

# Encouraging Social Competency

Just as children learn to use playdough, clay, hammers and hoes at Playcentre, they also learn to use manners, and relationship and social competence skills. If a child doesn't know how to use a drill, we don't assume they are naughty – we teach them the right way. The same applies when they don't know how to join a game, or take turns, and hit, snatch, yell, bite or push in attempts to get what they want. Our job is to teach them.

## In any situation, there are many possible options an adult can take to resolve conflict.

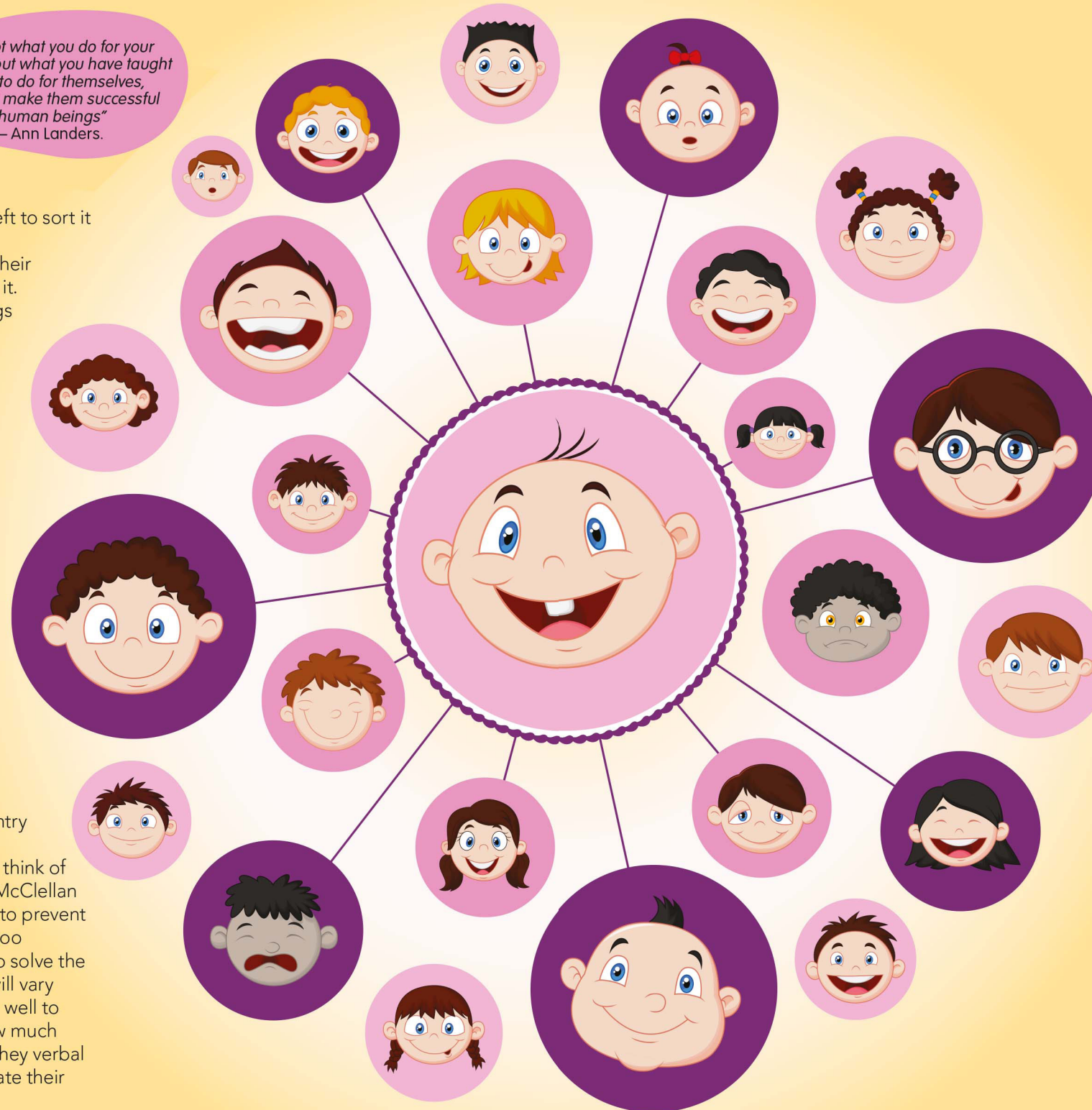
Imagine there are two children in conflict over a single piece of equipment.

