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THE WORKING IT OUT PLAN

PART I: TELLINGS

First, one person speaks while the other person listens carefully without interrupting.

SAY: What I FELT.
What I WANTED.
What I LIKED or DIDN'T LIKE.

THEN SAY: What I think YOU FELT
What I think YOU WANTED
What I think YOU LIKE or DIDN'T LIKE

Now, the other person says the same things to you while you listen carefully.

PART II: HAPPENINGS

First, one person speaks while the other person listens carefully without interrupting.

SAY: What I DID when I was upset.
What I want to happen INSTEAD.
What I can do DIFFERENTLY or BETTER next time.

Now, the other person says the same things to you while you listen carefully.

PART III: CONTRACT AND CLOSE

TOGETHER decide
What WE can do differently or better.
PLAN for the next time.
CLOSE by shaking hands or hugging.



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THE WORKING IT OUT PLAN EXPLANATION & INSTRUCTIONS

PART I: TELLINGS

This first section purposely focuses on two things: honoring each child's experiential world, and the beginning process of empathy. Usually, when children have gotten into a conflict or trouble, both feels accused and gets immediately defensive. This precludes the possibility of a positive resolution to the trouble. Asking, "What did you do?" to either child immediately feeds into this fear. Instead of interrogating each child as to what he or she did wrong (creating immediate resistance), asking about what he/she **felt**, **wanted**, and **liked** or **didn't like** allows the child to express his/her thoughts and feelings; this also allows the adult to try to have empathy for the transgressor. The rule that one listens while the other talks is vital. When the first person speaks and is interrupted, his/her experience is of having his/her reality challenged and denied. This is fundamentally intolerable and causes tremendous fury for the interrupted. It cannot be allowed. What he/she **felt**, **wanted**, and **liked** or **didn't like** must be heard and honored as his/her undeniable subjective experience.

What I FELT.

No facts. Facts are not relevant. By starting here, this offers validation to the child that he/she was bothered- that his/her sense of inequity or being harmed deserves consideration. This doesn't make what he/she did ok, but it does validate that he/she was upset. Children often need to be lead to how they feel. "I felt...", not "he/she did...." This is not an examination of the facts- only of his/her feelings.

What I WANTED.

This acknowledges that the child did not get what he/she wanted.

What I LIKED or (more probably) DIDN'T LIKE.

This acknowledges that the child has a grievance that is real to him/her.

What I think YOU...

The next set of Tellings are about what the child thinks the other person **felt**, **wanted**, and **liked** or **didn't like** prompts the child to have empathy, compassion, and understanding about the other child's experience. Of course, he/she will project inaccurate perceptions onto the other child. That is ok, and when the other child has his/her turn, he/she can assert his/her actual experience.

Next, the other child speaks and the first listens w/o interrupting.



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PART II: HAPPENINGS

What I DID when I was upset.

This is the pivotal question. This moves from acknowledgement of his/her grievance, feelings, etc. and moves to RESPONSIBILITY. It does not question the justification or not of doing the behavior, it only asks the child to state what he/she chose to do when he/she was upset. This leads the child to recognize not only how he/she is affected, but also how he/she affects others. This is also connected to empathy (taking on others roles, feelings is not easily done for young children). This also implies the power and control the child has over others' feelings, etc.

Expect that this may be difficult for the child. It asks for empathy- seeing and feeling the other (which is developmentally difficult for young children anyway), much less someone who feels admitting that the other has been negatively affected is tantamount to a confession of wrongdoing. He/she may be resistant. What they are resisting is the request for them to blame themselves. He/she does not yet understand that responsibility is not meant to be negative- and is not equivalent to blame! Instead of being frustrated at the child's difficulty in answering these questions, help him or her with the process- to own how he/she affected others. If the child could do this part easily, you wouldn't be using this material in the first place!

What I want to HAPPEN INSTEAD.

In the midst of conflict and anger, children often forget what they wanted to happen instead. This reminds them so that they can realize that with all the self-righteousness and anger that they have not been successful in getting what they want. His/her behavior or reaction **has failed** to get him/her what he/she wanted! Instead, he/she is in trouble, others are mad at him/her, and the adult is on his/her case! This directs them to looking for better solutions (possibly with adult guidance).

What I will DO DIFFERENTLY or BETTER next time.

Doing it the same is dead end! Doing something different offers the opportunity for something better to work out. This prompts the child to consider that he/she can do something differently! Sometimes the child needs help to work out something different that may work out better next time.



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PART III: CONTRACT AND CLOSE

There is a need to create a contract for the future.

TOGETHER decide...

There needs to be a joint commitment to the process. It will not work w/ only one person committed to it.

What WE can do differently or better

PLAN for the next time.

Because there will be a next time... many times!

CLOSE by shaking hands or hugging.

This is a symbolic confirmation. It also invokes touch, which is a powerful validating communication, which is often what both parties seek in the first place.