

When We Don't Know What the Child Wanted

Sometimes we really don't have a clue what the child wanted. All we see is a child using a nonverbal communication strategy (hitting, pushing) to achieve a goal. We have two choices when this happens: take our best guess and let the child correct us, or notice the nonverbal actions and wait for a response. Noticing integrates the left and right hemispheres so the child will often begin to talk about what happened. If the child remains quiet we could add, "Something happened," in an inquiring tone of voice. Below is an example of what this looks like:

Situation: Child slams his math book shut and slumps down in his chair with arms crossed.

Notice: "You slammed your book and slumped in your chair with your arms like this. (Imitate the child and download calm.) Your body is telling me you might feel frustrated."

Child: "I can't do math. It's stupid."

Positive intent: "You wanted to let me know you need help with math, so you slammed your book. You didn't know what else to do. When you feel frustrated, raise your hand for help like this."

Practice: "Raise your hand now to show me how you will ask for help. There you go. Good for you!"

Positive Intent, Hurtful Words

Physical aggression is the hallmark of a survival state. When children are in an emotional state, they are likely to be hurtful with words. These children verbally exclude others. "Bug off, we don't like you!" They attack through name calling. "Beat it, lard bucket!" They disrupt the learning process with their inability to manage their emotions. Whether in a physical survival state or a mouthy emotional state, we can use positive intent to transform these moments of negativity into positive interactions where all parties learn a helpful means of expression.

Situation: "Go away, stupid."

Monica is talking with some friends when Sandra approaches the group. Monica turns to Sandra and says, "Go away, stupid." The teacher sees this occur.

Teach Victim Assertiveness First

Notice: The teacher approaches Sandra by saying, "Monica just called you a name. Did you like how she spoke to you?" Sandra replies, "No."

Teach: Coach Sandra to assertively speak to Monica, telling her the exact words to use. "Sandra, tell Monica, *I don't like it when you call me names. My name is Sandra. Please use it.*"

Then Teach Aggressor a New Skill

Step 1 - Positive intent: "Monica, you wanted to let Sandra know you were busy talking to your friends."

Step 2 - Notice: "So you called her a hurtful name."

Step 3 - State the missing skill: "You seemed frustrated and didn't know any other way to get your point across."

Step 4 - Set limit: "You may not call people names, name calling is hurtful."

Step 5 - Teach: "When you want to let a classmate know you want privacy with your friends, say, *Sandra, this is personal. I would like to talk to my friends alone. We can talk later.* Say it now, so you can practice what to say that is helpful and not hurtful."

Step 6 - Encourage: "It's hard to do things differently when feelings have been hurt. Both of you gave it a try. Good for you both. Do you want to give high fives or pinky hugs to show you are still part of the School Family and respect each other."