

IMPROVING PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Basic Steps:

- Recognizing the problem exists
- Defining the problem and setting goals
- Generating alternative solutions
- Evaluating the alternative solutions
- Designing and implementing the plan
- Evaluating the plan

Description: Problem solving is the application of a set of skills to address situations that have multiple choices for resolution.

Problem solving is taught through modeling, direct instruction, and guided practice. The learning objective for this approach is for the student to use newly learned problem-solving skills in place of aggressive behaviors.

Illustration: Karen, a junior high school student, asked a classmate for help with an assignment during class. Her teacher directed her to stay on task, and Karen responded with profanity. The school psychologist worked with Karen to understand her aggressive behaviors and to develop a problem-solving strategy to better cope with frustration and stress. Karen learned that her response to the teacher's request was inappropriate. Using her new problem-solving skills, Karen learned to define the problem and set goals to eliminate her use of profanity when she became

frustrated. Karen determined alternative ways to respond to the teacher, being sure to explain her need for help with completing assignments. At the end of the each period, Karen evaluated the choices she made and the consequences that occurred as a result.

Teaching Strategy: The key to improving problem-solving skills is for students to develop the ability to know when and how to generate alternatives for their problematic behavioral urges (see Appendix B for sample lesson plans). Teachers can use the following steps when teaching this approach:

1. Choose a high-interest example that is related to problem solving, such as a current news event, a current school issue, or a funny story about life at home.
2. Share the example with the students to introduce the concept of problem solving. Teachers may choose to tell a story or show a picture or other visual depiction (e.g., a video of two students arguing) and ask the students to describe the problem.
3. Introduce the basic steps to problem solving. When necessary, substitute words that are appropriate for the students' age and vocabulary level.
4. Create a problem-solving scenario that results in an inappropriate, aggressive response. Be sure to consider appropriateness for culture, gender, socioeconomic status, and age.
5. Choose a student to play the role of each person in the scenario, and have the students act out the story. Tell the students to act how they think their character would respond to the situation. Be sure that students understand not to actually engage in behaviors that might hurt others (e.g., a student may pretend to break an object but should not actually break it).
6. Ask the students who were watching the skit to identify the problem(s) in the story and brainstorm ways to solve the problem.