



WHAT IS IT?

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

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Two students 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 students 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?

Kindergarteners are still learning perspective-taking and need assistance in understanding how their actions impact others. When a problem arises among students, teachers can use problem-solving strategies to help students 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 student displays prejudice, stereotyping, or racist actions towards another student), 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 students to *independently* resolve social conflict with peers.

Problem-Solving Steps

Introducing effective problem-solving includes teaching students 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 can also help to work through problems *before* they escalate.



TIPS FOR PROMOTING PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. WHEN problems occur

- ☒ Help students *recognize* and *describe* the problem.
Encourage students to discuss what they and others are feeling. Allow students to point to a visual of their feelings if they are not able to verbalize.
- ☒ Encourage students to *brainstorm* potential solutions.
Give students 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 students who may not be able to generate possibilities, and model how the solution might look.
- ☒ Discuss consequences of possible solutions.
Have students consider...
 - Is the solution safe?
 - Is the solution fair and equitable?
 - How would everyone feel?
- ☒ Act on the best solution.
Have students agree on which solution to try. If it does not work, try out another one of the suggested solutions.

2. PREPARE students 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 students.
Present possible scenarios/problems and have students think of solutions.
- ☒ Select books that portray culturally diverse characters where there is a social problem and encourage students to solve it.
Pause during reading and prompt students to generate possible solutions to the problems faced by characters.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT PROBLEM-SOLVING

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](#)
CASTL ©