

“She took my shovel!”

“I can’t do it!”

“There is no place for me to sit!”

Helping Children Become Problem Solvers

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Five-year-old Madison often loses her temper when she needs to get ready for outdoor time. Three and a half year-old Noah gets aggravated when the chair next to his best friend Shannon is already taken at the snack table.

Ms. Jones observes these emotional outbursts on a fairly regular basis and decides that she must do something to teach

her preschoolers how to problem solve.

She knows that if her young students gain skills in problem solving they will become less emotionally volatile, more independent, and socially skilled.



Importance of Problem Solving Skills

IL Early Childhood Learning Standards (Birth to 3)

- **Self-Regulation:** Emotional Regulation and Behavior Regulation
- **Problem Solving:** Children attempt a variety of strategies to accomplish tasks, overcome obstacles, and find solutions to tasks, questions, and challenges.

IL Early Childhood Learning Standards (3 to 5)

- **Social Emotional Development, Goal 31:**
31.A. Develop positive relationships with peers and adults
31.C. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

DEC Recommended Practices

- C10. Interventionists facilitate children's engagement with their environment to encourage child-initiated learning that is not dependent on the adult's presence.
- C11. Environments are provided that foster positive relationships.

The power of problem-solving skills (Joseph & Strain, 2010)

- Versatile
- A vehicle for preventing challenging behavior
- A quick relationship repair tool



Teach Problem-Solving...

Step-By-Step

(Joseph & Strain, 2010)

1. What is my problem?
2. What are some solutions?
3. What would happen next?
4. Give the solution a try!



1. What is my problem?

- Pay attention to their feelings
- Recognize that they have a problem
- Describe the problem



Step 1



Emotional Vocabulary

- What are some “feeling words” that you would like to teach the young children with whom you work?



Direct Teaching of Emotional Vocabulary



Describing the Problem

- Adult modeling with hypothetical and real problems
- Describing emotions
 - I am feeling _____.
- Reframing (own problem)
 - “They won’t let me play” to “I want to play with them”



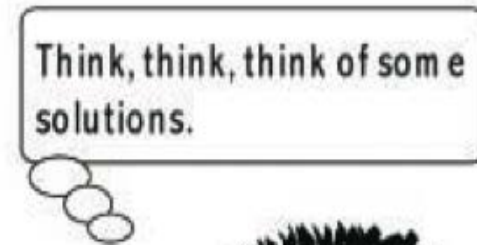
Group activity

- Read the vignette
- Discuss what Ms. Jones can do to help the children problem-solve.



2. What are some solutions?

- Generate multiple alternative solutions



Step 2



The Solution Kit

**Get a
Teacher**

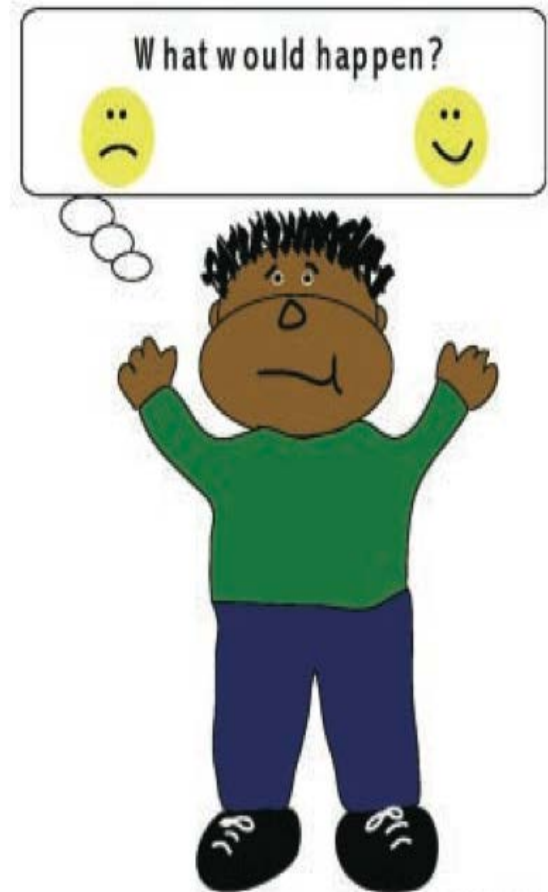


Wait and take turns.



3. What would happen next?

- Evaluate the consequences
 - Did anyone get hurt?
 - Was it fair?
 - How did you feel?
 - How did the other person feel?



Step 3



4. Give the solution a try!

- Act on the best solution
- If the first solution does not work, children can draw from the other solutions they generated in Step 2.



Step 4



Book Activity

1. What is the problem?
 2. What are some solutions?
 3. What would happen next?
 4. Give the solution a try!
- Discuss how to use the book to support problem solving in your class.



What You Can Do

- Anticipate problems
- Seek proximity
- Support
- Encourage
- Promote



Group Discussion

- Using the same vignettes, generate additional solutions for the situations.



Action Plan

- What is one thing that you learned from this session that you will implement in your early childhood setting next week?



Resources

Books to support problem solving skills

(<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>)

- *Don't let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems (Ages 2-7)
- *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!* By Mo Willems (Ages 2-7)
- *I Did It, I'm Sorry* by Caralyn Buehner (Ages 5-8)
- *It Wasn't My Fault* by Helen Lester (Ages 4-7)
- *Talk and Work It Out* by Cheri Meiners (Ages 4-7)



Resources

Problem-solving curriculum resources

From Joseph, G, & Strain, P. (2010). Teaching young children interpersonal problem-solving skills, *Young Exceptional Children*, 13(3), 28-40.

- *Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices*
- *Incredible Years: Dina Dinosaur's Social Skills and Problem Solving Classroom Curriculum*
- *I Can Problem Solve: ICPS*
- *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies: PATHS Curriculum*
- *Second Steps: A Violence Prevention Curriculum*



Resources

Websites on young children's social-emotional development

- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)
 - <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>
- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI)
 - <http://www.challengingbehavior.org>

