Problem Solving

When your child can problem-solve, he/she can respond to challenges and create solutions. Learning to solve problems makes your child feel more capable, independent, and safe at home, in school, and in the community. Problem solving-skills provide the basis for all learning and allow children to have control over their lives. Families play an important role in supporting a child’s problem-solving skills. Creating and allowing time for your child or youth to develop problem-solving skills helps make him/her better prepared to deal with challenges throughout life.

What Research Tells Us:

Children of all ages, abilities, and intellectual levels can learn problem-solving skills.

Children who are taught problem-solving skills are able to set their own goals and reach them.

Teaching problem-solving skills allows children to be more active learners in control of their behavior.

Children need opportunities to practice setting their own goals, taking action, keeping track of their progress, and deciding if their solutions worked.

When teaching problem-solving skills it is best to start with an activity that will naturally get your child’s attention and that he/she will enjoy.

What You Can Do:

♦ In the early years: Make pictures to show your child the steps you go through to solve every day problems. This will help him/her to solve problems on their own. Use the I do, We do, You do approach. Show the child, do with the child, and have the child do on his/her own with your support. Example: When your child is finished playing, ask “How can we make the toys fit in the toy box?”

♦ During the middle years: Read stories and talk about problems and solutions. As needed, use pictures to teach how to solve a problem in a specific situation and/or have your child draw out, point, or say the steps of a problem-solving plan.

Example: Your child tells you he is having a problem with a student at lunch, ask “What can you do when a student hassles you in the cafeteria?”

♦ In the teen years: Help youth learn new routines, places, schedules, and rules by giving them opportunities to visit places in advance and learn the new surroundings. Examples: “What bus route will you take to get from school to your new job?”