



HELPING CHILDREN BECOME PROBLEM SOLVERS

(adapted from "Systematic Training for Effective Parenting")

I. DECIDE WHO OWNS THE PROBLEM.

A. To decide who owns a 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 be handle this problem?

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

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

II. IF YOUR CHILD OWNS THE PROBLEM YOU HAVE SEVERAL CHOICES:

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

B. Use reflective listening. *Example:* "Sounds like you are feeling angry at your teacher for giving so much homework."

C. Help your child see the choices and the possible consequences. Apply the following steps to teach problem solving without solving the problem for the child:

1. **Understand the problem.** Make sure the problem is clear to both you and your child. Use reflective listening. Ask questions that help you understand. Check with the child clearly and respectfully to make sure that you understand the problem *from the child's point of view*.
2. **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, don't jump to judge them. A "silly" idea might help you think of other ideas. The ideas that you and your child come up with are "alternatives." Only offer ideas if your child runs out of them and there are no reasonable possibilities. Offer your own ideas tentatively, "What might happen if you tried...."
3. **Discuss the ideas.** Consider the ideas together. If you don't agree with an idea, express your point of view respectfully. 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. **Choose an idea.** Support your child to choose one idea after reviewing possible outcomes for each alternative.
5. **Use the idea.** Suggest that your child test the idea and decide together how long to use it. Plan enough time to give the idea a fair test. 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.

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