
Early Education Intervention Strategies for the Development of Emotional Conflict Resolution Skills in Children during Outdoor Independent Play

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Abstract: Outdoor independent play is a crucial setting for the social development of young children, with emotional conflicts being a common occurrence in their interactions within this context. Based on the laws of children's physical and mental development and the characteristics of outdoor independent play, this paper analyzes the internal motivations (such as egocentric thinking, inadequate emotional regulation skills, and unmet core needs), external triggers (including improper environmental support, misunderstandings in peer interactions, and inappropriate adult interventions), and typical manifestations (such as emotional outbursts and resource competition) of emotional conflicts in children. Furthermore, it clarifies the core concepts of early education intervention, including "respecting the child as the subject, empathizing and accepting, integrating into play, and cherishing opportunities," along with fundamental principles such as prioritizing safety and developmental appropriateness. A systematic intervention strategy framework is constructed, encompassing environmental creation and support, fostering emotional cognition and expression, guiding conflict resolution processes, and reinforcing reflection and consolidation after play. The paper emphasizes the importance of teachers' role transformation and professional development, as well as the collaborative efforts of home-school cooperation, providing theoretical references and practical guidance for promoting the continuous development of children's emotional conflict resolution skills and social competence.

Keywords: young children; outdoor independent play; emotional conflict; conflict resolution skills

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1. Introduction

Outdoor independent play, as a core setting for young children's free exploration, peer interaction, and social development, embodies the educational philosophy of "taking play as the fundamental activity" outlined in the Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6. It provides a natural platform for children to make autonomous decisions, construct rules, and engage in social practice. Within this open and free interactive context, emotional conflicts arising from factors such as children's cognitive characteristics, differences in needs, and environmental interactions are not only inevitable challenges in their interactions but also crucial opportunities for the development of their emotional regulation, empathy, and problem-solving abilities. However, in current educational practice, some adults hold a "negative perception" of children's emotional conflicts and often adopt overly intrusive, simplistic suppression, or laissez-faire

neglect approaches. The lack of systematic intervention strategies based on children's developmental patterns makes it difficult for children to acquire core skills such as effective communication, emotional management, and negotiation and cooperation during conflicts, thereby restricting their long-term social and emotional development. Based on this, this paper delves into the causes and typical manifestations of emotional conflicts by considering the unique characteristics of children's physical and mental development and the distinct value of outdoor independent play. It clarifies the core concepts and principles of early education intervention and constructs a systematic intervention strategy framework encompassing environmental support, capacity building, process guidance, and home-school collaboration. The aim is to provide scientific guidance for kindergarten educational practice, helping children gradually develop emotional conflict resolution skills and achieve healthy social and personality growth through conflict experiences in outdoor independent play.

2. Analysis of the Causes and Manifestations of Emotional Conflicts in Children during Independent Play

2.1. Internal Motivations for Conflicts

As children transition from home to kindergarten, their opportunities for interaction with peers increase, and they engage more frequently in peer interactions. Conflicts are inevitable during continuous social interactions^[1]. The inherent developmental characteristics of children are the fundamental internal causes of emotional conflicts. Children in the preoperational stage exhibit pronounced egocentric thinking, making it difficult for them to empathize and persist in their own wishes while failing to accept the reasonable demands or differing opinions of peers, which easily leads to disagreements. Moreover, their understanding of rules is superficial and irreversible, causing them to misinterpret unintentional actions by peers as deliberate provocation, triggering defensive emotional responses^[2]. Simultaneously, the underdeveloped prefrontal cortex in children's brains results in rapid and intense emotional arousal, coupled with a lack of effective regulation strategies. When faced with negative experiences, they can only vent through primitive means, escalating conflicts. Additionally, their core needs for play materials, autonomy, attention from others, and social integration, if not met through reasonable means, will also manifest as emotional conflicts.

