

Module 3

From Conflict to Cooperation: What to do about challenging behavior

Introduction

In the last module, I talked about reasonable expectations and toddler-appropriate rules, how to reframe your thinking about challenging behavior, to see it in a different light, the most common feelings that trigger challenging behavior and the importance of supporting your toddler to move through their upset instead of trying to change their mind about whatever is upsetting them.

In this module, I'm going to talk about why it's important to set limits and the 7 *Simple Steps* you can use whenever challenging behaviors happen, so you can reduce conflict and increase cooperation. You'll learn how to effectively respond to hitting, pushing, biting, whining and tantrums. You'll also uncover why your limits may be less than effective, so you can be clear about what, if any, adjustments you would like to make going forward. I have some videos to show you too, so you can see limit-setting in action.

Why It's Important to Set Clear Limits

Children don't come into the world knowing what is appropriate and what is not, so setting firm but friendly limits helps them to learn. "I'd like you to sit on your stool while you eat." "Your foot needs to stay on the floor."

Setting clear limits will help your toddler to *regulate their emotions*, to maintain their emotional equilibrium. Your toddler needs you to provide guideposts. When parents don't provide guideposts, the toddler can feel confused and chaotic inside, and that chaos manifests in their behavior. That's when we see aggressive and uncooperative behavior.

Setting clear limits helps your toddler to *build awareness of other people*, so they learn how their behavior affects someone else. When a toddler does something to another child that upsets the other child, we speak to both children. The child who is upset is acknowledged and the toddler learns how their behavior affected someone else. “She’s upset because you pushed her.” “It startles your baby brother when you yell.” When we provide clarity, it helps toddlers to build awareness and empathy for others.

Setting clear limits helps your toddler to *be successful*. Your child wants to please you and doesn’t want to lose your love for even a moment. It’s unsettling and upsetting for a toddler to feel their parent’s frustration or anger at them.

When we don’t set clear limits, when we’re permissive, the message the child gets is that their impulses – whatever they feel like doing in the moment – those impulses are the governing forces. “I want to touch your glasses, so I’m going to grab them.” “I’m frustrated, so I’m going to hit.” “I’m mad, so I’m going to whack my truck on the table.” And in the video I’m about to show you, a toddler had an impulse to sit on another child in class and had been trying to sit on him for several minutes. Take a look.

[video]

I intervened because the child who was being sat on looked to me and expressed upset. It was the end of a 90-minute class and he was just spent. He was tired and didn’t have the energy or emotional reserve to defend himself. So, he needed my emotional support.

How to Intervene and Set a Limit

This video is all about how to intervene when your toddler is doing something you don't want them to do. Sometimes, you can *anticipate and prevent* challenging behavior from happening, like you see in this photo. [photo] This child had a sudden impulse to swat the other child. I happened to be sitting right there, saw it, anticipated it and put my arm between them to prevent the swat from landing. You can prevent or block your child from touching, hitting, or pushing another child, or you, by putting up your arm to prevent the touch, hit or push from making contact. I'm going to show you a video, so you can see this blocking in action.

[video]

I gave the boy some choices. I said, "There are some dolls over there." He looked at the dolls but that idea didn't seem to interest him. Then I said, "Or you can put it on the floor." He considered that idea and then picked up the other car. To me, it looked like he was trying to figure out, "Is it this particular car I can't hit against someone's head? What about the other car? Maybe I can hit the other car against your head." You could see that I didn't touch the boy or grab his hand. I blocked with my forearm.

Preventing is very different than grabbing a child's hand because, even if you try to slow yourself down and grab the child's hand gently, there's no way for a grab not to feel aggressive, if not violent. Especially when you're frustrated or angry, your frustration or anger will be expressed through your hands. And here we are trying to teach children, model, how to be gentle. When you block, you'll find that it's completely different because you're *preventing*, not stopping. So, blocking can help you to intervene more peacefully.

I would suggest that you try it out with your partner or a friend. Reach out to try to touch an object and have your partner stop you by grabbing your hand. Then ask them to block you. Then reverse roles and compare notes. How did it feel to you physically and how did it feel, emotionally? Notice the difference.

Now I'll show you a video where you'll see me preventing a toddler from opening a door she wanted to pull open. You will see that I'm using my arm to block her, to prevent her from touching the door.

