

COLLABORATE GESTURE

Every day at work, at school, and at home, we have opportunities to collaborate with children to identify problems and work together towards a common goal.

Teaching children who have experienced traumatic stress how to collaborate can help them learn strategies to effectively address conflict and deal with adversity.

But science shows that children who have been exposed to toxic stress may struggle with seeing and understanding others' perspectives. They may lack a sense of belonging or even the will and know-how to reach out. And they may need help controlling their emotions, working through their problems, and gaining independence.

In this section, we'll share how through your everyday interactions, you can teach children the skills to collaborate and resolve problems by modeling cooperative relationships, helping them build trust, and encouraging them to express their opinions and ask for help when needed.

See the [short films](#), inspired by real stories, where mentors show students that their feelings and opinions really do matter.

Age-Related Tips

Whatever their age, children who have experienced traumatic stress can benefit from learning how to collaborate. Below are tips for teaching children the skills for working together, problem-solving, and recognizing others' perspectives.

Infants & Toddlers

Adults can help teach younger children the skills of collaborating by showing them how to work together and how to see and share different perspectives from other children and adults.

- Infants and toddlers need clear boundaries and time to work out tasks independently. Read their cues and provide encouragement and support.
- When they are frustrated motivate them to use their problem-solving skills, but try to catch them before they become too frustrated and give up.
- Provide age-appropriate activities.
- Help toddlers understand others' perspectives during activities by offering reflective statements such as, "It looks like James might be upset because you grabbed the toy away from him."

Elementary/Middle School

At this age, children can be encouraged to collaborate by working together, problem solving, and recognizing others' perspectives.

Encourage Working Together

- Create opportunities for children to work on tasks together with their peers.



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- Establish rules and expectations for different situations and set reasonable consequences for when things aren't going well.
- Help them to see others' perspectives on possible action steps and solutions.

Teach Problem-Solving Skills

Through gentle guidance and open-ended questions, support children in resolving their own conflicts by learning resolution skills and nonviolent ways of playing, working, and communicating with others.

- Acknowledge children's problem-solving attempts whether or not the attempts are successful.
- Encourage them to think ahead by discussing challenges they would face in carrying out their plans and help them consider how they can prevent or solve them.
- Suggest taking breaks when children are stuck or when they are getting frustrated. Provide choices when possible.
- Model the exact words to use, particularly when they are in new situations.

Teens

Teaching teens the skills to overcome conflicts and problems may be the first step in guiding them to collaborate with their peers, family members, or adults.

- Guide teens to first identify and understand their obstacles, to communicate how they're feeling and describe the problems in their own words.
- Once they've communicated the issues, encourage them to identify potential conflict resolution strategies and pros and cons to different ideas.
- Engage them in a step-by-step problem-solving process until you reach a solution.
 - Help them locate other sources of support at school, in their community, and at home.
 - Encourage them to reflect on how their peers and friends might be feeling during conflicts.
 - Assure them that they can rely on you to be their sounding board.
- Discuss how things went, what they learned in trying a particular solution, and possible next steps.

Environment-Related Tips

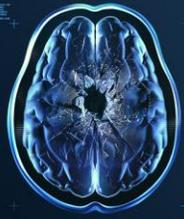
Whether at school, in the community, in a health care setting, or at home, children can learn ways to collaborate – to work together to resolve problems and conflicts and to learn new things.

At School

Children have many opportunities to collaborate in the classroom and during in-school and after-school activities.

Encourage Working Together

- Facilitate working together with peers towards a common goal using agreed upon rules and expectations.
- Demonstrate to students that group work can help identify multiple solution strategies to problems and that some might be more effective than others.



Teach Problem-Solving Skills

- Encourage working through conflicts together.
- Teach nonviolent resolution skills and model a problem-solving process rather than just giving students the answer.
- Notice when children are frustrated and offer supportive guidance.
- When possible, help them identify other sources of support in school, in the community, and at home.

In The Community

There are many opportunities during sports and free play, in counseling sessions, and around their neighborhoods where children can learn ways to collaborate.

Encourage Working Together During Sports

- Encourage teamwork and working together towards common goals.
- Encourage good friendship skills and set up rules and expectations.
- Encourage kids to take on appropriate leadership roles.
- Role model healthy interactions between the children and their peers.

Invite Children to Participate In Their Own Treatment

- Collaborate on decisions about treatment, placement, and other issues.
- Share your experience and tell stories about how you've handled similar situations in the past.
- Help them identify other sources of support at home and school.

Take Emotional or Physical Complaints Seriously

- Help them generate safety plans.
- Practice relaxation techniques with children when they are calm to make them more likely to use these techniques in times of stress.
- Encourage children to rely on you in times of struggle.

In Health Care Settings

Provide children a voice in their own treatment and involve them in discussing referral options.

- Encourage children to describe what's bothering them in their own words.
- Ask them what solutions they've tried in the past.

At Home

Children can learn ways to collaborate at home whether they are doing homework, completing chores, or participating in family activities.

- Talk to your child's teachers about instances that have triggered them to be upset. Learn if there have been sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Think about which situations are toughest for your child. How can you change your own behavior or reactions to help them better cope.



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- Teach nonviolent conflict resolution skills and problem-solving methods.
- Encourage children to make their own choices instead of choosing for them.

Why It Works

By practicing collaboration skills with children, you can teach them coping strategies, how to identify and control their emotions, how to work through problems, and how to gain independence.

Children, who have witnessed violence and experienced traumatic stress, may have limited role models and experience using problem-solving methods and may struggle with taking someone else's perspective.

In order to deal effectively with adversity, children need access to flexible strategies for addressing conflict, seeking help, and dealing with unforeseen setbacks. Problem-solving skills and learning how to adopt perspective are linked with better outcomes for children and may help them view aggression as a less attractive way to handle conflict.^{1,2} As a caring adult, you can help the children in your life to learn these strategies by encouraging children to describe and think about the results of their actions.³

Children who have positive friend networks are more resilient, have higher self-esteem, and have fewer behavioral problems.⁴ By collaborating with children on identifying fun choices for activities, by creating a safe and supportive environment for play, and by providing the needed guidance to help children share and resolve conflicts, you can help them discover how to form healthy friendships and peer relationships.⁴⁻⁶

When practicing the Collaborate gesture remember to:

1. Listen and make eye contact.
2. Build trust by showing respect for their ideas.
3. Model collaborative relationships.
4. Encourage them to express their opinions.
5. Teach them how to ask for help.

References

¹ Luthar, S.S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). Research on resilience: Response to commentaries. *Child Development*, 71(3), 573-575.

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⁴ Masten, A. (2009). Ordinary Magic: Lessons from Research on Resilience in Human Development. Education Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.cea-ace.ca/sites/cea-ace.ca/files/EdCan-2009-v49-n3-Masten.pdf>.

⁵ Futures Without Violence. (2013). Promising Futures: Promoting Resiliency Among Children and Youth Experiencing Domestic Violence. Retrieved from: <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/files/2014/01/Promising-Futures-Infographic-FINAL.jpg>.

⁶ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005/2014). Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3. Updated Edition. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

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[Taking Care of Yourself](#)