

The Peace Path Steps

When two children need to solve a conflict, they can use the peace path independent of an adult. The two people that are problem solving are on either side of the path and take turns speaking and listening to each other's feelings and needs as they move down the path. The steps are numbered to help them know whose turn it is to speak.

The goal is for children to have a visual tool with sentence starters that guide the problem-solving process. Ultimately, we want children to internalize actively listening to one another, sharing and naming feelings, and expressing needs. It is beneficial to introduce the path with younger students only after brainstorming everyday interactions that occur in class or at recess that cause hurt feelings. Role-playing these situations, sharing and labeling some of the emotions they might feel, and then brainstorming potential solutions are helpful. They allow students to practice reflection and expose them to possible solutions. We want the children to communicate to each other about the behaviors that made them have strong feelings and think about how they can help each other change their hurtful behaviors. To help facilitate the discussion, try asking the students what would help them feel safe next time or what they need the person who hurt them to do differently. **Instead of asking for the standard apology, children dig deeper and suggest a positive replacement behavior next time they are in a similar situation. With older students challenge them to think beyond just saying sorry and move them towards a thoughtful, meaningful change in behavior.**

Before going to the path, the children should think about how they feel about the incident between them and reflect on what they would like the other child to do differently the next time something similar occurs. When introducing the path, spend time discussing the importance of reflection and calming down before problem-solving.

Step One

One student stands on the feet of number 1 on the path and the second student stands across from them on the path, standing on the feet marked with a 2. The first child says, "I feel _____ when _____." Child two repeats back "You feel _____ when _____."

Explanation; We teach our students how to give an I message. So, the first student may say something like, "I feel **angry** when **people push me when I'm in line at the drinking fountain.**" We want the children to be sure to listen to each other, so having them repeat what the other says is one way to help them listen carefully. The second student will say, "You feel **angry** when **people push you when you are in line at the drinking fountain.**"

Step Two

The children move over to the next two footprints drawn on the path. Student one is now on the feet marked with a four, and student two is on the footprints marked with a 3. The numbers are in the order of who speaks next (keep this in mind when creating the path, they aren't numbered linear). Student two speaks first this time and says, "What can I do to make it right?" Student one says, "I need _____."

Explanation; This is where the children have to think about the behavior they didn't like and share a suggestion for a positive replacement behavior. The second student asks for advice on making things better for the person they hurt by asking them how to make it right. So, the first student might say something like, "I need **you to be more gentle and aware of your body while waiting in line.**"

Step Three

The children move over to the next set of footprints on the path. The first child is now on 6, and the second child is standing on the feet marked with a 5. The second child says, "I will _____." The first child says, "Thank you."

Explanation; The second child has to decide if they will follow the first child's advice. They can repeat the advice or develop their own solution that matches and addresses the hurtful behavior. Usually, the children will repeat the advice saying, "I will **remember to be more gentle and aware of my body while waiting in line.**" The first child thanks them to acknowledge that the other child is committed to changing their behavior.

Step Four

The children keep moving down the path on their respective sides. From number 7 through number 12 on the path, the other child gets the opportunity to share their feelings and suggest what they would like the other child to do differently next time.

The last two steps are to reflect one more time and tell the other person what they will do from now on. Then, they choose whether to shake hands, fist bump, or hug before leaving the path in peace.