

Make Popsicle Puppets...and Practice Communication

How many times a day do you say "Use your words, not your hands" to your young children? Probably more than you'd like to count! Preschoolers need to learn about conflict resolution. And puppets can help!

What You Need:

- 10-20 popsicle sticks
- glue
- safety scissors
- 10-12 pieces construction paper
- crayons

What You Do:

1. Set the stage. Talk to your child about the importance of being able to communicate his needs, wants, and feelings to others, including parents, siblings, and friends. Tell him that sometimes when our words don't work, we can be tempted to use our bodies instead, but that hitting or pushing is never okay, so you're going to practice some other ways to tell others what you need. Help your child create the following signs, by drawing pictures on circles, and labeling them with the following words:
 - Stop (draw a stop sign)
 - Speak (draw lips)
 - Share (draw 2 hands holding a toy)
2. Once he's created the signs on construction paper, he can use his safety scissors to cut out the pictures and glue each one on to a popsicle stick. Explain to your child that these three signs are a reminder of what they can do when they have a problem with another person. They can "Stop" before things get out of hand, they can "Speak" to the other person about their feelings and talk about solutions to the problem, or they can "Share" if the argument is about a toy or game that both kids want.
3. Get started! You don't need fancy puppets to have a puppet show. Kids can make puppets at home easily, with a few simple supplies. Depending on what you have kicking around the house, help your child create at least two puppets using:
 - Paper plates. Use markers to draw features or cut features out of construction paper and glue them onto the plate. Then use wiggle eyes, yarn or ribbon for hair, and scraps of fabric to enhance the puppet. Glue or tape to a popsicle stick.
 - Paper Bags: Create faces and glue them to the bottom of small paper bags, using the fold of the bag as the mouth.
 - Socks: Use permanent markers, wiggle eyes, and fabric scraps. Yarn works great for hair! The toe of the sock can be tucked to create a mouth.
4. Practice! Good communication is like a muscle, it gets better the more you use it! Role play one or more of the following situations, using the puppets. Ask your child to use one of the signs to show you how he'd deal with the problem:
 - We are arguing over a toy car.
 - We both want to read the same book.
 - We both want to play the same game.
 - You said something about my new clothes which hurt my feelings.
 - I am scared to come down the slide by myself.
 - I really like the picture you made for me!



This is a great way to teach your child to communicate, but for it to work, you have to talk about it! As your child holds up a sign, adjust your puppet play to take his suggestion into account. Then, when you're done acting it out, take off the puppets and talk about what he could say and do in a similar situation. Communication takes practice. So get to it. And remember, kids with good people skills aren't born, they're made!

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