2.2. External Triggers for Conflicts

Inappropriate external environments and interactive contexts are direct triggers for children's emotional conflicts. At the environmental support level, unreasonable outdoor area planning (e.g., mixing active and quiet areas, cramped spaces), insufficient/single/inappropriate difficulty of play materials, and the absence of commonly recognized or overly complex game rules can easily lead to contradictions^[3]. In peer interactions, the imitation of poor conflict resolution methods, emotional contagion, differences in interaction rhythms, and limited language expression abilities among children can result in misunderstandings and chain conflicts. Inappropriate adult interventions are also noteworthy, including teachers' over-involvement, simplistic criticism, or neglect and laissez-faire attitudes, as well as parents' indulgence, strict parenting styles, and negative conflict resolution demonstrations, all of which indirectly influence children's conflict response strategies.

2.3. Typical Behavioral Manifestations of Conflicts

The behavioral manifestations of children's emotional conflicts are diverse and direct, reflecting abnormal reactions in emotions, behaviors, and social interactions^[4]. Emotional venting types exhibit behaviors such as crying, screaming, throwing materials, destroying game outcomes, or sulking alone, refusing to interact, and displaying a wronged and angry facial expression. Resource competition types revolve around toys, space, and roles, involving behaviors such as snatching, pulling, occupying areas, and refusing to negotiate, even forcing peers to concede through crying. Social confrontation types include verbal accusations and ridicule, deliberate interference with peers' games, and retaliatory behaviors such as

hiding toys. Passive response types are characterized by withdrawal from conflicts, frequent tattling, expecting adults to resolve issues, or silently enduring and feeling dejected. Rule dispute types stem from differences in understanding game rules, leading to the denial of peers' ideas, accusations of rule violations, arguments, and even emotional outbursts and refusal to continue playing due to broken agreements.

3. Core Concepts and Fundamental Principles of Early Education Intervention

3.1. Core Concepts

The core concepts of early education intervention are fundamental guidelines based on the laws of children's physical and mental development and the characteristics of outdoor independent play, which permeate the entire intervention process. The crux lies in respecting children's subjective status in conflict resolution, recognizing their potential for autonomous exploration and problem-solving, and abandoning the traditional intervention model where adults take over. Teachers should intervene solely as observers, supporters, and facilitators, refraining from directly determining right or wrong or providing solutions on behalf of children. Simultaneously, it emphasizes acknowledging the authenticity and rationality of various emotions such as anger and wronged feelings that children experience during conflicts, discarding the erroneous approach of suppressing or denying emotions, and guiding children to recognize their own and others' emotions with an empathetic and understanding attitude, thereby building an emotional bridge for conflict resolution. Furthermore, intervention strategies should be deeply integrated into outdoor independent play scenarios, enabling children to "learn through play" emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills in a joyful and relaxed atmosphere through natural methods such as situational experiences and role-playing. More importantly, it is essential to break away from the traditional perception that "conflicts are negative events" and view each emotional conflict as a precious opportunity for children's social development and emotional capacity enhancement, focusing on cultivating children's thinking, communication, and empathy abilities during the conflict resolution process, and viewing each attempt and progress of children with a long-term developmental perspective.

3.2. Fundamental Principles

The fundamental principles of early education intervention are specific guidelines that ensure the scientific, standardized, and effective implementation of interventions, providing a basis for practical operations^[5]. Safety prioritization is the prerequisite and bottom line of intervention, necessitating the identification and avoidance of potential risks during conflicts to prevent physical harm or psychological trauma, thereby creating a fear-free and safe environment for children. The principle of developmental appropriateness requires interventions to align with children's age characteristics, cognitive levels, and individual differences, tailoring approaches to each child's unique needs. For instance, younger children may focus on emotion recognition and simple expression guidance, while older children may emphasize negotiation skills and rule awareness cultivation, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. The principle of guidance centers on "inspiring rather than indoctrinating," with teachers guiding children to autonomously think about conflict causes, others' feelings, and solutions through indirect methods such as questioning and demonstration, eschewing direct answers or criticism and suppression. The principle of consistency demands multi-dimensional unity, with kindergartens and families synchronizing educational philosophies and methods, and teachers maintaining consistent intervention attitudes, language, and demonstrations to enable children to form stable behavioral expectations. The principle of gradual progression respects the pace of children's ability development, setting step-by-step goals that progress from emotion recognition to communication expression and then to negotiation and empathy, promptly acknowledging minor progress without rushing for immediate results.

