Social Skills and Problem Solving!
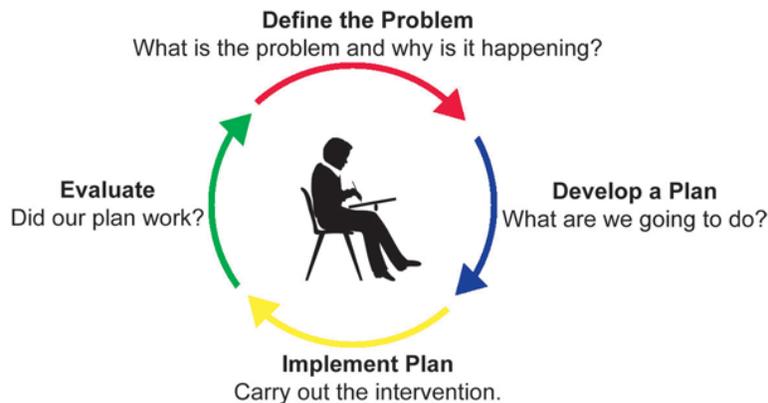

Reasons Kids Need Problem-Solving

Kids face a variety of problems every day. Problems ranging from academic difficulties, peer issues, problems on the sports fields, difficulty completing a task, or even deciding what outfit to wear can benefit from a formal solving process. When kids learn problem-solving skills they gain confidence in their ability to make good decisions for themselves.

When kids lack problem-solving skills they may avoid doing anything to try and resolve the issue. For example, if a child is being teased by peers and isn't sure how to respond, he may not address it. Instead, he may grow to dislike school, his grades may decline, and he may complain of physical health problems such as stomach aches or headaches.

Other children who lack problem-solving skills may not recognize they even have choices in solving problems. These kids may react impulsively without thinking through their choices. For example, a child who doesn't recognize his options when his friend takes his toy may lash out by hitting because he thinks this is the only way to get his toy back. Helping kids learn how to identify their options can help them ensure they are making healthy decisions for themselves.

Define the Problem
What is the problem and why is it happening?

Develop a Plan
What are we going to do?

Implement Plan
Carry out the intervention.

Evaluate
Did our plan work?

Teach Kids How to Evaluate Problems

Talk to your children about how to identify the problem. Sometimes just stating the problem can make a big difference. For example, a child who can say to his mother, "Kids are picking on me at recess," may begin to feel some instant relief.

Once kids identify the problem, teach them to develop several possible solutions before springing into action. Try to brainstorm at least four possible ways to solve the problem. Then discuss the pros and cons of each approach. It is important that kids learn to recognize the possible positive and negative consequences of their behaviors.

Once a child recognizes several options and the possible consequences of each, decide which choice is best. Teach kids that if they choose a course of action and it doesn't resolve the problem, they can always try something else. Encourage them to keep trying to solve a problem until it is resolved.

Actively Discuss Problems Together

When problems arise, don't rush to solve your child's problems for him. If you see your child struggling with something, allow your child an opportunity to figure it out before helping. For example, if your child is arguing with his sibling over a toy, allow them an opportunity to try and reach a solution themselves first. If they aren't able to do so, try to help them find a solution. Of course, if there is a safety concern, it is important to step in immediately.

Role model problem-solving skills to help your child learn what to do in real life situations. For example, if you receive a note from your child's teacher stating he is not doing well in math, don't rush to take away his privileges. Instead, sit down with him to discuss the problem using the problem-solving process. He may have lots of good ideas about what he needs to do differently or how he can gain extra help to improve his grade.

Try to work together on reaching a mutually agreed upon solution. Provide plenty of praise when your child is able to find a solution to a problem. Discuss progress and re-visit the issue periodically to see if any further changes are necessary.

Allow for Natural Consequences

When kids are allowed to experience natural consequences, it can be an effective discipline strategy that teaches problem-solving skills. Allowing for natural consequences means that you allow your child to make a choice and then face the negative consequences. It's important, however, to make sure that there are not any safety concerns.

However, letting a teenager spend his money on the first thing she sees at the mall and then refusing to give her any more money, means she will experience a natural consequence of not being able to afford other things she wants. This can lead to a discussion about problem-solving to help her make a better choice next time. Consider these natural consequences as a teachable moment to help work together on problem-solving.