

Problems with Problem-Solving: Breaking down the skills needed to solve problems and build skills

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Agenda for this Session



- -Dig deeper into problem-solving as an executive function skill
- -Introduce the idea of executive functions as skill deficits much like learning disabilities
- -Discuss ways to promote and teach executive function skills
- -Focus on teaching problem-solving skills

Executive Function ---By Definition---

What does it mean to me?

- Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.
- Executive function refers to the ability to execute appropriate actions and to inhibit inappropriate actions for the attainment of a specific goal. Research has shown that this ability **develops rapidly during the preschool years.**
- Executive functions help children develop skills of teamwork, leadership, decision-making, working toward goals, critical thinking, adaptability, and being aware of our own emotions as well as those of others.
- Executive functions or self-regulation serves as the foundation for life-long functioning in such areas as critical thinking and problem-solving, planning, decision making and executing tasks.

Sources: Harvard University Center for the Developing Child and The Administration for Children and Families

8 EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS NEEDED TO STAY ON TASK AT SCHOOL

TASK INITIATION

- Begins the task without reminding
- Finishes task without procrastination

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

- Can control emotions and feelings on their own or with self-regulation tools.

SELF-MONITORING

- Child understands how to evaluate how they are doing as they go in school or at home.

ORGANIZATION

- Keep things in order
- Keep track of things.



WORKING MEMORY

- Helps kids store and keep information they can use anytime.

FLEXIBLE THINKING

- Allows kids to adjust to the unexpected in the "real world."

IMPULSE CONTROL

- Allows child to process information before acting.

PLANNING & PRIORITIZATION

- Helps child set goals and know the actions to take to achieve those goals.

Show me a challenging kid, and I will show you they fall somewhere on this list...

Language and communication skills

Attention and working memory skills

Emotion and self-regulation skills

Cognitive flexibility skills

Social thinking skills



(Ablon, J.Stuart. 2016...Research on Skill Deficits)

Unconventional Wisdom-It's a Learning Disability

- **Research in neurosciences has shown these kids are delayed in the development of crucial skills or have significant difficulty applying these skills when they are most needed.**

Unconventional Wisdom: It's a Learning Disability

- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Frustration Tolerance
- Problem-Solving

- These all lead to Regulation Skill Deficits

Challenging Traditional Notions

- Motivation will not change the behavior (Why?)
- We can't MAKE kids want to do well
- Do we really think kids aren't trying hard enough?
- Motivate compliant behavior through rewards, punishments, consequences, ignoring = Over simplified solution

Rewards, Punishments, and Ignoring

Do:

