How to Help Your Child Solve Their Problems

One of the most important skills a child needs is to be able to think independently and solve their problems. As a parent, it’s common to want to step in and solve your child’s problems. But, teaching your child to solve their own problems can help them think more independently. It can help with their overall development.

How do good problem solving skills help a child’s development?
- It can prevent children from developing behavior problems in the future.
- It can help children think about the possible solutions and their outcomes instead of acting without thinking.
- It can decrease the chance of your child using physical violence as a way to solve their problems.
- They can develop better relationships with others.
- It can help them develop good listening skills.
- It can build self-confidence.

How do I help my child solve a problem?
You can start younger children out early by playing problem solving games. You can help them build skills by telling stories where they have to find the correct solution or ending to the story. They can also learn by role playing.

Here is an example scenario:

Kelly and Sara are playing dolls. Sara has been playing with the princess doll the entire time. Although the princess doll belongs to Sara, Kelly would like to play with the princess doll. Sara will not share the doll with Kelly.

You can use the following steps to work with your child when helping them solve a problem:

Step 1) **Identify the problem.**

Ask your child to identify the problem.

*Kelly would like a turn playing with the doll, but Sara will not share.*

Step 2) **List all possible ways to fix the problem.**

Ask your child to think of how they can fix the problem. Remember to allow them to identify as many solutions as possible, even if they seem like poor choices. This will help them develop critical thinking skills.
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Possible solutions:
A) I can take it out of Sara’s hands.

B) I can quit playing with dolls and find something else to do.

C) I can ask her to play with the doll and offer one of my dolls for her to play with.

Step 3) Evaluate the options.

Ask questions to help your child evaluate each option.

A) Is it fair to take it out of Sara’s hands? How would you feel if she took a toy out of your hands without asking?

B) Do you want to quit playing with the dolls?

C) Do you think she will want to play with one of your dolls? What if she still does not give you the doll to play with?

Step 4) Choose an option.

After evaluating the options you can guide your child to choose the best option. At this time in the process, you can explain why the other options may not be the best. For example, you can explain that taking something from someone without asking is not very polite.

Step 5) Create a plan of action and act on it.

Help your child talk through how they will act out the option they have chosen. Guide your child through this process. It may be helpful to create steps.

1) Choose a toy that you will offer Sara.

2) Ask Sara politely if you can play with the doll and offer one of your dolls for her to play with.

3) If she agrees, thank her for letting you play with the doll.

Step 6) Reflect on the outcome.

Ask your child questions that encourage him or her to think about the process.

How did it go?
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How did you feel?

What did you learn?

The best option to solve a problem doesn’t always work. If the chosen option does not help the problem, repeat steps 2 through 6. This time, ask your child to help think of other possible solutions. They may need more guidance from you this time around to come up with other solutions.

Keep in mind that some problems may be too big for children to solve on their own, so they will still need your help. The importance of helping your child problem solve is to help them think critically about the situation so they can use those skills for future problems that may arise. Remember, making mistakes is okay. Children can learn from the mistakes they make. As long as you involve your child in some problem-solving activities it can help them develop skills that will help with their overall development.

References:
http://www.psychologymatters.org/shure.html

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