

# ANBL's Peaceful Problem Solving Approach

At ANBL, we try to work in sensitive, supportive ways that promote peaceful problem solving among children. First, however, we always let children try to solve problems on their own. When we do decide to intervene, we take children through the **Peaceful Problem Solving Steps** listed below. Eventually, these children may grow up to be world changers who will work together in stressful situations to forge creative solutions and make critical connections to others. Here are suggestions to use initially when a child or children are upset and need your reassurance and support.

- ❖ Approach slowly; speak softly; get down to the child(ren)'s level.  
(If you don't know a child, be sensitive to child's need for personal space to gauge how close to get to him or her.)
- ❖ Pause, breathe, and be present in the moment; ask child(ren) to take a big breath, if circumstances allow.
- ❖ Acknowledge child(ren)'s distress first; e.g. "Your words and the expressions on your face show me that you're upset. I'm sorry that...happened."

If child(ren)'s distress continues and needs more discussion and some resolution, move to the steps below.

## Peaceful Problem Solving Steps:

1. **Go to a quiet place** where you and the child(ren) can talk without interruptions; sit in circle if more than one child.
2. **Remain neutral** if child(ren) voicing distress about others' actions; do not blame or take sides.
3. **Acknowledge child(ren)'s feelings** e.g. "I can tell that you're upset and didn't like what just happened. Let's hear about what happened and then figure out a solution."
4. **Say: "Tell me about what just happened."** Ask most visibly upset child to go first. Before child begins, remind others not to interrupt another child's explanation of events. (Good impulse control practice!)
5. **Paraphrase what child said** using his/her words; e.g. "I hear you saying that..."
6. **Ask for solution ideas** after everyone has spoken. Provide wait time. If no children offer ideas, you suggest a few; then repeat request to children for their ideas. Keep encouraging their ideas; over time they'll respond.
7. **Tell child(ren) to vote thumbs-up on solution ideas they like** as you restate each separate idea. Explain that they should vote thumbs pointing together if they're not sure they like a solution idea.
8. **Vote again** (and again, if necessary) on just the solution ideas with most thumbs-up votes, dropping others as you go through the voting process. Try to reach consensus (or at least try for a majority) on one solution idea to try.
9. **Restate final solution idea.** Have children try it out right then if appropriate and remind them to try the idea on their own any time a similar situation arises. The goal is to change a negative behavior pattern and DSD (**Do Something Different**)! Any DSD action based on a solution idea will lead to more peaceful problem solving.
10. **Use Peaceful Problem Solving Steps over and over.** Tweak steps to apply to different kinds of situations!

(Note: Avoid asking young children *WHY* they did something. Usually they don't know why; the question does not help move a difficult situation toward a peaceful solution. Using the steps above helps children **DSD: Do Something Different!** With practice over time, this solution-finding process will become automatic as people work together to change unproductive behavior patterns. Time outs, rewards, and punishments should be avoided. Peaceful Problem Solving is a lifelong skill that can replace these other approaches.)