

Elementary Counseling

Dear Parents,

Your child has been learning how to effectively solve typical childhood problems through a program called Kelso's Choices. This program is designed to empower young people with the ability to determine their own behavior, encouraging an internal locus of control and appropriate problem ownership. Statements such as "He made me do it!" and "She did it first!" become obsolete as children become accountable for their own choices. Elementary counselors strive to teach children to become their own problem solvers at an early age. We believe this will empower them to overcome any adversities that come their way as an adult. Here are a few ways you can support them as they learn these skills:

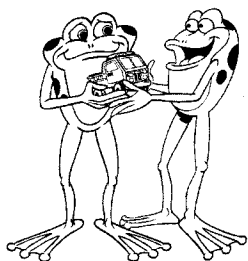
Go to Another Game



Some children have a hard time removing themselves from a difficult situation. They may find it hard to leave a game even if the children are pushing, arguing or yelling. This may be due to their feelings of loyalty for a friend, fear of kids getting mad at them, or lack of skill at other games. It is important for children to recognize that they have choices. They have a choice to go to a different game or play with a different friend. All children should have a back-up plan when things get difficult at school. Does your child?

- Try asking your child what games/activities are popular at school? What do they usually play at recess? Do they play the same game every day?
- Try telling your child of a time when your favorite game wasn't as much fun because of someone cheating or because the rules kept changing.
- Discuss how children get stuck in the habit of doing something even if it is not fun. When there are too many small problems, it's time to switch games. Tell them: "You are not a quitter; it just means you are smart and want to have fun!"
- What is another game your child feels comfortable and successful at? If they don't have one, you may want to dust off that handball at home, and get a little practice in. Who else can they play with if their friend is leaving them out or if there are problems? Do they think this plan will work?

Share and Take Turns

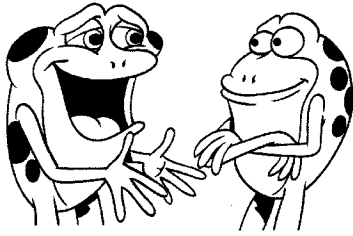


Children oftentimes struggle with this concept in two ways. Some children are too shy to ask for a turn so they stand on the outskirts and watch other children. They may worry about what other children might say or do. It is important that these children learn to use their words and practice this skill so they don't get taken advantage of. Other children have the opposite problem. They want their way with most things. They always want to be first, take balls away from others, and want to win at all costs. They can be very aggressive with their words and actions. In order to avoid getting in trouble at school, children need to develop this skill.

- Ask your child to go get something in the room that has to be shared (toy, ball, books, etc.). Discuss all the objects at home and school that must be shared.
- Model how to politely ask to use the article.
- Have your child practice asking you for the article.
- Have your child point out children who are waiting for a turn, or sharing at the park.
- Model how to offer to take turns when a friend is waiting.

- Have your child practice the skill back with you.
- Discuss how important it is to share and the consequences of not sharing.
- Practice playing games with your child. Positively reinforce good sharing and turn taking. If your child has a hard time playing games with you at home, they most likely have a hard time with friends at school.

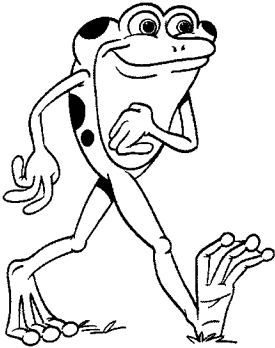
Talk It Out



When children don't have the words to communicate, they react in one of two ways. Some children become a door mat and allow people to boss them around or they avoid any confrontation at all costs. This can be quite debilitating for them. Others resort to acting out behavior. This may look like hitting, pouting, temper tantrums, whining or crying. Good communication is a vital tool for everyone to learn.

- Tell your child to look at the Kelso picture above. Explain that each person needs to explain their side of a problem while the other person listens. Then they need to switch. This choice will only work if the two are willing to listen to each other. This is a great one to practice between siblings. *Example: A sibling's feelings are hurt when their brother jokingly calls him a name. The sibling says, "When you call me names, I feel hurt and I want you to stop."*
- Ask your child to use "I" messages when explaining how they feel: "When you _____, I feel _____ and I want you to _____." Model several examples.
- State that the "I" message is even more powerful if the child has good eye contact and uses the name of the person to gain their attention.

Walk Away



Children may find it easy to walk away from their siblings, but it is much harder for them to walk away from a friend. What happens if that friend no longer wants to play with them, or even worse yet, starts talking bad about them behind their back? What happens if they lose all of their friends? This is a big deal in your little one's world. For some children, it is better to put up with a friend's bad behavior than be left alone at recess. This goes back to the back up plan. All children need to have alternative groups to play with, or at least alternative games to join.

- Teach your child that they need to move away from someone who is teasing them.
- Teach your child effective body language. Children should walk away with confident body language (head up, smile on their face, and shoulders back). This tells the teaser that they should move on, because what they are doing, your child is not going to put up with.
- Explain to your child: "This doesn't mean you're 'chicken'; it just means you're smart enough to walk away and that you are in control."
- Model inappropriate stomping away (aggressive) and ineffective moping away (passive).

