

Help your Child Become a Problem Solver

I. Decide who owns the problem

Ask yourself 3 questions:

1. *Are my rights being disrespected?*
2. *Will there be harm to a person or property?*
3. *Is my child too young to handle this problem?*

If the answer is YES to *any* of these questions, then you own the problem.

If the answer is NO to *every* question, then your child owns the problem.

Sometimes the problem is shared, especially with teens. You always want to lean toward your child doing as much of the problem solving as possible.

II. If your child owns the problem, you have several choices:

A. Ignore the problem. Trust your child to solve it.

B. Encourage your child and trust them to solve it. “That sounds like a challenge I think you can handle.” or “I have confidence you’ll figure out a good solution.”

C. Use reflective listening. *Examples:*

- “Sounds like you are feeling angry at your teacher for giving so much homework.”
- “Seems like you’re really hurt that you weren’t invited to the party.”

D. Coach problem solving skills. After reflective listening as described above and once your child seems calm, then help them see choices and possible consequences. Apply the following steps to teach problem solving without solving the problem for your child:

1. **Reflect back the problem from your child’s point of view.** Make sure the problem is clear to both you and your child. Use reflective listening. Check with your child clearly and respectfully to **make sure that you understand the problem from your child’s point of view without any added interpretation from you.**



- 2. Invite your child to brainstorm ideas to solve the problem.** Ask your child for ways to solve the problem and don't comment on their ideas. Stay open-minded and although some ideas may sound silly or break rules, refrain from comment. A "silly" idea might help your child think of other ideas. The ideas that your child comes up with are "alternatives." If your child has no ideas, invite them to take some time and think about the issue or chat with friends. If your child doesn't come up with possibilities, later you can offer your own ideas tentatively, "What might happen if you tried..."
- 3. Invite your child to discuss the ideas.** List each idea your child suggested and ask them to consider what might be the outcome of each idea. Remember that this problem belongs to the child and it is the child who will ultimately carry out the solution and live with the consequences of their choice.
- 4. Invite your child to choose an idea.** Support your child to choose one idea after they review possible outcomes for each alternative. If they choose an idea that breaks family rules, you can comment at this point and ask them to choose another option. Typically even if kids come up with outrageous ideas, they won't choose those.
- 5. Use the idea.** Suggest that your child apply the idea and decide together how long to use it. Plan enough time to give the idea a fair test.
- 6. Set a time to discuss if the idea is working.** If it isn't then you can repeat the steps again to try another approach.

You may not always get to all of these steps, but any part of this process can be helpful. Remember this is your child's problem, so if they are no longer interested in the process that is ok. Trust them to find their way and learn from experience with you by their side.