Teach basic lessons

Provide external motivation

Don't

Teach complex thinking skills

Help kids stay regulated

How to Teach These Executive Functions

Flexibility

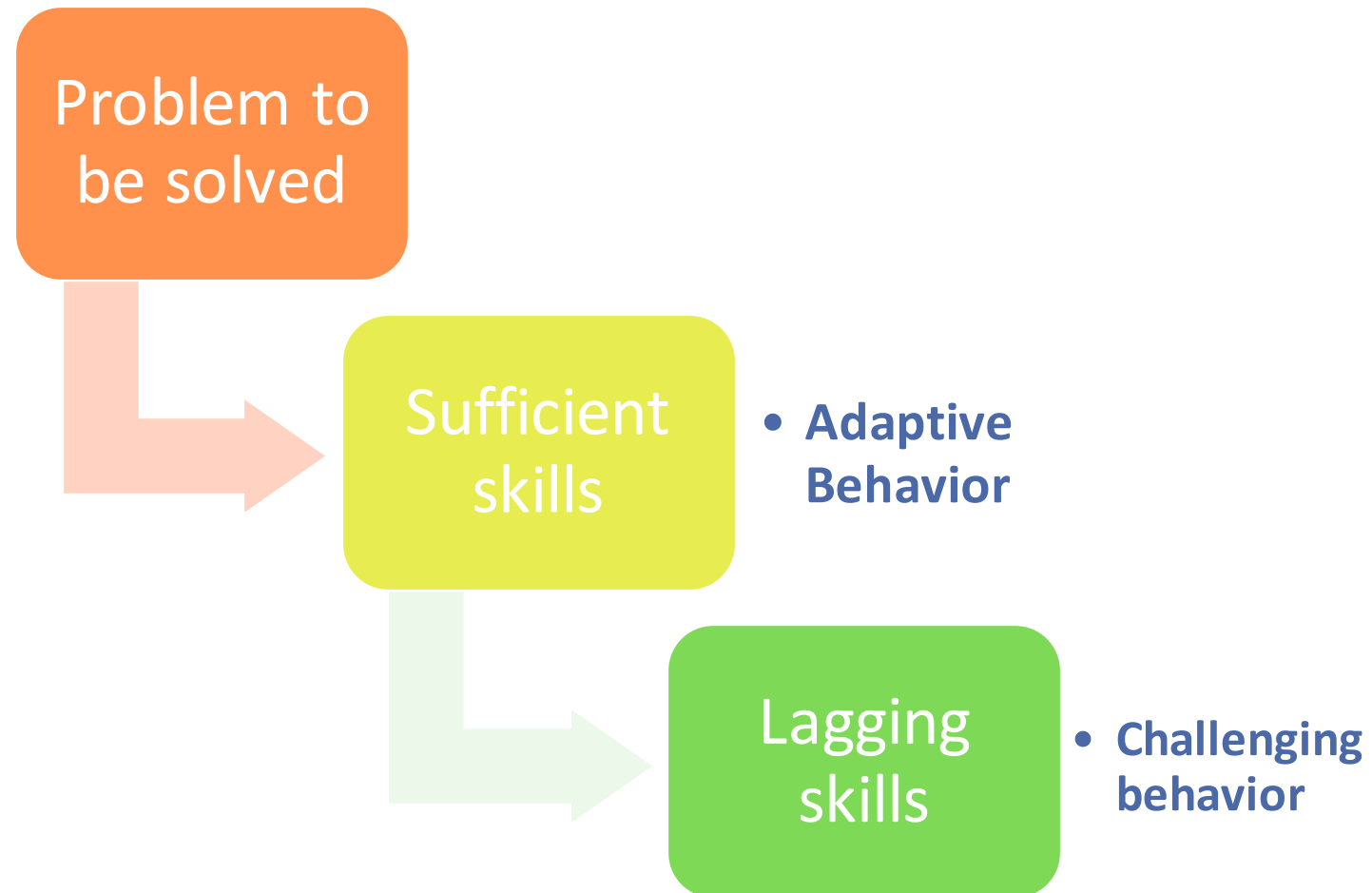
Problem-Solving

Frustration Tolerance

Collaborative Problem Solving

- We teach all 3 through collaborative problem-solving approach (-Ablon)
- **Through collaboration, not power and control.**
 - Maintain authority and compliance via collaboration rather than power and control.
 - Help youth and adults build skills
 - Build a helping relationship
- Important to remember --- Specificity Principle of Neuroplasticity - "artificial circumstances don't generalize because different neuro networks are utilized in real-world problem-solving."

Assessment



3 Plans – Really have only 3 options

- **Plan A: Impose adult will**
- **Plan B: Solve the problem collaboratively**
- **Plan C: Drop it (for now, anyways)**

Plan B: Collaborative Problem-Solving

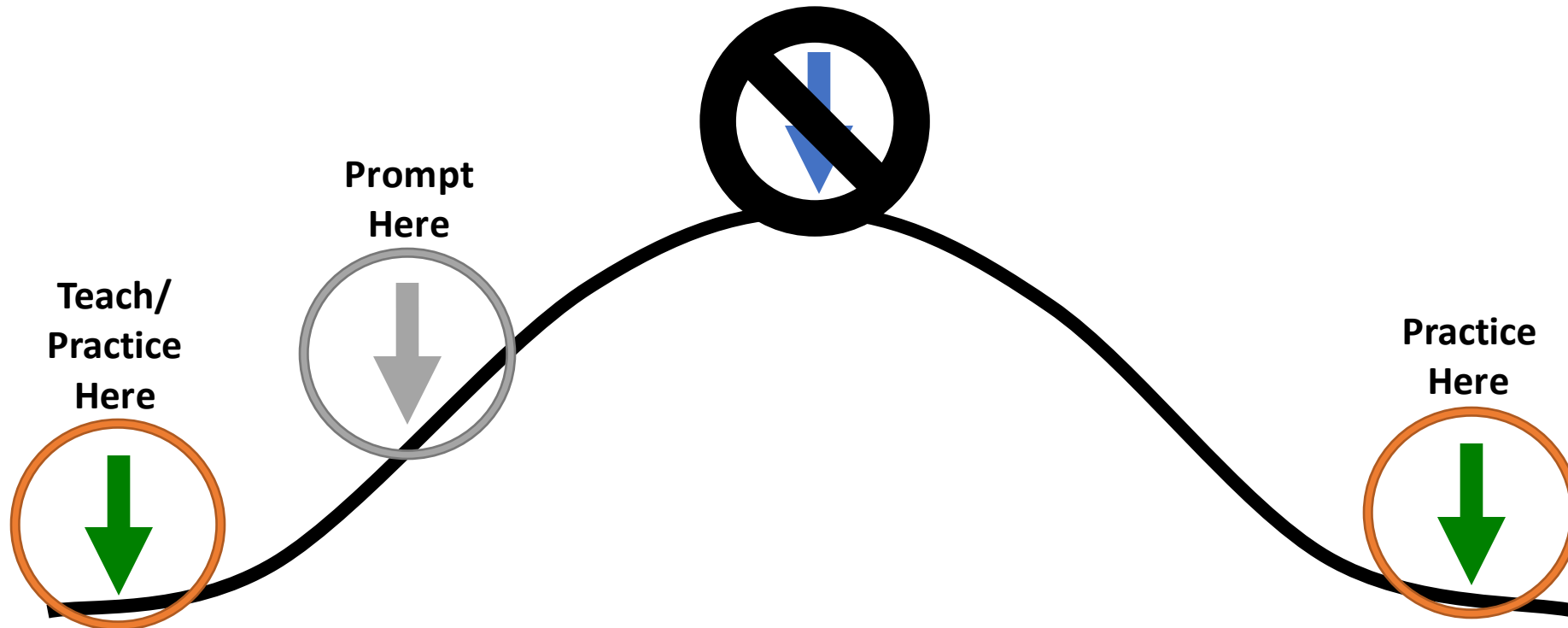
- **Empathize – Clarify child concern.**
- **Share- Adult concern. Not sharing a solution.**
- **Collaborate- Brainstorm, assess and choose solution.**