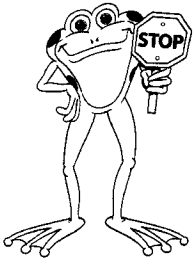
Ignore It



Let's face it, there are annoying children out there just as there are annoying adults. Oftentimes, these individuals receive a lot of attention for this behavior which is why they continue it. Basic behavior 101 says that for children whose goal is to gain attention by annoying, you should remove your attention. Instead, you give them attention when they are behaving appropriately. I will sometimes tell children that they are taking the bait if they get mad. That is exactly what that child is trying to do: either get you mad, annoyed back, or sad.

- Show your children the chart and say: “The frog in the illustration is ignoring a problem by not looking and not listening.” Notice how Kelso has a smile and an “I don’t care what you say” attitude?
- Ask your child what times they should ignore (teasing, name calling.)
- Teach your child that ignoring is very hard to do. They may have to do it for several days before the person stops bothering them. This choice is not a quick way to solve their problem, but it will eventually work.
- Discuss the idea that misbehavior can accelerate when ignored, but will eventually lessen. Say: “The teasing may get worse before it gets better!”
- Model inappropriate ignoring (huffing sound, angry look, arms crossed).
- Model appropriate ignoring (calm face, relaxed body).
- Have your child practice calmly ignoring a sound, a disturbance, or a conversation

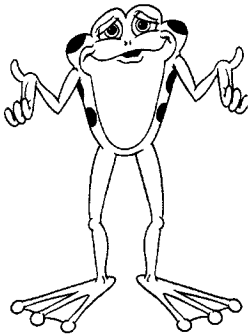
Tell Them to Stop



Assertiveness is an amazing quality to possess. When we hear about Columbine and other bullying stories, we hear about teens that were picked on day after day until they snapped. Using your words can be very empowering. It amazes me to listen to children who have been told they are dumb or stupid from other children, and they actually believe these messages! Saying, “Stop”, allows children to put that message back on the teaser instead of internalizing those messages.

- Teach your child to Stop, Warn and then Tell. First say Stop. “Stop calling me names”. If that doesn’t work, warn them. “If you don’t stop calling me names, I’m going to tell”. If that doesn’t work, go and tell an adult.
- Teach your child that ignoring doesn’t always work. Telling them to stop will work if you do it right.
- Model inappropriate “Tell Them to Stop,” using a whining or aggressive voice.
- Discuss with students: “If you really want others to stop, you, must tell them in a polite assertive way. Listen to this...” *Example: Get close to the person, look him or her in the eye, and say, in a quiet but firm voice, “Please stop.”*

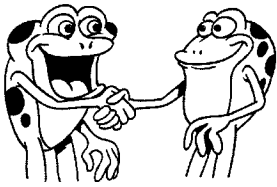
Apologize



Everyone makes mistakes, yet some children become hypersensitive. Some will shut down, others pout, while still some throw tantrums and refuse to acknowledge their mistake. Apologizing shows the other person you care about their feelings. Apologizing should be an activity that everyone in the family participates in. Let’s face it, parents aren’t perfect either. When we role-model apologizing to our children, they will in turn learn that it isn’t that hard to do.

- Teach your child what a sincere apology sounds like and looks like. Mention that students sometimes have to wait a day or two for things to cool down. Teach your child to give the other child space if that is the case. When children follow their friend around at recess when they are not yet willing to forgive, it oftentimes makes things worse.
- Teach your child what forgiveness looks like and sounds like.
- Model inappropriate “sorry” (sounds caustic, flippant).
- Model appropriate “I am sorry.”
- Ask students for additional phrases they use when they apologize: “I didn’t mean it,” “Excuse me,” “I apologize.”

Make a Deal



Compromising is a necessary skill to possess. It can mean the difference between having lots of friends or none at all. Elementary counselors call this skill a win-win situation. A win-win situation is when both friends walk away happy. If it is a win-lose situation, someone walks away mad or with hurt feelings. A lose-lose situation is when both friends are selfish and refuse to give in a little. This can end up with both people mad or in trouble.

- Teach your child that making a deal means you lose a little but you gain a lot. It's like making a bargain or a compromise." *Example: Two girls want to play different games at recess. They will lose a little when making a deal (cannot play their game the entire recess), but they will gain a lot (fun and friendship).*
- Ask your child to give an example of when they would need to make a deal. How could they strike a bargain? *Example: Both students want to use a certain game, or both students want to sit by a third friend on the bus but only two are allowed per seat.*
- Games such as "Rock, Scissors, Paper," picking a number between one and ten, and flipping a coin for heads or tails can also be taught.

Wait and Cool Off



Everyone gets mad, even us parents. When we role model when we need a cool down break, it will be easier for our children to do the same. Children feed off of our emotions. If parents lose it, children will learn to lose it too. Children mirror their surroundings. Children will learn self-control if you role model how to effectively deal with stress, disappointment or anger by exercising, taking a break, reading or drawing.

- Teach your child "If all else fails and a small problem has gotten you really upset, wait and cool off. Go to a quiet spot and think about how you are going to solve this problem." Positively reinforce them when you see them doing this.
- Discuss areas at school or home where your child can go to calm down (library, a fort, etc.).
- Emphasize to students that not all choices work in all situations. *Example: "Would you ignore someone who was pulling your hair? Would you walk away if someone had your pencil?" "Would you walk away if mom was in the middle of talking to you, or would you ask to take a break?"*

Sincerely Your Elementary Counseling Team,

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