[video]

It would have felt very different if I had grabbed the girl's hand to stop her. I would have helped myself if I'd moved a little closer to the door though. It was an awkward reach. Now, the first time she tried, I said something to her about it. "I don't want you to pull on the door." She heard me the first time, so I didn't need to say it again. I didn't need to repeat myself. When we repeat ourselves, it can sound like we're pleading with the child, or as if we're in a negotiation, and we're not. I think the blocking gesture sends the message quite clearly that the limit is firm. So, here, I had to put my arm up to block several times, because she didn't give up so easily. I didn't need to state the limit over and over again because she heard me the first time. But my arm continued to send a clear message. You can block like this if your toddler is trying to touch something you don't want them to touch or if they're trying to hit or push someone.

What happens if the toddler perseveres or aggressively perseveres? In the door example like you saw in the video, I would have sat in front of the door, so the child couldn't access it. If a child is trying to touch an object that can be moved out of

reach, then I would pick it up and move it away. If the object can't be moved, then I would pick up the child, to move the child away from the object. I would say something like, "I'm going to pick you up because I don't want you to touch that." Remember that the more you can demonstrate to your child that you are serious about a limit, the easier it will be for them to comply.

7 Simple Steps to Calm and Cooperation

When challenging behavior happens, your goal is to teach your child, not to punish. To that end, you'll see the *7 Simple Steps to Calm and Cooperation Cheat Sheet* in your learning portal. You can follow these *7 Steps* every time you need to set a limit. The purpose of these steps is to help you be clear and consistent, to help your child learn.

Step 1 is calm yourself. If you're watching your toddler bouncing on the safety gate, try not to wait until you've lost your cool to set the limit. Stop the bouncing as soon as it starts or if you can see it's about to happen, prevent it from even starting.

You can't set a limit effectively if you're about to erupt. So, if you feel your blood pressure rising, pause to take a few deep breaths to calm yourself before you respond. Unless it's a safety situation, wait before you respond. Count to 10 in your head to slow yourself down. Do your best to set the limit before you get angry, because when you can speak to your toddler from a calm place inside, it will help your toddler to calm and cooperate, and you'll feel good about the interaction.

Step 2 is go close to your child when you need to set a limit. Close enough that you can touch your toddler, get down on their level, if that's comfortable for you. Going close sends the message, "I'm really serious about this. I want you to stop whatever

you're doing." That is going to feel different to your toddler than being spoken to from across the room. And going close makes the next step possible.

Step 3 is connect. Before you address whatever your toddler is doing that you don't want them to do, connect with them. Connecting first will create a warm place between you, where the learning can happen more easily, so that your toddler can see, hear and feel your message. When a parent just talks at their child, without first connecting, there's much more resistance and it's more difficult, if not impossible, for the child to hear the message.

You can connect with your toddler through touch. If you gently touch your toddler, it can help them begin to calm, before you've even said a word. And sometimes, just by going close and putting your hand gently on your toddler's back, it may be enough to remind your toddler, "Oh, that's right. I'm not supposed to bounce on the safety gate!" and they will stop without you saying anything.

You can connect through eye contact. Offer eye contact, but don't force it. Look into your child's eyes as you speak to them. Eye contact activates the social brain, that coordinates how we respond to other people. It can help your toddler synchronize with you, so that if you're calm, it will help your toddler to calm.

Pay attention to your facial expression. Are you sending a congruent message? Do your words, body language, facial expression, your whole demeanor all send the same message? When a parent smiles or laughs as they set a limit, it sends a mixed message and the message the toddler gets is, "Maybe my parent is not serious about this limit. So, I'm going to keep pushing it and see if I can get my way."

Let's say that a baby crawls up into my lap and tries to touch my glasses. Now I may think it's kind of funny, maybe even charming. But if I say to the baby (laughing), "I don't want you to touch my glasses," that's going to be confusing because I'm laughing. I look like I'm enjoying myself, but my words are expressing a different message that says, "Stop what you're doing." Instead, we want everything to be congruent. That's what we practice.

