

Conflict and Discipline

If you've been working with families for any length of time, or even hung out with families, you'll know that people often have very different ideas and priorities when it comes to parenting. This can be enough of a minefield when it's your own family's priorities that are called into question but what do you do when you encounter this kind of conflict within your Playgroup?

One of the more common scenarios has to do with discipline. One Mum sees herself as a guide for her child, helping them navigate the "terrible" twos and threes. Another Mum uses tools such as time out, and removing the child from the situation and is frustrated that the other Mum doesn't do likewise. Both Mum's are trying to help their child learn, they just have quite different approaches. In less ideal circumstance we meet parents who are either plain exhausted or ill-equipped to deal with these situations and so find themselves either ignoring it, yelling at the child, or leaving.

How do we respond and interact in these settings to provide appropriate pastoral care and avoid the escalation of these issues?

As with most things, I suggest that prevention is the best cure. We can't tell parents what their priorities should be, but we can tell them what we require in order to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all families. We can also give parents a hand when they are simply at the end of their rope, wrung out, exhausted and struggling.

Some Suggestions:

- Start by putting aside your own parenting priorities and practices. We can draw on our own experience, but our experience is not the answer to another person's problem. We need to hear other peoples' stories and ask God to give us wisdom to respond with love and kindness.
- Include in your guidelines what is not acceptable at your Playgroup or mainly music group e.g. biting, hitting etc.
- Include in your mission/values statement, somewhere visible, attributes such as "safe", "kind", "welcoming" etc... these words can be used as teaching tools through your story time and conversation with children. Children aren't born knowing what it means to share or be gentle; we need to teach them.
- When an incident occurs, make sure you follow up with the parent to reassure and encourage them. It's an awful moment for a parent when their child hits or bites another child and yet these are completely normal, developmental processes. We don't want a family or child to feel judged by them.
- Have available a range of resources that can help parents with some of these tricky (and at times exhausting) things. The Parents Inc website (Parentsinc.co.nz) has a great range of such books that can be bought direct from them or via thebookdepository.co.uk who will

Early Childhood



by Louisa Raggatt

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Some Suggestions continued:

- We never want a parent or child to be humiliated and so as much as possible always talk with them about these issues in private to see if you can come up with a strategy together.
- If a situation is recurrent or seems to be escalating, take steps to work with the families involved before it becomes an insurmountable issue. Speaking with your pastor or pastoral care team is a good first step here.

There's no one way to deal with these issues, but if they are happening in your setting you are not alone. Perhaps as we encounter these moments we can be encouraged by this quote:

William Allen White once said "If each man or woman could understand that every other human life is as full of sorrows, or joys, or base temptations, of heartaches and of remorse as his own . . . how much kinder, how much gentler he would be."

Grace and Peace,

Louisa