4. Systematic Early Education Intervention Strategy Framework

4.1. Environmental Creation and Support Strategies

Environmental creation serves as the foundation for preventing emotional conflicts in children's outdoor independent

play, necessitating the construction of a support system from four dimensions: space, materials, rules, and psychological atmosphere^[6]. In terms of spatial planning, functional areas should be reasonably divided based on children's activity needs, with clear boundaries between dynamic and static zones. Dynamic games such as running and chasing should be separated from static games like building and exploring to avoid friction caused by activity interference. Simultaneously, sufficient space should be ensured in each area to reduce collisions and resource competition due to crowding. Material allocation should guarantee an adequate supply of core materials and provide diverse alternative options, offering materials of varying difficulty levels based on age and ability, with regular updates and the establishment of an achievement display area to enhance children's sense of belonging. In rule construction, children should be guided to jointly formulate game rules and convert them into visual graphic and textual signs, with a flexible adjustment mechanism established. Regarding psychological atmosphere creation, teachers should adopt an inclusive and respectful attitude towards children's every attempt, encouraging them to boldly express their thoughts and needs without denying their emotional expressions, enabling children to feel safe and accepted during play, reducing emotional suppression and sudden outbursts caused by fear of criticism, and thereby lowering the probability of conflicts from the root.

4.2. Strategies for Cultivating Emotional Cognition and Expression Abilities

Emotional cognition and expression are the core foundations for children to resolve emotional conflicts, necessitating their integration into the entire process of outdoor independent play through gamified and experiential methods to help children build emotional management abilities^[7]. For emotion recognition, diverse forms such as emotion picture books, expression cards, and natural observations should be utilized, with activities like "Expression Guessing Game" and immediate guidance in observing peers' emotions to assist children in recognizing the external manifestations and causes of common emotions and establishing empathy. For emotion expression, teachers should provide "I-statement" expression examples and safe channels, encouraging children to truthfully express their emotions and responding positively to make them feel the rationality and respect of emotional expression. For emotion regulation, simple regulation methods such as "Calm Corner" and role-playing as "Emotion Stewards" should be incorporated into game scenarios, encouraging peer mutual comfort to enable children to acquire strategies for calming emotions and seeking communication and assistance.

4.3. Intervention and Guidance Strategies During Conflict Resolution

Scientific intervention during conflicts is key for children to acquire resolution skills, with teachers needing to grasp the timing and clarify the logic while ensuring safety and leaving ample space for children's autonomous resolution^[8]. Before intervention, the nature of the conflict should be judged. For minor conflicts that children are capable of resolving autonomously (e.g., simple disputes over toy snatching), observation should be maintained without rushing to intervene. If the conflict escalates to physical aggression, emotional out-of-control, or children feeling helpless (e.g., incessant crying), immediate and calm intervention should be carried out, with priority given to stopping harmful behaviors. During intervention, the first step is to listen and empathize, guiding both parties to express their feelings and demands without judgment and responding more (e.g., "You're very anxious because it's not your turn to play on the slide, right?"), helping them sort out their emotions and feel understood. The second step is to inspire negotiation, using open-ended questions (e.g., "Besides snatching, what other ways can everyone play with it?") to guide children to think of solutions without directly providing answers, only offering slight hints when necessary. The third step is to demonstrate and guide, visually demonstrating communication methods (e.g., "Can you wait until I'm done playing and then give it to me?") for children lacking skills and promptly acknowledging positive behaviors (e.g., "Willing to negotiate and take turns playing is a great idea!"). For rule dispute conflicts, guide children to review or jointly formulate rules. For conflicts involving multiple children, organize small-scale negotiation meetings to enable children to autonomously reach solutions within the framework of rules.

4.4. Reflection and Consolidation Strategies After Play

Reflection and consolidation after play are crucial for transforming conflict experiences into stable abilities, with diverse activities used to sort out the process, reinforce experiences, and form sustainable behavioral patterns^[9]. After daily play, organize brief “Game Sharing Sessions,” encouraging children to voluntarily narrate conflicts, feelings, and resolution methods, with teachers summarizing and elevating the content to guide children in thinking about subsequent optimization plans and promoting mutual learning. Utilize role-playing, painting, and other methods for situational reenactment and story creation (based on real conflicts) to guide discussions on better resolution methods and expand skill ideas. Establish growth files for emotional conflict resolution, recording children’s progress (e.g., from crying to negotiation), regularly reviewing them to enhance confidence, and sharing them with parents to form home-school co-education. Strengthen positive incentives, providing specific praise (rather than vague compliments) for positive behaviors such as proactive communication and tolerance, and setting honors like “Conflict Resolution Expert” to enable children to internalize the acquired skills into stable abilities.

