Teaching Problem-Solving

Being in a classroom is often the first setting where children encounter the complexity of the social problem-solving process. This process involves children being able to identify a problem, generate possible solutions, evaluate whether those solutions would be appropriate, and implement an acceptable and effective solution. Because smooth social navigation requires new skills for most young children, teachers must intentionally plan for ways to teach social problem-solving as a process (Hemmeter, Fox & Snyder, 2014).

Teachers who understand their key role in helping children to acquire social-emotional skills can be observed:

- Teaching the steps of a social problem-solving process.

- Providing feedback to and commenting on children who are using the problem-solving process.

- Modeling the steps of the process in their actions with children.

- Assisting children in reflecting on their use of problem-solving.

- Providing individualized problem-solving support to children who need it.

Ways to Encourage Problem-Solving

- Talk to children
- Demonstrate problem-solving steps during typically occurring activities.
- Ask children to generate possible solutions.
- Use visuals to explicitly teach the steps of the process.
- Remind children about the behavior expectations by showing them the visuals of the problem-solving steps.
- Discuss examples of problem situations that have occurred during another time of the day and use them to teach children how to use the problem-solving steps in the future.
- Use positive descriptive feedback to describe a child who is problem-solving.
- Prompt children to talk about how they have used problem-solving.

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