



WHAT IS IT?

Promoting Problem-Solving is a set of strategies to teach children specific steps to resolve disagreements and conflict between peers.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Two children are arguing over materials at their table. Their teacher approaches and asks, “What are you feeling? What’s the problem?” The teacher references the *Solution Kit* cards to help them brainstorm different ways to solve their problem. They decide that they could 1) ignore, 2) take turns, or 3) ask nicely. After discussing if the solution is safe and fair and considering how the other student would feel, the two children decide to take turns with the tablet, and the one who is waiting can use the number tiles. Their teacher says, “I am proud of you both for working together to solve the problem!”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Preschoolers are still learning perspective-taking and need assistance in understanding how their actions impact others. When a problem arises among children, teachers can use problem-solving strategies to help children identify the problem, take one another’s perspective, and generate and try out solutions. In social conflicts that involve oppression between peers (e.g., a child displays prejudice, stereotyping, or racist actions towards another child), teachers are the ones modeling and leading the problem-solving; teachers acknowledge, reject, and challenge the oppression. In other situations, problem-solving skills training is an effective way to empower children to *independently* resolve social conflict with peers.

Problem-Solving Steps

Introducing effective problem-solving includes teaching children how to...

- ☒ **Recognize** a problem.
- ☒ **Brainstorm** multiple solutions.
- ☒ **Understand** the consequences of each solution.
- ☒ **Agree** on an equitable and fair solution together.
- ☒ **Try** out the solution.

Using these steps not only helps solve problems in-the-moment but also it can also help to work through problems *before* they escalate.



TIPS FOR PROMOTING PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. PREPARE children to handle problems before they occur

- ☒ Stage or intentionally provide play opportunities that would require the use of problem-solving skills (e.g., needing to share blocks).
- ☒ Play “What would you do?” with children.
Present possible scenarios/problems and have children think of solutions.
- ☒ Select books that portray culturally diverse characters where there is a social problem and encourage children to solve it.
Pause during reading and prompt children to generate possible solutions to the problems faced by characters.

2. WHEN problems occur

- ☒ Help children *recognize* and *describe* the problem.
Encourage children to discuss what they and others are feeling. Allow children to point to a visual of their feelings if they are not able to verbalize.
- ☒ Encourage children to *brainstorm* potential solutions.
Give children enough time to brainstorm solutions.
Consider using the NCPMI *Solutions Kit* cards to present possible solutions. Rather than focusing on what will work best, generate as many solutions as possible (see *Introduction to the Solutions Kit* activity). Provide possible solutions for children who may not be able to generate possibilities, and model how the solution might look.
- ☒ Discuss consequences of possible solutions.
Have children consider...
 - Is the solution safe?
 - Is the solution fair and equitable?
 - How would everyone feel?
- ☒ Act on the best solution.
Have children agree on which solution to try. If it does not work, try out another one of the suggested solutions.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT PROBLEM-SOLVING

**Problem Solving with
Others**

[ECE Resource Hub](#)

CASTL ©

Solution Kit Cue Cards

Available as PDF in
[English](#) and [Spanish](#)

NCPMI ©

**We Can be Problem
Solvers Scripted Story**

[Available as PDF](#)

NCPMI ©

Solution Kit Activity

[Available as PDF](#)

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