

# "IT'S NOT FAIR!" SUPPORTING PSED AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN PRESCHOOLERS



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Anyone who works with young children will know that arguments and disputes are common. At this age children's brains are not yet developed sufficiently to understand other people's feelings and the impact their actions have on them. As a Childminder a big part of my role is supporting children to manage these conflicts and to develop empathy for others.

This case study focuses on one four-year-old, Susan who attends my setting in a cohort with three other children all very close in age.

Susan is an only child who struggles with self-confidence. She often found it hard to make herself heard in a group of more assertive children. This led to her becoming angry, tearful and frustrated, when she felt that other children were not "sharing" as quickly as she would like. Susan would always seek adult intervention whenever she felt things were not going as she would like them and would later tell her parents that other children were not playing with her.

Understandably her parents were concerned, so my first action was to invite them over for a meeting. Both explained that they had struggled to make friends as children and that Susan being an only child had no need to share or take turns at home. Furthermore, they both admitted to "doing everything for her" meaning that Susan had little confidence in her own abilities.

I suggested that we jointly implement the following actions, using guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation, to support Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

## FIRSTLY: TALK ABOUT FEELINGS AND SUPPORT SUSAN TO RECOGNISE HER EMOTIONS.

Evidence shows that emotional literacy can support the development of empathy, in this case all of the children in the cohort would benefit from understand the impact of their actions on others.

## SECONDLY: MODELLING NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Instead of stepping in with solutions, I and the parents would model phrases or suggestions as to how disagreements may be managed. For example, "Can I have a turn when you are finished, please?" or finding an alternative resource. This lessened Susan's dependence on adult intervention, giving her some agency over the situation and tools to use when she felt frustrated.



## THIRDLY: TEACHING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Susan was used to not having to share and often expected to be given a resource immediately. It was important for both her and her parents to understand that sharing does not mean that a child has to give something up, and that every child has a right to use the resources for as long as they need to.



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## CONTINUED...

This meant she became dysregulated and struggled with having to wait for a resource. Evidence shows that learning relationship skills from adults improves a child's ability to self-regulate and improves children's social communication, both key skills needed throughout life.



Susan is now able to self-regulate sufficiently to be able to negotiate turn taking as she feels she has more agency over these situations and her need to seek adult intervention has reduced significantly. The other children in the cohort have also benefitted, by talking about emotions, I have noticed an increase in empathetic language and an overall calmer and more co-operative environment.

## FINALLY: SELF-CARE SKILLS

Both I and the parents focused on supporting Susan's self-care skills such as dressing herself, using the toilet and managing at mealtimes, this may seem unrelated, but it gives Susan the confidence to know that she can do things without adult support.

## WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

Initially, Susan was very frustrated when, instead of intervening in a disagreement, I offered suggestions for how she could manage the situation using a few key phrases. However, she quickly began to use them and over time I began to see a shift from dysregulation to a calmer approach. Susan's parents also initially found it difficult to step back and allow her some independence but with continuing support and encouragement from me they understood that she will benefit from the changes especially as she transitions to school.



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