Listen to your tone of voice. You want to convey your seriousness, but not be threatening, shaming or scolding. I like to describe the tone of voice as "warmly matter of fact." Also, listen to the lilt of your words, how your tone of voice stays the same or goes up at the end of your sentence. When we make a declarative statement, the end of our sentence should be the same tone as the rest of the sentence. I can say to a child, "I'm not going to let you hit your brother." But if my tone goes up at the end of the sentence, "I'm not going to let you hit your brother, okay?," it sounds like I'm less than firm. Maybe what I'm saying is open for negotiation. Research shows that this kind of raise in tone of voice at the end of a sentence can cause anxiety in the person being spoken to. Now, I'm not saying that if you do this your toddler feels anxious, not at all. What I am saying is that it undermines your message because you sound less-than-sure and confident. And when children hear a less-than-sure and confident limit, they are much more likely to keep pushing. When you speak confidently, it makes it easier for your toddler to learn to accept a limit.

Step 4 is state the limit one time, using a few simple words. "I won't let you climb on the table." Resist any temptation to repeat yourself or to explain to your toddler why they can't do something. At the toddler stage, you want to teach what behavior's okay and what's not. Since your toddler is just learning language,

overwhelming them with too many words can bury the lede and make it harder for your toddler to understand what you're trying to tell them. Obviously, if your toddler is three-years-old, they'll have more language than a one-year-old. But still, what you want to convey is that it's not okay for them to do whatever they're doing. You may also want to acknowledge your child's point of view. "I know you want to play with my phone, but it's not a toy." That's going to feel a lot better than just saying, "That's not a toy!" and taking the phone away.

Step 5 is give time for cooperation. Your toddler is just learning words and especially a young toddler, can't process language as quickly as you can. So, pause and give time for your toddler to process what you've said. Give time for them to cooperate. Look for that lightbulb turning on, that indicates, "I understand!" If you don't see the lightbulb and you're not sure if you've given enough time, silently count to ten to make sure you've given your toddler sufficient time to cooperate.

Step 6 is be firm. The place where a lot of parents get confused comes after they've done really well setting a clear limit and really well giving time, but the child doesn't cooperate. They think, "I guess I need to give *more* time, so I'll just hang out and wait until my child cooperates." But somewhere in the hanging out period, it's very likely that the parent will get frustrated because they've given control to their toddler at just the moment they need to take control. And if the parent has become angry and frustrated, the child will pick up on it, and that is when things can get even more chaotic and antagonistic. In those moments when you've given time and your child doesn't cooperate, be firm and take action. "It's time for us to go home now. I'm going to pick you up and put you in the stroller." Seize the moment. Take charge.

Step 7 is offer a choice. Nobody likes being dictated to. We all want to have a say in the things that are important to us and the same is true for toddlers. Not all the

time, but sometimes, it will be appropriate to offer a choice to your toddler and having a choice can make it easier for them to cooperate.

Let's say you've told your toddler it's time to get in their car seat and they typically climb in themselves. But today, they're dawdling, maybe they're looking at something on the ground. You've paused and given them time to process what you've said and cooperate, but they don't make a move. Now, you can give your toddler a choice. "It's time to get in your seat. Do you want to climb in, or do you want me to pick you up and put you in your seat?" If your toddler still doesn't cooperate, it's time to calmly and confidently take charge. "I'm going to pick you up and put you in your seat."

The last thing I want to mention is consistency because it's sometimes taken to mean rigidity. There will be times when you'll let your toddler do something and other times when you won't let your toddler do that very same thing.

A mother recently had an example that I think will help to clarify this. Her son loves keys and enjoys using her keys to try to open the neighbor's doors in their apartment building. Sometimes, there is time to let her son have some fun doing this and sometimes, there's not. At those times when there's not, she can tell the truth. "I let you play with the keys earlier, but I'm not going to let you play with them now." Then the ever-important pause for that information to sink in. "We need to go inside now."

It would be easier for this mom if the keys were always off limits, but I don't know very many toddlers who don't love keys. Maybe one reason they love them is they see their parents using keys so often, so they want to figure out what keys are all

about. I wouldn't want to deprive a key-loving toddler of playing with keys but sometimes, just like in this example, a limit will need to be set and the child can learn that, "Sometimes I can play with keys and sometimes I can't."

When you're setting a limit, your firm but friendly demeanor will demonstrate that you are in charge and that you expect your toddler to cooperate. I think you will find that when you practice setting limits in a firm and friendly way, and with consistency, it will make it easier for your toddler to cooperate.

Common Challenging Behaviors

Now I would like to talk about a few common challenging behaviors and how you can effectively respond to them.

