



Transcript for the [Audio Podcast:](#)
Carlota Schechter Interview
Audio Podcast Series

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Open: The Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University presents: [Early Childhood Insights](#), an audio podcast series, featuring interviews with experts on topics of interest to Early Childhood professionals.

Host: Hello and welcome to [Early Childhood Insights](#). I'm Julia DeLapp, Program Coordinator of the Center for Early Childhood Education. Today we will be talking with [Dr. Carlota Schechter](#) about building young children's conflict resolution skills. Dr. Schechter taught and conducted research for many years in the education department at St. Joseph College in Connecticut, and she currently works on early childhood education issues at the state level. Welcome [Dr. Schechter](#). Let's get started.

Question 1: What is the nature of conflicts that occur between young children?

Carlota: Well anyone who has ever been in an early childhood classroom knows that conflicts occur all the time. There are two kinds of conflicts that tend to happen frequently: one is a conflict over materials and another is a conflict over space. I was watching children in the writing area in our classroom, and two children both wanted the red marker because it was Valentine's Day and they both started tugging at the marker and grabbing at it. I watched for a while then eventually one of the children said to the other child "if I use it first then you can have it," and that resolved the conflict and that's what they did.

Question 2: What about when children can't resolve a conflict? What is the role of the preschool teacher or caregiver in those situations?

Carlota: In a situation where children are engaged in a conflict and one child gets hurt you need to handle it differently. When a boy was drawing a valentine's card and he got up from the writing table and came over and showed it to me. After I commented on his card for a few

minutes he went back to the writing table and a girl had moved into the seat where he had been. He looked at her and he pushed her off the seat, she fell to floor, and started to cry. My responsibility as the adult in that situation was first to comfort the child. I went over and I stood next to the girl and comforted her. My second responsibility was to make sure that both children knew and that any children that had observed that knew that I don't think that hurting is ok. The boy actually leaned way down into the table and started using the markers with his card trying to block out the crying. I knew that I needed to engage him. I asked him to get her a tissue. I confronted the girl when he brought back the tissue and I asked her what happened. So I prompted her by saying it looks like your really upset and then she said, "He pushed me," and the boy at that point said, "It's my chair." Then we had a conflict situation to deal with. The next thing I said was, "it looks like you wanted the chair she was sitting in and you pushed her so that you could have the chair - but that hurt her and so she started to cry. Hurting is not OK, and it's not a good solution to the problem you had. So we need to find another solution to this problem."

Question 3: And what do you then? What are the major steps in the conflict resolution process that adults should take?

Carlota: When you first see children involved in a conflict the goal is, when children are in a conflict situation try and help them learn the skills they need to be able to resolve a conflict independently. Ask, "What did you think happened," suggest solutions to the conflict, and implement the solution to the conflict. As children learn this process gradually over time they will begin to take on more and more of those roles and model them for you. The beautiful thing about observing children in the classroom when they had the conflict over the marker, that was a wonderful example where I knew that the teacher in that classroom had spent a lot of time modeling how to resolve conflicts. Those children, one was three and one was four, it takes a lot of time but it's possible to teach children that age to come up with non aggressive solutions to conflicts if we continuously are consist about modeling that type of process for them.

Question 4: So, we've talked about the kinds of conflicts children have, and we've also discussed the steps adults can take to help children resolve conflicts and when it's important for adults to intervene. But let's get to a more basic question: Why is it important for caregivers to encourage children to resolve their own conflicts?

Carlota: It's winter now in our school and so a big learning goal for us is helping children to get there snow pants and their boots on when they're getting ready to go outside. It would be a lot quicker for us if we, as the adults, put the children's boots on for them but then we wouldn't be teaching them anything. The same things true with conflicts. If two children are struggling over

a marker it would be a lot easier for us to hand them another marker so they would have two markers, or to separate the children, or to intervene in some other way. But that would not be a learning opportunity. So, the idea would be to see this as an opportunity to teach children the skills so that the next time they have a conflict, if an adults not around, they'll be able to resolve it on their own. In the situation that I observed in our laboratory school where children were actually able to decide to take turns with marker, I didn't need to intervene. But if they had continued tugging on the marker that would be an opportunity where you could engage in step by step conflict resolution process: where you would ask the children first to describe what the problem is and you could repeat the problem to them until you had a clear understanding - and each child had an opportunity to give their point of view. Then you'd ask them to generate solutions and try to come up with some sort of solutions that they both could agree on. I want to point out that there is a very big difference between those two kinds of conflicts. In the first case they were tugging at the marker but nobody got hurt; in the second situation a child got hurt so the second situation is an example where aggression occurred. Conflicts are so common and whenever two people interact, children or adults, we can expect conflict. But aggression is more worrisome and we obviously need to be concerned about conflicts were aggression occurs. It is worrisome obviously to the girl who got hurt, it's worrisome to the other children in the area because when someone gets hurt in a classroom it doesn't feel safe. It's also troubling to the adult. It is emotionally draining to be dealing with children when aggression occurs. So it's something we need to act on right away. But I think, it's that emotional part of aggression that makes us look at conflict differently and while we need to stop aggression - conflicts are a naturally occurring situation and there also a learning opportunity. So it's not that we need to stop conflicts - what we need to do is, we need to help the children to resolve them constructively.

Host: Thank you Dr. Schechter for talking with us today (and thanks to all of you for listening.) You can watch a video that includes a portion of this discussion and footage from early childhood classrooms on iTunes U or by visiting our website.

Close: This has been a presentation of the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University. For more information about the Center for Early Childhood Education, please visit our website at www.easternct.edu/cece.

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