

SUMMARY OF HOW TO FACILITATE CHILDREN'S PROBLEM SOLVING

The primary job of an adult facilitator is to help the children remain focused on the problem and the problem solving process.

1. GATHER DATA

Collect information about events and feelings. Decide what parental options you will use. If you plan to help the children negotiate, avoid blaming anyone (even if you think someone is at fault). You may find the following questions useful:

What happened?

How did you feel when you ... ?

Why did you ... ?

How did you feel when your friend/sibling ... ?

What happened then?

2. STATE THE PROBLEM CLEARLY

It is easier for children to solve a problem if you have a clear understanding of the problem. State the problem in terms of both children's needs. You might wish to use either of the following approaches or develop your own.

Some questions: You want to _____ and your friend wants to _____. What can you do so you can both be happy?

OR

I know you are both upset about what happened. I do not want to focus on that. I want to focus on what we can do *now*. What are some things we might do so that both of your needs will be met?

Remember: Include both (all) children's needs in the problem statement.

3. GENERATE LOTS OF IDEAS

Go for quantity of different ideas, not quality in this step. Write the ideas down if you can't remember them. Encourage children to suggest silly ideas as well as practical ones.

Write down all the ideas. Evaluate them later, evaluation stops the creative process.

Encourage different ideas. If a child offers similar ideas, tell the child how they are similar and ask her for something different. For example, "Hitting, punching, and biting are all hurting ideas, what is something different?"

Avoid criticizing ideas. If the child offers an idea you do not like, help him evaluate the idea in the next step.

Review the problem frequently. It is easy for kids to wander from the problem; remind them what the problem is. For example, "Yes, that is a problem too. Right now we are looking for ways to _____. When we are done we can consider that."

Focus on the childrens' ideas. Resist the temptation to add your ideas unless you are asked. If you offer lots of good ideas, children will depend on your skill rather than developing their own.

Focus on content, not grammar. Do not correct children's grammar directly. When you summarize you can restate the suggestion correctly.

4. EVALUATE THE IDEAS

Look at the consequences. Encourage children to consider the question, "What might happen if you _____?" OR "How will Mary feel if you _____?"

Is this a win-win alternative? Will this idea work for all the people involved?

If no idea is acceptable, consider how the ideas could be changed to make them acceptable.

5. ASK FOR A DECISION AND HELP CHILDREN PLAN

List the alternatives, ask the children for a decision, help them plan how to implement the idea, and decide on a time to evaluate your plan.

List the alternatives. Remember to include them all: the ones you like and don't like.

Plan implementation. What do the children need to do first? Will the children need someone's permission or cooperation?

Plan time to evaluate. Decide on a time to review your plan and see if it is successful. If the solution is not working, choose another idea or return to identify the problem. If it is successful—

Congratulate the children on finding a solution and remind them if it does not work out there are other ideas.