The first one is *throwing*. We all know that toddlers like to throw. Sometimes it happens because the child has a quick impulse to throw and you may choose to ignore it. A mother recently described how her son suddenly flung her cell phone across the room. She sensed this happened because her son had an impulse to throw and it didn't look like he was going to try to do it again, so she chose to let it go and not address the phone-flinging. I think that was a good call because the impulse happened and was over. If she had given it too much attention or any attention at all, it would have drawn her son's attention back to the phone and he might have tried to fling it again. There will be times when you will choose to ignore impulsive throwing because you just don't want to give it any oxygen.

But sometimes your toddler will throw something that is unsafe to throw and you will need to address it.

[video]

The child was dropping and throwing the water bottle because I think he liked the sound it made. This sometimes happened at other classes and a child might drop the bottle two or three times and that was it. So, I was waiting and observing to see if that's what would happen in this class when you saw the child toss the bottle and it bounced onto a parent. She wasn't hurt, but that is when I decided it was time to put away the bottle. You saw that I let the child know what I was doing. I wanted him to see me take the bottle out of the room.

What if your toddler is throwing a smaller object that is unsafe to throw, like a wooden car? You've told them you don't want them to throw it, but they continue because they can't control their impulse to throw. It's clear you've got to put the car away, but the child won't let go of the car, they won't cooperate. Then what do you do? First, slow down, and put *your* hand on the car too. Look at your child and tell them, "I want to put this up on the shelf." [pause] Remember how much we convey with our hands? Very often, when we put our hand on the toy and when we slow down and give the child a few moments to cooperate, the child senses that we are firm and this is non-negotiable, and they release the toy more easily. Not always. Sometimes, we need to take action and take the toy out of their hand, for safety's sake.

Toddlers sometimes throw toys when they get frustrated, and this often happens when a toy is too challenging for them. This can happen when toys are close-ended, like puzzles and stacking toys. These toys are designed to be used in a very specific way and if a child is not developmentally capable of using the toy in that specific way, it leads to frustration. But when your child plays with simple, open-ended toys

like you saw and heard me talk about in *Your Toddler's Play Space and Toys Mini Course*, you don't see this kind of frustration because your toddler is inventing their play. Open-ended toys can be used in whatever way your child chooses.

The next common behavior is *pushing or hitting*. Toddlers push or hit for a few reasons. A toddler may push or hit when they don't have the vocabulary to say, "Excuse me. Would you please move out of my way?" Very often, if it's a little push, the other child doesn't get upset. It's only when an adult signals that something bad has happened that the child who's been pushed gets upset. So, if a little push happens, wait. Observe how the child who's been pushed responds. If that child is okay with it, there's no reason for you to say anything.

I'm going to show you a video where you see a gentle push. The boy always wanted to be close to the girl and his gentle push was not aggressive. I think he wanted to be near her. The video starts with me going close because the children were opening and closing a vent and it became clear they weren't going to stop, so I went close.

[video]

You saw that the girl didn't like it when the boy pushed her. She retreated to her mom's lap and I narrated.

Why else does pushing happen? A toddler may hit or push when another child gets too close to them, as if to say, "I don't want you to stand so close to me." If we're paying attention and can see and anticipate that a toddler is going to hit or push, we can block with our forearm. We should remain neutral, and calm. We don't want to

throw fuel on the fire by swooping in with a lot of energy. That only escalates things. We can calmly tell the toddler, “I’m not going to let you push/hit her.” But let’s say the child continues to try to push. We don’t need to repeat ourselves, but we can block so the hit can’t land.

The next common toddler behavior is *biting*. I think this behavior causes more horror and upset for parents than any other behavior challenge. It seems so primal, but biting is not at all unusual for toddlers. Sometimes, if we observe, we can figure out why a toddler is biting. Toddlers may bite when their gums are hurting because a tooth is coming in. They may bite when the environment is over-stimulating. Maybe there are lots of children running and jumping and making a lot of noise. They may bite when they get over-excited. A hug can turn into a big squeeze and then suddenly, a bite can happen. Bites can happen when a toddler feels anxious. When they don’t have the words to say, “You ran quickly toward me and that scared me.” If we observe that a child is uncomfortable with another child coming close, we can narrate. “Sophie, it looks like you don’t want Emma to stand so close to you.” Bites can happen when a toddler is angry. In that case, we can suggest an appropriate way to express their anger. “If you’re angry, you can stomp your feet and growl like a tiger.” Demonstrate. Give them another, appropriate way to express their feelings. Remember, toddlers respond to fun.