5. Teacher Professional Development and Home-School Co-Education

5.1. Positioning of Teacher Roles and Literacy Requirements

In the intervention of emotional conflicts among children during outdoor independent play, teachers’ roles have shifted from traditional “problem solvers” and “rule enforcers” to “precise observers,” “emotional empathizers,” “strategic guides,” and “professional researchers.” The core is to build a supportive scaffold for children to autonomously develop their emotional conflict resolution skills^[10]. As precise observers, teachers need to keenly capture signals and behaviors before and after conflicts, systematically record relevant conflict information, and provide a basis for personalized interventions. As emotional empathizers, they respond to children’s feelings with an attitude of equal acceptance, convey understanding using language that aligns with their cognitive level, and become a safe haven for emotional expression. As strategic guides, they grasp the timing and degree of intervention, inspiring children to solve problems independently through questioning and demonstration. As professional researchers, they reflect on the effectiveness of interventions, summarize patterns, optimize strategies, and form a closed loop of professional growth. The core competencies supporting these roles include emotional perception and empathy (accurately identifying emotions and understanding expression characteristics), gamified guidance and demonstration skills (transforming conflict resolution techniques into game forms acceptable to children), reflective practice skills (reviewing the intervention process and adjusting methods), solid professional knowledge (mastering children’s developmental patterns and conflict resolution theories), and communication and collaboration skills (effective teacher-child communication, colleague discussions, and home-school co-education).

5.2. Implementation Pathways for Home-School Co-Education

Home-school co-education is crucial for the sustained development of children’s emotional conflict resolution skills, with the core being the construction of a collaborative education system featuring “shared concepts, synchronized methods, timely feedback, and practical linkage.” In terms of shared concepts, through diverse forms such as parent meetings and case sharing, the concept that “conflicts are opportunities for growth” is conveyed, the negative impacts of improper parenting are analyzed, and parents are guided to change their perspectives. Simultaneously, family experiences are shared to form co-education goals. Regarding synchronized methods, intervention techniques operable at home (such as listening, “I-statements,” and strategies for sibling conflicts) and parent-child resources (picture books, role-playing) are promoted, with personalized guidance provided for different parenting styles. In terms of feedback mechanisms, bidirectional information flow is achieved through home-school contact books and communication groups, integrating children’s performances at home and in kindergarten to form growth records, with regular communication and reviews. For practical linkage, parents are invited to participate in kindergarten open days, jointly establish rules, and organize parenting salons, forming a collaborative ecosystem of “kindergarten leadership and family participation” to ensure the sustained and stable

development of children's abilities.

6. Conclusion

By analyzing the intrinsic motivations and external inducements of conflicts, this paper clarifies the core concepts and principles of early education intervention and constructs a systematic intervention strategy system of “environmental support—ability cultivation—process guidance—reflection and consolidation—home-school collaboration.” The core essence lies in returning to the child-centered development approach, returning the initiative for conflict resolution to children, and allowing them to gradually acquire core skills in emotional recognition, effective communication, and negotiation and empathy through independent exploration, experience, and reflection. The development of children's emotional conflict resolution skills is not achieved overnight; it requires teachers to accurately position their roles, enhance their professional literacy, and build a “supportive scaffold” for children with scientific intervention strategies. It also necessitates that homes and schools adhere to consistent concepts and synchronize educational methods to form a powerful collaborative force for co-education. Only in this way can outdoor independent play truly become a “training ground” for children's emotional growth, transforming every conflict into an opportunity for their social development. The cultivation of children's emotional conflict resolution skills still requires continuous exploration rooted in educational practice, optimizing intervention details based on individual differences among children of different ages and developmental levels, to make educational interventions more targeted and effective.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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