

Guiding Your Child to Solve Their Own Problems

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As a parenting facilitator, I teach parents to use a process that guides their child to solve their own problems. Using the five steps listed below, the parent begins with understanding and empathy, but then hands the problem back to the child while communicating the message that they are capable. Of course, the younger the child, the more support they may need in coming up with possible solutions. It is important to offer the support that is needed to enable your child to feel empowered and accomplished.

Using this process, even poor choices that the child makes can be part of the learning experience. By first expressing empathy and keeping our relationship intact, the mistake or the poor choice is the “problem.” Even unsuccessful

attempts are learning opportunities. The road to responsibility and wisdom is paved with many “affordable” mistakes!

Affordable mistakes—your child regrets trading a favorite call with a friend or spending all of their allowance on a toy that disappoints—are ones that have only a short-term impact. They can learn from these mistakes if we resist the urge to rescue them and we respond with empathy—not “I told you so.” The goal is that the child can learn through the outcome of the choices they make and avoid ones with a higher price tag in their future.

There are five steps to solving their own problems:

Step One: Empathy first!

“How sad.”

“I bet that hurts.”

“I know it is tough to figure this one out.”

Step Two: Then, send the “Power Message.”

“What might you do to try to fix this?”

“What ideas come to mind?”

“If anyone can figure this out, I know you can.”

Step Three: Offer choices.

“Would you like to hear what other kids have tried?”

At this point, offer a variety of choices that range from less desirable to good. It’s usually best to start out with the less desirable choices, as an upset child may reject the first ones offered. Each time a choice is offered, go on to step four, helping the child to state the consequence in their own words. This means that you will be going back and forth between steps three and four.

Step Four: Have the child state their choice.

“And how will that work?”

“Do you think that is doable?”

Step Five Give Permission for the child to solve the problem or not

“Good luck. I hope it works out. Let me know if you need some help from me.”

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Don't be overly worried about the outcome. If your child makes a poor choice, they will have the opportunity to do more processing and learning and you can be the one to support them through the process.

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