If you see that a bite is about to happen and you can get there quickly, you can prevent it and set a limit. Instead of putting out your arm to block, put your cupped hand between your toddler’s open mouth and the person they’re trying to bite. You’re not putting your hand on or over their mouth, but in front of their mouth. In this position, you can prevent the bite without getting bitten yourself. You can say, “I’m not going to let you bite” or “I’m going to help you stop biting.” You can also

offer a choice of two toys that would feel good to bite, “If you want to bite, you can bite one of these.”

When a bite has already happened, speak to both children: “Sophie, you were bit. That hurt.” “Emma, Sophie’s crying. It hurt when you bit her arm.” The language describes what happened. It’s not scolding or shaming and we speak to both children. We can also give some information to the biting child, in a few simple words, “Biting hurts people and I don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

If your toddler has bitten another child or if biting attempts are happening frequently, you will need to shadow your child. This means stay close to your toddler as they play, crouch down on their level, so you’re close enough to intervene when you have to. Do your best to be as unobtrusive and peaceful as possible because when you’re calm, it will help your child to feel calm. It’s a good idea to have a couple of toys in your pocket, too, that you can offer to your toddler when they try to bite. If your toddler is having a hard time controlling their urge to bite, they’re demonstrating that they’re just not capable of playing peacefully right now. Then it’s best to go home from the playground or end the playdate. Most importantly, try your best to bring a sense of peacefulness to the situation. No shaming or scolding.

The last behavior is *moving*. We know toddlers love to move and sometimes, they move in ways that are unsafe. Your toddler may get all wound up and run or fall about, or spin until they fall on the floor. When they do this in a safe place, it can be a lot of fun. But what about when it’s not a safe place or what about when your child does this as a way to seek your attention? Then, when you can go close and give even a minute of full attention, it can refill your toddler’s emotional cup and help them to calm.

Sometimes toddlers spin and fall on the floor to re-enact something that's just happened to them. You may think, "Will you just stop?! I'm going to trip over you." But when you stop and acknowledge your toddler for a few moments, it can eliminate their need to continue to re-enact. "Wow. You were spinning around and you fell really hard."

With all of these common toddler behaviors, the more you can provide clear and consistent limits, the easier it will be for your toddler to learn what's appropriate behavior and what's not.

Tantrums and Whining

There tends to be fewer tantrums when toddlers get plenty of rest, have regular routines and mealtimes, opportunities for emotional connection and a simple daily schedule. But even when you can tick off those boxes, your toddler may still have a tantrum every once in a while, when big feelings just have to be released.

When a tantrum happens, stay with your toddler. If you're in a public place, take your toddler outside or to a quiet place, if you can. Your toddler may kick and flail about when they have a tantrum. Some toddlers can be helped to calm by corralling them loosely. This can help protect your child from being hurt or hurting the environment or someone else. But for other toddlers, any physical contact may escalate the tantrum even more. Trying to reason with your toddler during a tantrum will be futile and can also escalate it, so do your best to be calm and quiet and stay with your toddler until the tantrum has ended. Wait until the emotional storm passes over.

Whining is also developmental. It serves the purpose of getting your attention, just like crying did when your toddler was a baby. Whining can be triggered by hunger, fatigue, over-stimulation or a need to connect with you. Whining also happens when your toddler feels uncomfortable. They don't have the words to describe how they're feeling, so they whine. You can respond by giving attention, connecting with your child and acknowledging their feelings. "I know you want to stay at the playground. We can come back after your nap." "I know you're really hungry. It's hard to wait for lunch to be ready."

I know it's not easy to listen to whining. Some days you'll be able to keep your cool and other days whining will sound and feel like nails on a chalkboard. But when your child feels acknowledged, heard and understood, whining tends to lessen or stop altogether.

Conflicts Between Two Children

Conflicts between two children is a big topic that I've touched on here and there. Feeling confident that you know what to do during a conflict takes practice. It's not something that can be summed up in a tidy bow: "This is when you should intervene. This is how to respond." There is an art to knowing if, when and how to intervene during a conflict. But there are certain things you can look for that will make it easier for you to know if your support is needed.

