 “Ways to Frame It”

by: Lara Davis

Chief among the tools in a toolbox is the carpenter’s square. There are numerous ways to look at this versatile tool. It can be used for framing, roofing, working on stairs, measuring, and even for squaring up a quilt! Versatility is helpful when using the skill of empathy as well.

At the heart of empathy is the ability to understand another’s feelings and perspectives…without judgment…and to use that understanding to guide our actions. We need not take on the feelings of others, nor is it our job to “happy a person up.” Instead, our job is to be willing to listen, to support, and to guide children toward solving a problem that resulted in their upset. Becky Bailey describes this process using five steps:

1. I Am: Something has triggered an emotion in a child which causes upset. This upset can be acted out physically (pushing, hitting, kicking, etc.) and/or emotionally (yelling, name-calling, etc.). The adult will help the child to remain safe.
2. I Calm: The adult guides the child by offering ways in which the child can breathe and calm himself.
3. I Feel: The adult assists the child in naming the emotion she may be feeling…sad, angry, frustrated, etc. For younger children, the adult may notice the child and say, “Your face looks like this (using descriptive words).” “You seem angry?” This allows the child to recognize and to respond with “yes, I am feeling angry” or “no, I am feeling frustrated.”
4. I Choose: The adult will now reframe the upset by using phrases such as: “you wanted \_\_\_\_” or “you were hoping \_\_\_\_\_.”
5. I Solve: The child is now able to seek solutions and resolve conflicts. What might the child’s next move be? The adult and child will work together to look at choices and options for resolution.

Consider this scenario using the five step process: “Sally” has finished building a castle using blocks. A friend comes over and knocks it down. Sally pushes her friend and begins to cry. The teacher walks over to Sally, saying, “Something must have happened, Sally. Your eyebrows look like this, your hands are going like this (mirroring the child’s). Breathe with me, you are safe, you can handle this. You must be feeling disappointed? You were hoping that you could show your castle to the class. I get it…that can feel very disappointing. What might be helpful for you right now? If you are interested in rebuilding your castle, you may build it here or you may decide to join the children at the table who are looking at books about princesses.”

This process provides valuable life skills for children. They learn to calm, identify, and acknowledge the emotion associated with the upset, choose acceptable ways to handle the upset, and problem-solve alternatives. The “reframing” of the original upset supports healthy emotional growth and assists in accessing higher-level problem-solving skills.

For more information about this process, visit: [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com) and search “emotional regulation.”