

Top 5 Tips for Teaching Problem Solving at Home

Are you curious about teaching your child to problem solve? To think about resolving an issue without becoming overwhelmed or upset? After all, we can't fix all problems for our children. *Problem solving is a great life skill to have.* Here are my top 5 tips for *teaching* your child how to problem solve.

1. Model Problem Solving: We all run into problems no matter what our age. Whether it be the dishwasher breaking or spilling a glass of water. When this happens, model or do a think-aloud of how you are problem solving.
2. Focus on What You Can Resolve or Control: Teach your child(ren) that some things are out of our control. We can't control the storm during recess or fix something after it has burned in the oven. We can resolve a fight with a sibling and we can control how we respond to an uncomfortable situation. All these situations take practice (see #1).
3. Get Your Child's Input on Your Problems: When you encounter a tricky situation, ask your child for their input. It shows them that you have problems to solve too and it also gives them the opportunity to practice those problem solving skills to help you.
4. Value Your Child's Input: When you value the input your child gives you it validates the work and thinking time they put into it. It also means that they are more likely to try and problem solve in the future.
5. Don't Fix Everything for Them: Actually, you can't always fix all your child(ren)'s problems. Sometimes you aren't around and sometimes they need to learn through natural consequences. If your child cheats on a test, there are consequences set in place by school. Allow your child to feel those feelings and experience the consequences. The goal would be for them to problem solve on their own (e.g. come forward, apologize). If they need help problem solving, do it together instead of doing it for them.

Age Appropriate Tips for Teaching Problem Solving at Home

In District 31 we teach students from early childhood through 8th grade. There are many problem solving skills to be learned throughout these years and they all look and feel different. *Most important, teach your child that all feelings are important and all feelings are okay.* There are no “bad” feelings. Yes, some of them feel uncomfortable, but all of our feelings serve us in different ways. Here are some ideas and scripts I hope you find helpful.

Ages 3-5: To help your child learn to identify feelings, catch them in the moment. For example, “It looks like you’re mad because we can’t buy a new toy (name and validate the emotion). Let’s give ourselves a big hug and close our eyes to help us relax (process emotions). Now, what can we do to help you feel better? (problem solve by doing more listening than contributing).” If your child struggles to come up with a solution to their problem, work together and/or model some ideas on how they might solve the problem.

Ages 5-7: Support your child by noticing and naming the feeling they are experiencing (“You look like you are sad.”) and then helping them identify the specific problem. If it’s a broad problem (“Everything about my day was bad!”) help them narrow down what happened (“I didn’t do well on my spelling test”). Support them as they come up with a list of solutions for their problem. Next, go through that list with them as they identify what might happen with each solution. Last, let them pick a solution they’d like to try.

Ages 7-9: As children get older, their problems look and feel different. Help your child break their problem into smaller chunks and then ask open-ended questions about their situation. For example, if your child has reported “fighting with all of their friends” ask them to identify what friends they are not getting along with, what the specific issue is, what caused the problem, etc. Listen (don’t give them all the answers) as your child brainstorms solutions to the problem. You can mediate their thinking by asking open-ended questions. [Here](#) are some open-ended question sentence starters.

Ages 9-11: As your child identifies the problem, have them make a list of possible solutions. After they select and attempt their solution, have them talk through what worked, what didn't, and why. This will help them problem solve in the future.

Ages 12 and up: Teach your child and practice the SODAS method

S-Identify the SITUATION

O-Make a list of OPTIONS to solve the problem

D-Think about the DISADVANTAGES of each option

A- List out the ADVANTAGES of each option

S- Pick the SOLUTION to try



References:

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