First, I think it's helpful to adopt an attitude that conflict is not a terrible thing. Conflicts are informative, they're instructive. We expect toddlers to have conflicts, with their siblings, with their peers and with their parents. Toddlers are just learning about social interactions. They don't have the vocabulary to say, "When

you're done playing with that toy, I'd like to play with it." They can't manage their impulses yet, so they see a toddler holding a toy and they take it.

Interestingly, research shows there is less conflict between children when no adults are present. What this tells us is that we adults can bring a lot of energy to a conflict that can cause the conflict to escalate. Our feelings about conflicts can help a conflict to resolve or can make matters worse. As long as the toddlers are not hurting each other, it's a good idea to hang back, observe and give them opportunities to discover how and what they can resolve on their own. And sometimes, we can be surprised.

If you grew up in a family where conflicts were suppressed or swept under the rug, chances are good that you'll be triggered when your toddler has a conflict, and you'll want it to stop quickly. When we get triggered, it's often because we weren't allowed to express a certain emotion or work through conflicts as we grew up, so it's unfamiliar and sometimes uneasy emotional territory for us. Giving toddlers time to try to manage conflicts on their own takes practice.

During a conflict, the art is in figuring out if, when and how to intervene. Let's say two toddlers both want the same toy and are both pulling on it. As adults, we can see two children pulling on a toy and assume, "They're both pulling on the toy. They're really upset about it. I should step in to referee." But are the toddlers really upset? What do you observe? Maybe they're pulling on the toy to see if they can hold onto it, but they're not upset by the pulling. It may even be interesting to them, to feel the other toddler pull on the toy. We can't get into a child's head to know what they're thinking, so we can make all sorts of assumptions and 99% of the time, our assumptions diminish the child. "My child isn't strong enough" or "My child is

going to cry.” Rarely or never is the assumption that the child is more capable or more competent, or can manage a conflict like toy-pulling without getting upset.

Very often, our knee jerk responses to a conflict are about managing or putting an end to our own discomfort. So, another benefit of slowing ourselves down and waiting before we respond is to give ourselves time to observe and see what happens. When we pause and observe, we often discover that the toddlers are managing the conflict quite successfully on their own and we are the only one who is uncomfortable with it.

When a conflict erupts, the first thing to do is pay attention. If the children know you’re paying attention and available if they need you, that can provide enough emotional security so they can continue to try to resolve the conflict on their own.

How do you know whether or not you should intervene? Look to see where the children are looking. If their focus is on the toy or each other, and if they’re not hurting each other, you can just continue to pay attention. But if one or both children look to you, as if to say, “Hey, I need your help over here,” that’s your cue to move close.

I’m going to show you a short, 30-second video of two children who are pulling on a bucket. I’m going to show it to you three times. This first time, just watch the video, so you can get a feel for what’s happening.

[video]

The boy in black and white checks, I don’t think he ever looked at the bucket. He was looking at the other child and also at the carpet. He was being sort of dragged

along by the other child. And when the other child got the bucket out of his hands at the end, he said “bucket” in a very unconvincing tone of voice. I don’t think he cared about the bucket at all. The bucket served as a bridge, a way for him to connect with the child in red. For the child in red, it was all about the bucket. He wanted it. This bucket conflict happened at the end of our 90-minute class and throughout nearly the entire class, the boy in black and white had been following the other child around; standing close to him, touching toys he was playing with and taking toys away from him. By the end of class, when this conflict happened, the child in red had just had enough of this and he looked at my practicum student as if to say, “Help me please.” That was her cue. If the children had focused on the bucket or each other, then we would have hung out and given our attention, but neither of us would have moved close. But it was when the child in red looked at the adult, that was the cue that we needed to go close.

The interesting thing is that these are the same two children you saw in the *Why It’s Important to Set Clear Limits* video. But in that video, the roles were reversed. In that video, the child in red was trying to sit on the child in black and white. That video was taken in class a week earlier. In that class, red jacket pursued black and white check everywhere he went and in this class, the roles were reversed. So, it was clear that these two children were interested in each other. They sought each other out and played things out through the objects, through the toys. “Let me take something from you. Let me try to sit on you. How are you going to respond?” Very often, when children have a lot of conflict, it’s because they’re really interested in each other.

Toddlers can learn from their conflicts. “How do I get what I want? Do I want to compromise here? Can I negotiate with the other child?” Some toddlers try to get what they want physically. Others try to negotiate by offering a toy.