Plan B: Is the Skills Training

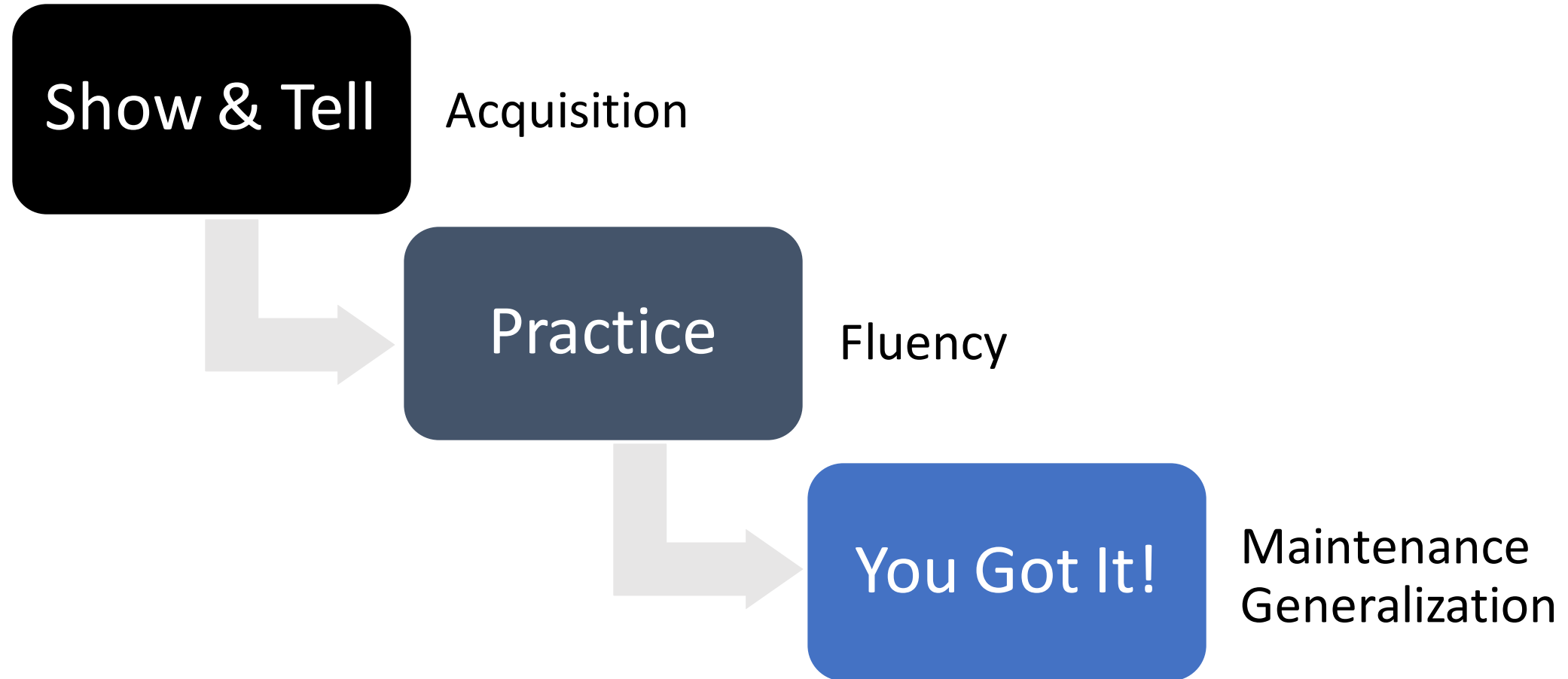
- **Empathize:** Clarify Child Concern – regulating emotions, expressing concerns, identifying emotions.
- **Share Adult Concern** –Perspective taking, recognizing impact on others, empathy.
- **Collaborate** - Brainstorm, assess, and choose solution – generating solutions, reflecting on multiple thoughts, considering outcomes, moving off original idea/flexibility.

