BOSTON CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Figuring It Out
Learning to solve problems

Stuck zippers! Snatched toys! Spilled milk! Learning to be a good problem-solver helps children be independent and feel more comfortable trying new things. It also helps them enjoy playing with others.

The Basics

Problems come in all shapes and sizes. A young child might not be able to reach the sink or might want a turn on the slide. Sometimes these problems come with big feelings.

Problem-solving starts early. Babies learn by testing things out again and again. So do young children! Problem-solving involves creativity and a willingness to keep trying. With practice, children can become really good at solving their own challenges.

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Search everywhere

• Invite your child to play hide-and-seek. Take turns "hiding" and "seeking". There is problem-solving in finding places to hide and in figuring out where someone else is.

• Play hide-and-seek with puppets. Show your child two puppets. Then hide each puppet in a different spot. Give your child one hint at a time. "Cow is somewhere warm and cozy." "Cow is having a nap." "You found it! Cow was under the blanket!"

Getting Started

The very best way for young children to become good problem-solvers is through play. Play gives children time to try things out and make their own choices.

Sometimes children need help when things get challenging. Work together to come up with lots of possible ways to solve the problem. Let your child choose one solution to try. Sometimes their choice might work, other times it might not. Help them learn from their mistakes. "How else could you try that?"

More!

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Building challenges

- Challenge your child to use the <u>blocks</u> to build a tower on their own. Each time the tower falls, ask, "What could you try differently next time?" Let them try and try again.

- Mix it up! Add other building materials to the <u>blocks</u> from your recycling bin. Challenge your child to build a tower using the blocks, yogurt cups, toilet paper tubes, and whatever else you have. This is harder because the materials might not all fit together easily.

- Challenge your child to use the <u>blocks</u> to build a home for a <u>puppet</u>. What happens if it rains? Try adding other building materials to make a roof.

- Try more building challenges with <u>blocks</u> and things from your recycling bin. Build a home big enough for more than one <u>puppet</u>. Build a way for the puppet to get across a road. Build something big enough for your child and the puppet to fit inside together. (You might need to add some pillows and blankets!)

Everyday Interactions

Use mealtime spills to practice problem-solving. "I see you spilled your milk. Accidents happen. What can you use to help clean it up?"

When reading a book, point out problem-solving. Ask your child what the problem was and how it got solved. Do they have other ideas for how they might have solved the problem themselves?

Model, Notice, Practice

"I can't get this bag open. I could use scissors. What else could I try?"

Model when you are solving a problem. Ask your child to help think of possible solutions.

"You chose to play with the other truck instead of taking hers. That was very nice of you."

Notice when your child has made a good choice in how they solved a problem. Use specific words to help them see what was good about their choice.

"I can see that's not quite working. What else could you try?"

Practice thinking together. Ask questions like, "What do you think you should do next?" "Can you use this object? I wonder how..."