



Ask BYFS

March 2007

Question: *How do parents foster a sense of independence and strength in their children as they become increasingly dependent on the favorable opinions of their peers? How can children manage rejection by social groups and how can parents help them?*

Teaching a Life Skill: Problem Solving With Children

When a child feels hurt, frustrated or angry, the normal reaction of most parents is to try to "fix" the problem. It is with the best of intentions that adults want to ease the difficulties that children experience. But is it always in the best interest of the child to make things right without teaching him/her how to make things right for themselves?

It is sometimes important to remember the ultimate goal of child rearing, to raise strong, healthy and independent young people who can navigate in the world. Whether the issue is being left out at recess, doing badly on a test, getting into trouble unjustly or any of a number of issues that arise in the daily life a child, helping a child to come up with their own solution is a probably the best help you can offer.

In order to use the problem solving approach, be sure to have the time to explore the issue. Remember to listen more than talk and to guide rather than overtake the conversation. Be sure that our child is calm enough to engage in the process. Bedtime can often be the best time. Begin with:

- 1. Identifying the problem.** *Try to sort out the emotion from the problem. Be sure to state the problem to be sure you are both talking about the same thing. If you don't get the problem right, your child could begin to get frustrated. Try to remain calm.*
- 2. Help your child to brainstorm some solutions.** *Come up with as many ideas as possible no matter how silly. It's ok to have a little fun with this.*
- 3. Choosing one solution and try it out.** *Be sure that the solution is doable, won't leave your child more vulnerable, and makes sense.*
- 4. Evaluating what has happened.** *Be sure to follow up with your child to find out how things have turned out. If the solution didn't work, try another. There may be times when it is necessary to bring in outsiders for help.*

One of the most important skills a child can learn is how to solve ones own problems. Not only is it useful in the long term, but in the short term, it helps a child to feel confident and capable. You will know that you have helped to prepare them for taking on the challenges that are a part of all of our lives.

For further ideas try Myrna Shure [Raising a Thinking Child](#) or [I Can Problem Solve](#).

The BYFS is here to support and nurture the social, emotional, and developmental needs of children, adults, and families in Bedford. Email your questions to sueb@town.bedford.ma.us and the Bedford Youth and Family Services team (BYFS) will choose one to answer next month. Your name and email will remain confidential. Be sure to visit the BYFS website at <http://www.town.bedford.ma.us/youth/youthindex.html>.
