

Challenges and Solutions for Teaching Problem-Solving Skills



“My children can’t seem to make it through the problem-solving process without creating more problems!”



Consider whether children have some skills that support problem solving!

1. Can children locate and “read” familiar resources (e.g., classroom schedule, expectations)?
2. What social and emotional skills do children already use?

Social and Emotional Skills

- Get an adult’s attention
- Get a peer’s attention
- Ask for help
- Give an object to a peer
- Request an object from a peer
- Label own emotions
- Calm down when experiencing strong emotions
- Give a play idea
- Engage in a peer’s play idea
- Disagree with a peer
- Respond appropriately to others’ emotions
- Give a compliment



“We don’t have enough ‘problems’ for the children to get enough practice.”



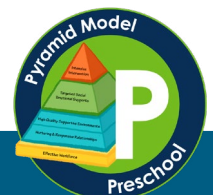
“Problematize” everything!

1. Frequently label classroom situations as “problems” in a positive tone
2. Descriptively model the problem-solving steps in context
3. Support children to use the steps to solve those problems (with a few initial solutions from the solution kit or without solution cards)
4. Give descriptive feedback to children engaging in the problem-solving steps

Problems Between Two or More Children

Problems for an Individual Child

- Two children want a toy
- Peer in a child’s spot a circle time
- One pair of scissors for three children at small group
- Not enough chairs at small group
- Peer knocks over a child’s tower
- Group of children cannot agree on a play idea
- Peer paints on a child’s picture
- Child wants to go to a full center
- Difficulty putting shoes on after nap
- Child wants a peer to play with
- Child wants a red marker, but none are out
- Child says she misses her family member and wants to go home
- Peer is making noise that bothers a child





“We seem to have the same problems that keep happening, and none of the solutions really fit.”



Add more solutions to the kit!

1. Can children locate and “read” familiar resources (e.g., classroom schedule, expectations)?
2. What social and emotional skills do children already use?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a play idea • Ask for a hug • Ask for help • Find another friend to play with | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a new choice • Take a break • Say, “maybe next time...” • _____ |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



“My children give up on problem solving.” or “I keep getting interrupted while trying to help children solve a problem!”

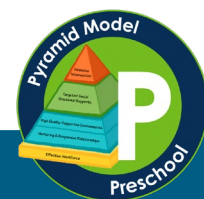


Make problem-solving process *efficient* for children!

1. Efficient = effective and quick
2. Eliminate distractions by prompting other teacher(s) to be the point person for other children
3. Have a peer get the problem-solving steps or solutions visuals for child(ren) if in another part of the room
4. Give more supportive prompts if children get stuck on a step

Supportive Prompts

- “It looks like you are having a hard time with your shoes. Should we try to solve this problem?”
- “What if we tried _____?”
- “We could try ‘say, please’ or ‘wait and take turns.’”
- “You picked ‘ask nicely.’ You could say, ‘can I have a turn?’”





“My children know where the solution kit is but they don’t use the solutions!” or “My children always say ‘share’ for the solution to their problem.”



Teach the solution kit with the steps!

1. The solution kit is a tool to help children with Step 2 of the problem-solving process; it cannot stand on its own without the steps
2. Teach children to locate and “read” the solutions in the environment
3. Pick solutions that make sense for the classroom context
 - a. What solutions do children already use?
 - b. What language do you find yourself using frequently?
4. Once some initial solutions have been taught, introduce new solutions one at a time by explaining, demonstrating, and having children practice the solutions that make sense for that solution

Suggested Initial Solutions

Suggested Solutions to be Taught Later

- Get a teacher
- Trade
- Wait and take turns
- Give a toy (share)

- Say, “please”
- Ignore (look away and say nothing)
- Ask nicely
- Say, “please stop”
- Play together
- Get a timer



“There aren’t enough teachers to go around to help children solve problems all day!”



Use group activities to highlight problem solving!

1. Note problem situations that occur in the classroom and solve them together
2. Engage children in reflection about their use of problem solving
3. Read books and pause to have children engage in problem-solving steps for characters

