



Helping children learn problem-solving skills

Introduction

Young children require lots of guidance as they learn to cope with the everyday challenges of new situations and getting on with others.

Parents and educators are central in teaching children how to solve problems and resolve conflict. It may take some time at first, but developing problem-solving skills leads to confident and resilient children who can work out what to do on their own in the future.

Problem-solving is a skill for life, and involves four main steps:

- identifying what the problem is
- thinking about possible options to solve the problem and the consequences of each option
- choosing the best option and planning how and when to try it
- thinking about how well it worked and deciding if another option is needed.

***Allen solves a problem* template**

The *Allen solves a problem* template provides a structure for talking with young children about how to work out what to do if they have problems or conflicts. Initially, you can work through each step with them. Gradually, children will learn the steps and will need less help from you.

The template outlines the step-by-step process to work through displayed in three columns:

- images for children to identify the four steps in the problem-solving process
- text for you with suggestions of what to say at each step
- space for the child to draw their answers or for you to write a few key words for the child.

The template is intended to be printed (and perhaps laminated) on A3 paper. Information is provided below for early childhood educators. Parents and other carers can use the template in a similar way at home.

How to use the *Allen solves a problem* template in a classroom setting

Keep in mind the aim of the activity is to teach the problem-solving process while you consider some real problems or issues.

After the children have listened to the story of *The Allen Adventure*, **introduce the activity** by saying something like, *'It was a bit hard for Allen when he didn't know what to do at his new school. What were some problems he had?'*

Select one of the ideas that children provide or suggest the problem of Allen not wanting to share the rocket (as provided in Notes on The Rocket). *'One of the things that happened was other kids got mad at Allen because he wouldn't let them play with the rocket. He didn't like that, but he didn't know what to do.'*

Display the *Allen solves a problem* template and demonstrate the steps. Ask the class to suggest answers at each stage and, if necessary, you can provide some of the suggestions provided in Notes on the Rocket. (In the story Allen shares with the other kids, but in the problem-solving example, he decides to take turns playing. This is provided to show there is usually more than one solution).

Then **introduce the idea that the children can use these steps** as well when they need to work something out. Say something like, *'We all have to work out how we can get on with others. Let's think of a time we could solve a problem in this way.'* Invite suggestions from the class or suggest something (e.g. *'What about when two children are arguing about who plays in block corner first?'*).

The Allen Adventure

Talk through the steps in the *Allen solves a problem* template with an issue suggested by the children, inviting the group to contribute ideas and discuss the implications and options of each idea.

Revisit the steps using the template a few times over the following week to consolidate the ideas.

Apply problem-solving steps in everyday situations

Following this activity, if a child comes to you with an issue, you can decide if it would be suitable for a problem-solving discussion (not all situations will be). You can use the template to talk about conflict over sharing toys, arguments, or not being included in games.

On these occasions, first ask the child (or children) if they would like to talk through the steps like you did for *Allen solves a problem*.

Allow the child to decide what solutions to try and to learn through trial and error, although do not allow children to try options that are dangerous.

This way, children can learn they have choices in solving social problems and that some choices are better than others. They also learn there will usually be more than one option, and they can try something else if the first idea doesn't work.

Some general tips for adults

Avoid jumping in to sort things out before children have had the chance to find their own solutions. If you need to get involved, use the opportunity to teach ways to sort out conflicts and solve problems.

Be patient about the time needed when you start discussing the steps involved in problem-solving. It may slow things down initially, but the child will gradually learn how to use the steps themselves. This helps them become more independent and responsible.

Make sure that you model your own problem-solving. When a problem arises for you (e.g. you have broken a cup), talk through the issue and your ideas about a solution. Your child will see that everyone has problems they need to sort out.

Other resources and reading

Read more about *The Allen Adventure*

at <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/TeachingAboutBullying/StartingInEarlyChildhood/Pages/About-the-Allen-adventure.aspx>

Read more about teaching young children about positive and healthy relationships

at <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/TeachingAboutBullying/StartingInEarlyChildhood>

Read more about teaching social and emotional skills

at <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/TeachingAboutBullying/StartingInEarlyChildhood/Pages/Teach-social-and-emotional-skills.aspx>

Find other lesson plans and teaching materials related to *The Allen Adventure*

at <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/Resources/TeachingResources/Pages/Early-childhood-resources.aspx>

Allen solves a problem Notes on *The Rocket*

| Step and prompt questions | Notes for educators | Example answers from Allen |
|---|---|--|
| What is the problem? | | |
| What is wrong? | <i>This step can be challenging as children do not always have the words to describe what they want or how they feel. Children will need your patience and may need your help to understand what is happening. They may also need your help and some time to calm down. Remember not to jump in to solve the problem at this stage. You are aiming to teach the process of problem-solving.</i> | The other kids are mad because they want the rocket, but I want it too. |
| How do I feel ? Do I need to calm down so I can think about what to do? | | I feel sad they will take the rocket, but I feel worried about the kids being mad at me and maybe not playing with me again. I feel calm enough to think now. |
| What would I like to happen? Would that be fair ? | | I want to play with the rocket and I don't want the kids to be mad at me. It is fair for me to play with it some of the time. |
| What can I do about it? | | |
| What can I try ? And what might happen if I do that? | <i>Once you have an idea of what the problem is, suggest you and the children think about solutions. Aim for two or three options. More may seem overwhelming for a young child. Suggest some options for a child younger than 5 years old, or ask prompt questions for children over about 5 years, like, 'I wonder what else you could try'.</i> | I could hide the rocket for myself. Then the other kids might get angrier. They might stop me playing with other toys. |
| What else could I do about it? And what might happen if I do that? | | I could say they can take turns with it. They might not give it back when I want it, but they will not be mad at me. |
| Can I think of any other ideas ? And what might happen if I try them? | | We could play with it together. That might be fun if we like the same games, but I really like playing on my own with this rocket. |
| Which is the best idea for me to try? | | |
| Which one will I try first ? | <i>Once you and the child have identified some options, discuss which one to try first. Do they need help from you or another child? Also discuss when might be the best time to try out the idea.</i> | I think taking turns to play is the best for me and for them. |
| Do I need someone's help ? When should I try my idea? | | I think I can work it out myself. I need to do it now; they are mad at me now and might tell the teacher. |
| How well did my idea work? | | |
| After I tried my idea, how did it go? Would I do that again? | <i>Check in with the child as soon as possible. Provide lots of support if it didn't work out; pointing out that sometimes we need to try again, or maybe think more about the problem.</i> | They liked the idea of taking turns and they gave it back to me after that. We asked the teacher to tell us when it was 10 minutes and we got 10 minutes each. |
| What else could I do now? | | I think it's okay now, and I might say let's play with it together tomorrow. |

Allen solves a problem

What is the problem?



What is wrong?

How do I feel? Do I need to calm down so I can think about what to do?

What would I like to happen? Would that be fair?

What can I do about it?



What can I try? And what might happen if I do that?

What else could I do about it? And what might happen if I do that?

Can I think of any other ideas? And what might happen if I try them?

Which is the best idea for me to try?



Which one will I try first?

Do I need someone's help?

When should I try my idea?

How well did my idea work?



After I tried my idea, how did it go?

Would I do that again?

What else could I do now?