If we want to support children to grow into adults who are not conflict-avoidant, who are more comfortable with conflict and speaking their truth when they have a conflict, then it's good for us to practice hanging in there when toddlers have conflicts with their peers. If somebody's being aggressive and potentially hurting someone else, then we don't just hang back and wait for it to happen. We have to go close and 90% of the time, conflict is lowered just by going close to the toddlers, without even saying a word. Going close provides emotional security to the children. It also provides safety when it's a physical safety issue.

The vast majority of the time, when there's aggression or conflict, you haven't seen the whole interaction. You haven't seen the beginning of the conflict and you haven't seen what precipitated it. You only become aware of the conflict when you hear one or both children yell or cry. So, try not to approach the children with judgment about it being one child's fault. Go close with a sense of wonder, "I wonder what's going on between you two." The conflict is between the children, so don't take away from their interaction with your own energy. Do your best to be calm and peaceful. Pay attention to your breathing, your tone of voice and facial expression. Is your face relaxed or is it full of tension? Are you holding your breath?

Now, let's say you've gone close and the conflict seems to have resolved. Stay there and be the last one to leave. In other words, wait to move away until one or both of the toddlers move away because the children may be relying on you to be the peacekeeper, and when you move away prematurely, the conflict may erupt again.

I want to say a word about sibling conflict. A lot of the time, it's the older child who gets the blame when there's a sibling conflict. Let's say the older child hits the younger one. In most instances, the parent hasn't seen what caused the older child

to hit. They haven't seen the beginning of the conflict. They only respond when they hear the upset, when they hear the older child yelling and the younger one crying. But what happens quite often is that the curious toddler has invaded the older sibling's play space and does something the older child is justified in being upset about. Maybe the younger child grabs a toy or knocks down whatever the older child is building. So, no wonder the older child gets upset. But an older sibling can learn how to use their arm to block their sibling from touching whatever they are playing with, using their arm to block like you've seen in the videos. Some families create a safe play space for the older child, to prevent the younger one from disturbing the older child's play and to make sure the younger child can't reach potential choking hazards.

One place where conflicts are trickier is at the playground. The toddlers may not be familiar with each other and there may be parents with very different parenting styles from yours. Your toddler may want to play with toys that belong to another child, or another toddler may want to play with your child's toys. When that happens, see if the children can manage the toy-taking on their own and try not to make any assumptions about what will happen. If you feel one or the other child needs some support, start by moving close. A lot of times, parents are unsure what to do, so either they don't do anything or they swoop in with a lot of energy and a lot of words and make matters worse. But if the goal is to help children learn, then it's preferable to move in peacefully. Try not saying a word and see if going close is sufficient support for the toddlers to be able to relax and manage things on their own.

When there's a conflict at the playground with a toddler and parent you don't know, you may want to be the one to intervene and the other parent may

appreciate this. You have to feel it out because some parents will welcome you intervening and speaking with their child and other parents may be offended. There's no one-size-fits-all answer to this. Diplomacy is important at the playground.

Managing conflict will take practice for your child and for you. Give yourselves time. It's a learning process.

Mindset

The last thing I want to talk about is mindset. Throughout the Peaceful Toddler course, you've heard me use the word "practice" a lot. And that's because it takes practice to create habits, to create new ways of interacting with and responding to your toddler. It's one thing to understand the ideas up here, intellectually, but it takes practice to create new habits and to bring greater awareness to your interactions with your toddler.

You can't be fully aware and well attuned to your toddler all day, every day. But practicing during caregiving and at other times, too, will help you to internalize the principles I've taught you, so they become more and more natural to you. The more you practice, the more you'll discover how much of what I've taught you will prevent challenging behavior. When you slow down and move at your child's pace, you'll avoid a lot of unnecessary upsets. When you confidently set and reinforce limits, your toddler will learn to stay at the table until they're all done eating and mealtimes will be peaceful and pleasurable. When you give time for your toddler to process what you've said, you'll see how they can cooperate more easily and more often.

After you've completed the material in Module 3, you may want to look back through the modules to guide you, as you continue to practice. Something may stand out to you in a new way that it never did before and you may choose to focus your practice on something new.

Over and over again, I've seen how the simple principles of this approach can have profound effects and help families to enjoy greater peacefulness and cooperation. And that is what I wish for you.