The continuum of some of the possible adult interventions might look like this from low intervention to high intervention.

- Adult ignores and may leave the area – the children are left to sort it out themselves.
- Adult stands near and watches children – children know their problem has been noticed, and there is help if they need it.
- Adult empathises with children and supports their feelings 'you both want the toy, you feel sad you can't both have the toy.'
- Adult draws attention to the situation – 'looks like we have a problem.'
- Adult verbalises the problem – 'there are two children and only one toy'
- Adult asks the children for ideas to solve the problem. 'What can we do?'
- Adult coaches one or both of the children – 'ask her to let you have a turn.'
- Adult suggests a solution – 'how about we get another toy?' or 'how about we take turns?'
- Adult solves the problem by telling the children what to do – 'we share toys, you are going to take turns.'
- Adult quietly gets out another toy and places it nearby for the children to notice.
- Adult gets out another toy and gives it to a child.
- Adult takes the toy away – 'if you can't play nicely the toy will have to go away.'
- Adult takes one of the children away – 'if you can't play nicely you can't play in this area.'
- Adult distracts the children 'oh look over here, the carpentry looks fun today. Let's go.'

There are other possible options that you may be able to think of too. Somewhere on this continuum there is what Katz and McClellan call the 'optimum' intervention point – you act just enough to prevent the children being too frustrated and becoming rough, or too emotional to think, without taking away their opportunity to solve the problem for themselves. The optimum intervention point will vary depending on the situation. You need to know the children well to get this balance right. How quickly will they get rough? How much experience solving their own problems do they have? Are they verbal enough to explain what they want or do you need to translate their body language?

*"It is not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings"*  
– Ann Landers.



## Questions to consider when choosing an action to take.

- What is this child trying to learn? How can I redirect them so they can still achieve this?
- What is the child learning from my intervention? Would they learn more if I chose a different strategy?
- How can the child be part of the solution?
- How can my intervention build relationships and support a positive learning environment?
- Sometimes you will get it wrong, and intervene too fast or too slow. That is ok – you are learning too.

## You can create a pro-social environment by building strong and caring relationships with all of the children in your Centre

- Role modelling – use your manners with children and other adults.
- Reading books about manners and behaviour and talking about them – who is being a meanie? What could they do instead? How do you think the characters are feeling?
- Talking about ways to calm down when you feel frustrated.
- Making and talking about the rules with children. 'gentle hands', 'everyone can play together'.
- Acknowledging pro-social behaviour 'thank you for letting her have a turn.' 'Thanks for your help.'
- Creating opportunities for children to be supportive – 'can you older children help the littlies wash their hands?'
- Setting up activities that encourage group work-equipment that needs several children to move it.

*Social competence is not something we only teach when things have turned to custard. Talk about it and promote it daily. Children will absorb the messages better when they are not in the middle of conflict.*

## Useful books on Social Competence

- Lilian Katz and Dianne E. McClellan: *Fostering Children's Social Competence: The Teacher's Role*, NAEYC
- Vivian Gussin Paley, *You Can't Say you Can't Play*. Harvard University press 1993
- Lise Fox and Rochelle Harper Lentini [http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/yc\\_article\\_11\\_2006.pdf](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/yc_article_11_2006.pdf)
- *Early Childhood Toolkit* [www.eyesonbullying.org](http://www.eyesonbullying.org) Don't be put off by the word 'bullying'. This is a brilliant resource, about teaching social skills, not about labelling small children as bullies.

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