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Why is problem-solving skills important for everyday function?

Kids make hundreds of decision every day based on the problems they encounter. Some problem are not even realised e.g. choosing which coloured shirt to wear to school while other problems takes time and cognitive planning to solve.

We get different levels of difficulty when talking about problem-solving?

- Simple concrete problem-solving - Do you want to wear your red shirt or blue shirt?
- Complex concrete problem-solving - I spilled a drink on the carpet, what do I do now?
- Simple abstract problem-solving - My friend is sad as he had a fight with his mom, what advice I give him?
- Complex abstract problem-solving - I have to choose subjects in high school but have to consider what I want to study one day, which subjects do I choose?

How do I know if my child finds problem-solving difficult?

- Your child will turn to you/another adult/teacher/peer to help them 'find and answer' to the problem/situation
- The child will have an emotional response e.g. crying/tantrum
- Your child won't be able to solve the problem at hand or will give non-sensical solutions
- Your child will find word-problems and other maths difficult
- Avoid the specific situation
- May have social issues as they react on impulse rather than solve the problem or conflict situation e.g. if a peer cuts in front of your child when standing in a cue will your child think about what to do or react and hit the child?
- Reacts impulsively rather than thinking about the situation



So how can we help our kids solve problems effectively?

- First of all, identify the problem
Saying it out loud may help you to make the problem clear
Break a bigger problem into smaller problems will assist the process. Solve each smaller problem and thus getting close to the solution of the bigger problem
Is it your problem or is the problem someone else's as well? We can't for example help if a child bully's you as this won't stop the bully's behaviour.

Both children need to part-take in the process. E.g. the one child needs to confront the bully or tell an adult about the behaviour AND the bully needs to change his behaviour before the problem is solved
Talk the problem through with someone

- Find a few solutions
Talk about the solutions with someone
Brainstorm if possible
Help your child if they struggle with possible solutions
Discuss the outcomes of each solution to find a viable one – talk about the consequence of each solution
- Apply the solution
- Re-evaluate the problem and possible solutions if the problem is not solved
- Practice the above problem-solving steps by creating hypothetical problems
Do this in a safe environment where your child can experience failure
As far as possible let your child solve the problem himself/herself and only offer assistance when necessary
Practice solving problems together by taking problems that arise in the home-situations
- Provide praise when your child solved a problem sufficient and even when they really tried but the solution was unsuccessful



Other helpful hints to help with problem-solving skills

- Let your child experience the consequences of her decision
E.g. if I don't throw my clothes in the hamper, I will have no clean close to wear tomorrow
- Allow your kids to make mistakes
If it is in a safe environment allow your child to make the wrong choice E.g. Let your child cover his own schoolbooks using plastic – let him see that this task is still too difficult for a Gr. 1 learning as the book won't look neat. Sometimes hearing this from mom/dad won't be as effective as letting the child experience doing this himself/herself and then seeing that mom/dad should rather do it
- Provide enough time for unstructured free-play
Kids who think-up ways to keep themselves busy thus using their imaginations have more problem-solving skills that kids who are 'kept busy' by their parents the whole time
- Provide educational toys
Most of these toys provide problem-solving opportunities on the level of the child
- Allow your child to make their own choices – within reason of course
- When your child encounters a problem – as them to first try and make a plan by themselves – on after they tried will you provide some assistance to solve the problem
- Read them stories to show how a character solved a certain problem
- Use construction toys with booklets and instructions. Lego's and such toys provide the opportunity for so much learning! Solve the problem together when the missed a step or did it incorrectly
- Allow your child to experience failure in a safe environment – we tend to over-protect our children

