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*Dedicated to helping children with emotional and behavioral problems,
by developing stronger more positive family relationships*

Problem Solving With Your Child

We often ask - How can I stop the conflict in my family? How do I get my child to follow the rules? I suggest using the Five Steps to Problem Solving and Participative Rule Setting. This is a process that includes your child's participation and does not leave the child feeling as though their thoughts and feelings do not matter to you.

Using a collaborative problem solving process means that everyone involved in the problem is also involved in the solution. This doesn't mean that the adult solves the problem and then presents it to the child as a done deal. This means that you work together to solve the problem. A child who is involved in the problem solving process is more likely to buy into and stick to the agreement, as opposed to the child who is always given demands and consequences.

Keep in mind, you can only problem solve when everyone is calm. During the middle of an argument or conflict is not the time to problem solve. It is imperative to stop all hurting before even attempting to use the problem solving steps.

There are five basic steps to use when problem solving. It is very important that you allow for the child's input in identifying the problem and in coming up with a workable solution.



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Step 1 – Identify the problem

Identifying the problem does not mean giving opinions or judgments. It means gather the facts about what happened. How you see the problem and how your child sees the problem may be very different. If you don't agree on what the actual problem is, it is pointless to use the next four steps. You and your child need to keep communicating until you both agree on exactly what the problem is. Everyone involved in the problem needs to take part in identifying the problem.

Step 2 – Brainstorm solutions together

When brainstorming the solutions, ask one person to record the suggestions. Now is not the time to discuss the solutions or give your comments. It is just a starting point. Discussion will come later in step 3. Remember don't discount each other's ideas. Again everyone involved in the problem identified in step one needs to have input to the brainstorming phase.

Step 3 – Review and choosing a workable solution

Now is the time to review all the suggested solutions. Discuss each solution suggested. Remember to be respectful of each other's opinions and keep an open mind. Your child may have a very good resolution to the problem, but you will need to be open enough to hear it. As you discuss each solution take a vote to see who wants to keep the solution. Once you have discussed all the solutions given and have narrowed the list to only one solution, it is time to move to step 4.



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Step 4 – Test the solution

Now it is time to test the solution that the group chose. Agree on a length of time to test the solution. Usually a week or two is best. At this point everyone agrees to be cooperative and try to follow the suggested solution.

Step 5 – What to do if the solution does not work

After the week or two of trial, it is time to reconvene and discuss how the solution worked. Does it need to be tweaked or is it working? If the solution is not working go back to step 1. Sometimes the problem was not identified correctly and needs to be addressed again. Sometimes the solution did not really fit the identified problem. Work through steps 1 -4 again and try again.

Some families like to add an extra step, which allows for identifying what the consequence will be if the problem arises again. I caution against this at first, because the goal is to stop the problem, not have it continue. ■

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