

PARENT INFORMATION 3

The Triple A's 4 Refusals

If you ask permission to join in, a refusal is a possibility. In the playground, refusals to play are a regular occurrence. In *Highway Heroes* it's called a 'FOPL' – a 'Fact of Playground Life', and dealing with these Highway Happenings, is an important generic lesson in coping with disappointments and bouncing back, that is, in being resilient.

However, not all refusals are the same. They can be Normal or Nasty – or even 'Very Nasty' and responding to the latter two is difficult. Normal Refusals are defined as those where there is no ridicule or abuse of the child; it's more factual. For example, there's not the opportunity to join in that game at that particular time. Nasty Refusals are when it involves criticism and denigration of the child personally or their skills.

Responding successfully to Play Refusals requires skill which doesn't come instinctively to most children; it needs to be taught. By 'successfully', is meant without the child:

- Suffering humiliation.
- Losing their temper.
- Attacking the group verbally or physically.
- Retaliating with sarcasm.
- Damaging their reputation.
- Closing off future opportunities for inclusion.
- Threatening the group with outcomes.

Rather, the child is able to:

- Respond calmly and confidently.
- Avoid self-blame and harsh criticism.
- Reflect optimism for future play opportunities.
- Demonstrate their skills in handling disappointment.
- Show they have other options for play.
- Appreciate that these are common BUMPS on the Highway.

The HIGHWAY TOOL of The Triple A's 4 Refusals has been introduced. The three behavioural choices each start with the letter 'A', although they can involve different actions. In this case, they stand for Accept, Assert and Argue. The focus is on Accept and Assert, with Argue consistently discussed throughout all the Modules as being a choice that can be made, but one that usually results in an escalation of conflict, and not necessarily the achievement of a solution. The focus of *Highway Heroes* is therefore on the Accept and Assert Responses.

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- A ccept** Useful for Normal Refusals and requires a child to use positive and helpful self-talk, called Supa Thinking. This would sound like, 'It's OK. I'll play tomorrow.'
- A ssert** Useful for Normal and Nasty Refusals and requires a child to use a confident tone of voice, body language and words to assert their position, and right to fair treatment.
- A rgue** Not useful for any refusal, as it accelerates the negative interaction, and may have lasting effects on friendships.

Refusing to take "No!" for an answer is often proposed as a show of determination and persistence. In the playground, however, it's a response that can spell trouble. A child who can engage their positive and helpful self-talk, will minimise their emotional response to the refusal. Similarly, a child who can say assertively that the refusal is unfair or nasty, is less likely to be excluded on future occasions. Self-management strategies help children to make choices and respond, rather than to 'catastrophise' - that is, to think the worst and react accordingly.

Your child has undertaken two roles plays: one of experiencing a Normal Refusal and responding with an Accept Response, and the other of using an Assert Response to a Nasty Refusal. Asking your child which are their favourite Accept and Assert Responses would be helpful.

REFLECTION POINT:

Have a discussion with your child about the way in which they respond to Play Refusals. Also incorporating some role plays, would be a great way to consolidate the skills that will be learned in this Module.

Please note: *It is acknowledged that some children receive frequent and often nasty Play Refusals, and for a minority, this may continue from year to year. These experiences are emotionally damaging and require further investigation. If a child's play is disruptive, aggressive, developmentally inappropriate, or consistently unco-operative, these behaviours can be the cause of ongoing rejection, and professional assistance should be sought. The Connecting 4 Friendships Module will be helpful to any child experiencing peer rejection, but it is not a substitute for a thorough assessment of the difficulty – which is recommended.*