

i **WHAT IS IT?**

Supporting students' problem-solving skills is teaching students specific steps to resolve disagreements and conflicts. This involves teaching students to recognize a problem, come up with a set of solutions, understand the consequences of choosing each solution, mutually agree on a solution, and give the solution a try.



EXAMPLE

Ann and Sadie are fighting over some blocks in the play area. The teacher approaches, kneels down to get on their level and asks them: "What are you feeling? What's the problem?" The girls each explain that they are mad because each girl wants to play with the same blocks. The teacher says, "Well, we have a problem and now we need a solution, let's look at our Solution Kit cards (cue cards with potential solutions to problems) to help us come up with ideas!" The girls review the cards and brainstorm that they could 1) Ignore 2) Take Turns or 3) Ask Nicely. Ann suggests she could "Ask Nicely" and then Sadie could give her the blocks. The teacher prompts her to consider "Is the solution safe? Is the solution fair? How would everyone feel?" Ann says that the solution isn't fair to Sadie and Sadie may feel sad. Sadie suggests they can take turns with the blocks. The students decide the solution is safe, fair and makes them both happy. The teacher says, "I am proud of you both for problem solving! You found a solution to your problem!"

★ WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Problem-solving skills training is effective because the teacher is empowering students to solve their own problems. Kindergarten students are still learning to take the perspective of another person and need assistance to understand how their actions impact others. Thus, a student is not likely to think about how taking a toy from a student would make that student mad or sad. When a problem arises among students, the teacher can use these techniques to help students identify the problem, take the other student's perspective, come up with and implement a solution.

Problem-solving skills training helps to stop problems before they escalate and will alleviate negative events in the classroom. It can be used to help an individual student who is having trouble negotiating with other students. It is a wonderful strategy to use classroom-wide so that all students learn how to independently and effectively resolve disagreements.

GUIDE TO PROMOTING PROBLEM-SOLVING

HOW TO PROMOTE PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. When problems occur:

- ✓ Help students **recognize and describe** the problem
 - Encourage students to discuss what they are feeling (e.g. anger, frustration, sadness)
 - Role play with puppets, draw pictures of example problems, adults acting out when needed
- ✓ **Encourage solutions** by having students generate multiple ideas for solving the problem
 - Use the Solutions Kit cards to suggest solutions and prompt students to come up with their own possible solutions (see “Solutions Kit Cards” under Additional Resources)
 - Don’t focus on what will work best, but rather generate as many possible solutions as possible
- ✓ **Discuss consequences** of possible solutions
 - Students should consider: Is the solution safe? Is the solution fair? How could everyone feel?
 - Role-play possible consequences
- ✓ **Agree on a solution**
 - Have students agree on which solution to try
 - **Try it out!** If it doesn’t work, try out another one of the solutions students generated

2. Prepare students to handle problems throughout the day

- ✓ **Introduce the Solution Kit**
- ✓ **Practice solving problems:** Stage or problematize normal activities to encourage students to foster solutions
 - Play “What would you do?” with students
 - Present possible scenarios/problems and encourage students to come up with solutions
- ✓ **Discuss problems using books:** Select books where there is a problem and have the students solve it
 - Pause during reading and encourage students to generate possible solutions to the problems faced by the characters

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT PROMOTING PROBLEM-SOLVING

Solution Kit Cards I or II

Available as PDFs

[\(Solution Kit Cards I, Solution Kit Cards II\)](#)

CSEFEL©

Solution Kit Activity

[Available as PDF](#)

CASTL©

Problem Solver

[Available as PDF](#)

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