

Learning Links' Tip Sheet

Encouraging problem solving skills



Everyday Situations

Encourage children to be independent problem solvers in everyday situations. When a child comes to you with a problem, talk about it.

Have the child tell you what is wrong, what they think should happen and/or what they can do about it themselves. If this is difficult for the child, “wonder” out loud, e.g. “I wonder if we ...”, or suggest options for the child to choose from.

Give your child an opportunity to work through issues with your support. Make sure the child has opportunity to learn through trial and error. These situations can occur over sharing equipment or toys, arguments with friends and not being included in play situations.

Parents and carers can also set up situations where the child must solve a problem. This helps the child to identify that there is a problem and come up with the solution for a situation that naturally occurs in a particular setting. For example, we don't have enough chairs at the table for mealtimes, where is the plug for the bath, there is no butter for the sandwich or there are no pencils at the drawing table.

Wait and see if the child notices the problem and then ask them what they need to do to solve it rather than just give an answer. These simple problem solving efforts may give children a sense of achievement and motivate them to be more independent in other problem solving areas.

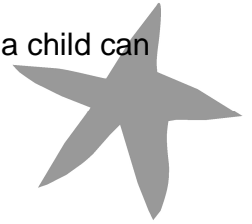
Puzzles

Puzzles provide opportunities for children to practice problem solving skills.

- ∞ Encourage the child to look at the picture and shapes before taking pieces out.
- ∞ Talk children through the process of completing a puzzle.
- ∞ Verbally prompt children to “try another way” or “turn the piece”.
- ∞ Point out the shapes of pieces and the colours; for example, a blue piece might be a piece of blue sky or this long thin piece might fit in this thin space.
- ∞ Praise attempts to solve the puzzle independently but encourage children to ask for help rather than walk away from hard puzzles.



- ∞ Provide a variety of complete puzzles from simple to difficult so that a child can achieve success but also move on and be challenged.



Construction and building activities

When children are involved in construction and building activities they are often actively involved in problem solving.

- ∞ Talk children through how to build a solid tower, road, etc. Ask questions; for example, "What will happen if you put this large block on top of this smaller block – will it balance?"
- ∞ When a construction breaks or falls ask the child why they think this happened: was the structure too tall; not enough blocks, etc.
- ∞ Encourage children to talk about what they are going to do or build and after they have finished how they did it.
- ∞ Resist the temptation to always solve the problem for the child. Give the child time to explore different approaches to solving the problem. Encourage the child to accept disappointments and try an alternative approach to solving the problem.

Craft

Craft experiences such as collage provide children with opportunity to develop their problem solving skills.

Using different types of glue and a range of materials that may include old rags, paper of different sizes, boxes from home and cups. The range of materials can change as the children use the materials.

Give the child the time and opportunity to explore the materials and experiment with different ways to solve the problems that occur.

Encourage the child to persevere by "wondering" what to do or asking specific questions, e.g. "How are we going to stick this down and what happens when.....?"



The information in Learning Links' Tip Sheets is prepared by experienced early childhood professionals. Each child is unique and this material is not necessarily suitable for every child, parent or carer. We recommend you discuss this information with your child's therapist or education professional prior to using these tips.