starts—one to the child and one to the family. She also calls the family the day before school starts and then again on the first night of school to make sure everything went all right. She says families especially appreciate this last phone call.) If additional adults are needed, teachers and families might ask special education teachers, mental health consultants, senior staff members, or others to observe and become involved. As professionals, teachers collaborate to accomplish together what they cannot accomplish alone (Gartrell 1998).

The adults build a mutually supportive teaching team so all know they can rely on each other when children have crises or long-term needs.

### Teachers need support too

As a final note, for teachers to use guidance effectively, they must have their own support systems. In the classroom, they create a teaching team—adults with differing backgrounds and educational credentials who work together for the good of all members of the classroom community. The adults build a mutually supportive teaching team so all know they can rely on each other when children have crises or long-term needs.

Teachers also must build partnerships with families, beginning at the start of the program or school year. The problem-solving process works more effectively when a teacher knows a family well. The research is compelling that children are more likely to succeed at school when families and teachers work together (Coleman 1997; Gorham & Nason 1997; DeJong & Cottrell 1999). As volunteers, family members of course may also be part of the teaching team.

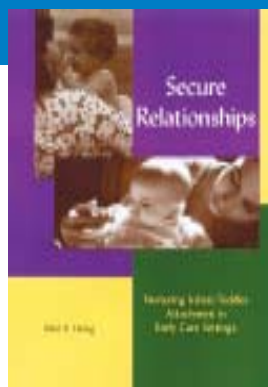
Outside of the classroom, effective teachers seek positive personal connections with family, friends, and community. Teachers recognize the need for a measure of personal success—including financial security—so they can fully function as professionals in assisting children and families to learn and develop. This understanding is the first and last step in successfully using guidance and being a liberating teacher. It is a reality that the world outside of the early childhood community needs to better understand.

## New from NAEYC

### Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant/Toddler Attachment

by Alice S. Honig

For healthy adjustment in childhood and later in life, infants and toddlers need secure attachments to the adults who care for them. Loving, responsive, and consistent care from primary caregivers is key to young children learning to form relationships. This book focuses on key points in research and theory needed by caregivers in understanding and building attachment. Vital information and sound advice for caregivers—and parents too. An NAEYC Comprehensive Membership Benefit. **NAEYC order #123/\$8** (ISBN 1-928896-03-0)



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For additional resources on this subject, see **For Further Reading** in Part One of this article (*Young Children*, November 2001 [Vol. 56, No. 6], p. 16).