



The Playgroup Altercation

Part Two – Your child is the Victim

By Judy Arnall

You hear a loud thud, an ear-piercing scream, and then your child appears before you wearing a tear-stained cheek and red eyes and is pointing to another child. Apparently your son was hit by another parent's daughter in the playgroup and you are wondering what to do. The mother is busy chatting away to another parent and is missing the whole scenario. What is the best way to handle playgroup altercations that leaves everyone feeling content and supported?

Here are six easy steps:

Calming Down

Comfort your child. Attend to any first aid necessary. Acknowledge his feelings. Say, "You are sad and hurt because you were hit." Wait until he is done crying. Keep comforting him until he is fully calm and able to listen to you. Ask him what had happened and what he would like to occur. Remember to stay calm yourself!

Restitution

1. Find the other child if she is still present. The first rule of conflict resolution is to speak to the person directly responsible for the negative feelings. That would be the other child, not the parent. Go to the child and encourage your child to speak about how he feels over what happened and what action he would like to have. Perhaps he wants his toy back or wants his turn on the ride-on toys. He may even want an apology. Focus on what your child wants, not what the other child did. If your child is too shy to speak, you can do it for him. This teaches him the words and tone of what to say.
2. If the other child does nothing, the next step is to appeal to their parent. Again, speak in terms of how your child feels or what he wants, not how bad the other child's actions were. You could say, "My son was hit by your daughter when she took away his truck. Would it be possible for him to continue his turn with it?"

Follow-Up

3. Hopefully, the parent will take control of the situation and your child gets the truck back. No matter how the child and parent react to you and your son's requests, you have three choices:

Persist – Continue to verbally assert your needs, even higher up the chain of command, such as appealing to the playgroup organizer. In conflict resolution, if the problem is not resolved at the level of the direct people involved, move up to people higher on the authority ladder. That shouldn't be a first step. Try to resolve things with the child first and then the other parent, because it's respectful to bring the problem to their attention first. Only appeal higher if there is no effort to resolve things from the daughter and her parent.

Flight – Leave the group for the day. This is a viable option if you just don't have the energy to deal with the other parent or if an altercation has happened more than once that day.

Redirect– Steer your child to another activity and ignore the other Mom and her child and enjoy your day. Say to yourself and your child, "Oh well, what else can we play with?" This might be a good choice if the other child or parent is no longer present.

In fact, with every situation in life, from a bullying teacher, a manipulative friend, or an unfair boss, we only have three basic ways to deal with what we have been handed: Persist, Flight, or Redirect. Outlining those three options to your child teaches them a valuable life skill.

4. While playing with your child, or even on the ride home, debrief by asking him how he feels about the outcome and what he could do differently next time. This gives him a chance to vent and also to feel in control of his actions, even if he can't control the other child's actions.
5. Many parents feel that they need to teach the other child a lesson. This is not advisable. The other child is a product of her parents. You are not in charge of her life lessons. Focus on your child.

If another altercation ensues with the same child or another child, recognize that your child is having a bad day and go home. Have some snuggle and one-on-one time, because your child needs to feel comforted by his parent and shown that his feelings matter. It gives him the message that even though there are challenging people out there, we feel better by immersing ourselves in people that are good and nurturing to ourselves. Don't forget to give yourself some pampering too! You are an excellent parent dealing with a challenging day.

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