

The problem solving approach to conflict resolution.

Example of using this approach in a setting:

Isaiah and Alex were fighting over the Batman cape. The argument was escalating and the boys were about to start physically hitting each other. Sarah, an early childhood educator stepped in.

What to do	Example
Step 1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions or language	Sarah approaches swiftly but calmly, “Hey Isaiah and Alex, what’s going on? Remember to use kind hands...” She stepped between the two boys and gently held the cape, allowing them both to keep holding it too.
Step 2. Acknowledge feelings of all children involved	“Alex, you look very angry and Isaiah, you look very cross!”
Step 3. Gather information	“What happened?” The boys both tell Sarah about the cape and how they both (!) had it first. The tug of war starts again. Sarah holds the cape still. “Let’s hold the cape together.”
Step 4. Restate the problem	“Now, it looks like we have a problem guys because we only have this one Batman cape and (counts) one, two, children want to play with it.”
Step 5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together	“What shall we do?” Several children have now begun to watch this interaction. Sarah asks them for ideas too. One child suggests that they buy a new cape but Sarah explains that although a good idea, that won’t solve the problem right now. Then Isaiah says, “I know! Maybe Batman and Superman are fighting, so we could get a Superman cape too?” Alex thinks that this is a good idea but still wants the Batman cape. They agree to play Batman versus Superman.
Step 6. Give follow-up support as needed	Sarah helps Isaiah to find the Superman cape and put it on. She then checks that Alex is happy with the arrangement. She says, “Well done guys, you really are superheroes! You solved the problem!”

It is important to note that Sarah should remain impartial and non-judgemental during this process – validating the feelings and opinions of both children. It is not about who is right and wrong here, it is about turning this conflict into an opportunity to develop skills which will enable the children to resolve their own conflicts in the future.

Adapted from: HighScope Educational Research Foundation (2018)

Shared in Grimmer, T. (2019) *Calling All Superheroes: Supporting and Developing Superhero Play in the Early Years* London: Routledge tamsingrimmer.com