When Do We Teach Social-Emotional Skills?

Planning Lessons
(Teaching Skills Ahead of Time)

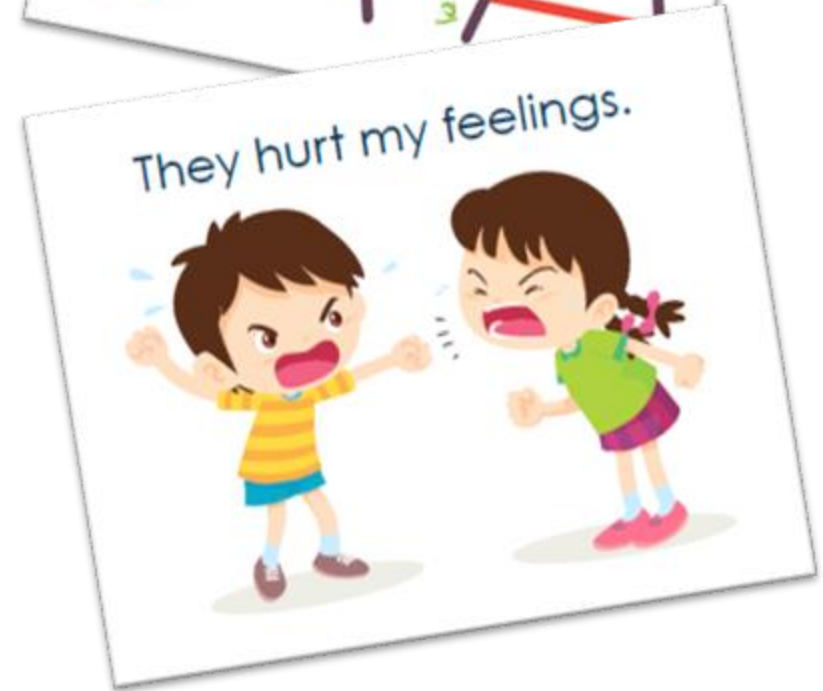


Stages of Learning Any New Skill



What Problem-Solving Skills to Teach?

- Identify a problem has occurred in a social situation (is it a big or little problem)
- Think of multiple solutions
- Understand that solutions have consequences
- Understand that when one solution does not work, they can try another solution to solve the problem



Problem-Solving Practice in Small Group

Planned and Intentionally Embedded Opportunity



Embedding Problem Solving into Daily Routines

- Plan an activity where children must share or take turns to complete the project
- Make snack time a problem-solving time
- When reading a story, allow children to provide solutions for the character's problem before finding out what happens next



Supporting Young Children with Problem Solving in the Moment

There are five steps to enhance problem-solving skills:

1. **Anticipate**—plan ahead
2. **Proximity**—be close to prompt children through problem-solving steps
3. **Support**—without solving the problem for the children, use tools to remind
4. **Encourage**—good solutions don't always work, encourage to keep trying
5. **Promote**—"in the moment" problem solving to reinforce success



Teaching Matrix: Problem Solving All Day, Everyday!

	Arrival	Large Group	Center Time	Small Group	Outside	Snack	Departure
Problem Solving Skills	Assign helper of the day to help children find their names and complete emotion check-ins when they arrive.	Teach problem-solving steps by using visuals. Role play problem solving with children.	Teach children where the solution kit is in center areas. Practice using it.	Create a solution kit with children. Have children illustrate and demonstrate each solution.	Place problem-solving visuals in one place where children can go to resolve conflicts.	Problem: limit the number of utensils to be passed out. Ask the children for help solving the problem.	Reflection time: Discuss and reflect on children's use of problem-solving skills throughout the day.

Supporting Problem Solving in the Moment



Problem Solving: What Do Maintenance and Generalization Look Like?

- Children begin to recognize when there is a social conflict that can be solved
- Children generate solutions with peers independently or with minimal adult support
- Children recognize others who problem solve
- Children celebrate the conflict resolution together
- Families report children using problem-solving skills at home or in the community

Spend some time thinking about these ideas...



If you teach a child that someone always has to win and someone always has to lose, when does she/he learn the skill of problem solving?

If you teach a child that “winning” depends on being bigger and stronger, what do you do when he/she is bigger and stronger than you?

If you teach a child that adults are the only ones with good ideas, when does the child learn the she/he has good ideas?

Thank you!

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