

OCTOBER 2022

TIMELY TOPICS

JORDAN CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER



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PARENT CLASSES:

No Classes in October.

Next classes will meet in November. See next month's newsletter for topics and registration information.

PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

As adults, we have to figure out hundreds of small and larger issues every day. Sometimes it's something quick like setting out the meat you need to thaw for tomorrow's dinner or deciding which kid needs to be dropped off at school first. Sometimes you have a much larger task like planning a birthday party. You need to make all of the decisions about presents, food, people to invite, and where and when it will happen.

Our kids start to develop their problem skills early in life. Babies figure out how to move their bodies to get to their favorite toy. Toddlers learn if they can't see mom they need to look in other rooms for her. Preschoolers learn when someone else has their favorite toy they either need to find something else to do or ask for a turn.

Developing problem solving skills early sets up your child to be more independent, resilient, and confident. Learning how to problem solve increases their skills in all areas of development. For instance, cognition and play skills are strengthened when kids figure out how to attend to toys and activities for longer amounts of time. Problem solving skills help young children improve their eating skills by learning how to hold their utensils and how to tip back their cup enough to get a drink but not dump it all over their shirt. Motor skills become more developed as kids figure out how to move their bodies to climb up the slide or navigate other playground equipment.

Learning how to problem solve is a lifelong skill. Caregivers can help their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers develop these skills early on.

Tips for Caregivers

Caregivers can do a lot throughout the day to develop their child's problem solving skills. Here are a few tips on how to do that.

1

Model / Think Out Loud

Young children learn by watching us. We can model appropriate problem solving skills to teach. For instance, if you spill your drink, you can say "Uh oh, how should I clean this up?" If your child understands your question, they may be able to answer by getting a towel or pointing to the towels. If your child is younger, you can prompt them by saying, "I need a towel. There's one!"

You can also model the appropriate emotional response. For instance, if something spills, show your child that you can remain calm about the spill because there is an easy solution.

2

Provide options.

Our young kids often do not yet have the experience to know how to problem solve or the vocabulary to express what they need. You can provide a couple of options for them that are acceptable to you and let them decide on the solution. For instance, if your child's favorite snack is gone, you can say, "Oh no. All the fruit snacks are gone. But, we can have pretzels or applesauce instead." If your child is playing with blocks and they fall down, you can say, "They fell down. Should we fix it or be done?"

3

Break big tasks into smaller steps.

This strategy lets your child be successful at the parts they can do themselves. It also teaches them to think about what to do next. For instance, if you're teaching them to wash their hands, talk about the first step. "We need your stool so you can reach." Once your child has done the first step, ask "What's next?" or "How do we turn on the water?"

Go step by step if needed. Provide only as much help as your child needs to complete each step.

4

Wait -- let your child struggle a little.

We often jump in to offer help without letting our child try first. If we know they can't get their shoes on by themselves, we often just do it for them right away. If your child is working on a puzzle, we quickly point to the correct spot or move it into the correct position for them.

It is often hard for us to watch our child struggle -- either because we're short on time and need to get it done fast or because we don't want to see them sad or frustrated. However, if we wait and give our kids a chance to try on their own, we may be surprised about how much they can do and they will feel excited and confident they were able to do it (at least part of the way).

Activities to Encourage Problem Solving

Whatever age your child is, you can teach them problem solving skills through daily activities and play.

Infants

- Show your baby toys and objects in a variety of colors, shapes, and textures.
- Help your baby reach for and touch toys. You can also place the items to the baby's left and right side as well as above them to encourage them to move their body in different ways to reach the toy.
- Cause and effect toys teach babies to do a repeated action. Babies learn that if they bang on a toy, music plays or lights come on.
- Peek-a-boo and hiding toys under a blanket encourages babies to move the blanket or hands to find what they want.



Toddlers

- Hide and seek with toys and objects. Hide toys under a blanket or pillow and see if your child will find it.
- Begin introducing nesting toys, blocks, puzzles, and drawing materials. Model how to use these items.
- Place items your child wants in clear containers (snacks, puzzle pieces, cars) to encourage your toddler to open it themselves or ask for help.
- Give them their sippy cup or snack bowl but "forget" to put their drink or snack in so he'll have to hand it back to you or communicate that your forgot their snack.
- During dressing, put their sock on their hand or another silly situation. Wait for your child to let you know that's wrong and to hold out their foot.



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2-3 Year Olds

- Use every day routines to teach problem solving. For instance, during bath time you can start getting your child ready, but then playfully sabotage the situation. You might get all of their clothes off except their shirt and they have to communicate that you still need to do this. Once they're ready for the tub, you can hold up your hands in a "now what?" gesture. See if they will show you what to do next by pointing, reaching, signing or saying water, bubbles, toy, etc.
- Provide toys that require more than one step. For instance, you have to set up all of the bowling pins and then roll the ball to knock them down.
- Start introducing categories -- animals, food, vehicles -- by talking about and grouping items that are the same.
- Provide more independence on the playground. Instead of helping right away, stand close by but let them try to figure out how to climb up the ladder or go across the bridge on their own.



Preschoolers

- Use simple "recipes" to teach problem solving. For instance, if your child wants a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, talk through the process and have them help. For instance, ask questions such as: Where's the peanut butter? The lid is stuck - what do I do? Should I use a fork or knife to spread the jelly?
- Read stories that introduce a problem and then show ways to solve it.
- Before getting dressed in the morning, look outside at the weather with your child. You can say, "Brrrrr...it's really cold today. What should we wear?" You could also say, "It's sunny and hot. Do you need a coat today?"
- Teach emotion words. Trying new things can be difficult and frustrating. Name the emotion they are expressing and then offer a solution or two to help them.





Free Classes for Parents!

Our Next Set of Classes Will Be On: November 30th.

In the meantime, check out this website! It includes a lot of topics on early childhood (motor skills, listening, sensory play, social skills, cognitive, etc). There are a lot of activities for toddlers and preschoolers.

- **Empowered Parents**
- **<https://empoweredparents.co/>**

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