

Autonomous Play & Conflict Resolution at Farm Camp

At Farm Camp, we believe children learn best when they feel safe, trusted, and empowered. Alongside structured farm- and land-based activities, children are given time for self-directed (autonomous) play, an essential part of building independence, confidence, and strong social-emotional skills.

What Is Autonomous Play?

Autonomous play gives children opportunities to:

- Make their own choices
- Use creativity and imagination
- Interact meaningfully with peers
- Practice solving problems independently

During autonomous play, adults remain present to provide clear expectations, guidance, and support while allowing children the space to practice independence. While children are encouraged to try resolving conflicts on their own, staff remain observant and ready to step in whenever safety or emotional well-being is at risk.

This approach helps children develop:

- Confidence and independence
- Emotional regulation
- Problem-solving skills
- Creativity and resilience
- Empathy and cooperation

Learning to Navigate Conflict

Conflicts and misunderstandings are a normal and healthy part of growing up. These moments are viewed as learning opportunities. Children are taught how to handle conflict respectfully and safely using a simple, consistent three-step process.

Our 3-Step Communication Process

Step 1: Kind Reminder with Instructions for Change

Children are encouraged to calmly explain the issue and clearly state what needs to change for them to feel safe or respected.

Step 2: "Stop, I'm Serious"

If the behavior continues, children reinforce their boundaries by using the agreed-upon phrase and gesture that we practice at camp. They repeat the request from Step 1 to signal that the behavior is not okay and must stop.

Step 3: Ask an Adult for Help

If the behavior becomes a pattern—or if someone is hurt physically or emotionally—children are encouraged to involve a trusted adult right away. This builds help-seeking skills and reinforces safety, accountability, and shared responsibility. Asking for help is not tattling; it is how we keep our community safe and respectful. Campers should involve a teacher or Farm Educator immediately when needed.

This process supports:

- Self-awareness (recognizing feelings and boundaries)
- Self-management (using calm, clear communication)
- Social awareness (considering others' perspectives)
- Relationship skills (resolving conflict and repairing harm)
- Responsible decision-making (knowing when to seek adult support)

Our staff is committed to helping children:

- Solve problems and conflicts
- Repair harm
- Learn from mistakes
- Feel heard and supported

We understand that children may want to share their experiences at home, and we value that connection. We encourage families to remind children that telling an adult at camp right away about conflicts allows our staff to respond quickly. This helps us support everyone involved and maintain a safe, respectful community.

Our goal is for every child at Farm Camp to:

- Feel safe
- Feel respected
- Feel heard
- Become confident using their voice
- Advocate for themselves respectfully

By teaching autonomy, communication, and responsibility, we help children build social and emotional skills that serve them not only at camp, but throughout their lives. Mistakes and missteps are a natural part of learning, and our camp environment is intentionally designed to support growth, reflection, and repair.