

Problem Solving

Problem solving is a technique used frequently by Occupational Therapists to help your child be as independent as possible in everyday activities. This is something that can also be done at home. This factsheet aims to give you strategies and ideas on how to promote problem solving with your child.

Why is Problem Solving Important?

“Remember that each time one prematurely teaches a child something that he could have discovered himself, that child is kept from inventing it and consequently from understanding it completely”

Children learn to problem solve from a young age and this informs every stage of their development. For example; many toddlers learning to walk will fall over multiple times before problem solving how to stay upright on their feet. Problem solving is an important skill to maintain growing up into adult life. When a child is able to problem solve an activity they find difficult, they are more likely to retain this skill than if an adult tells them what to do.

Strategies

One effective problem solving strategy is ‘**Goal, Plan, Do, Check**’.

This strategy focuses on guiding children to problem solve and find their own solutions to what they want to do, which can then be transferred to other daily activities they find difficult to complete. Problem solving is about the process, not the result and helps to build initiation, organisation, planning, self-monitoring and self-correction. The aim is for the child to find strategies that can then be generalised to other goals and problems.

Goal: Encourage your child to set a goal they would like to achieve. It's important that the goal set by the child is meaningful to them to ensure that they are then motivated to learn the problem solving techniques. Examples of goals could be;

- To make my handwriting neater so it is easier to read
- To be able to swim without aids
- To be able to score a goal in football
- To be able to put together a Lego set

Plan: The child then needs to be able to make a plan that works towards their chosen goal. Encourage the child to verbalise their plan aloud and work on one section of the task at a time. Examples of plans could include;

- To move my chair in closer to the table when writing
- To kick my arms and legs in and out like a frog
- To aim my body towards the goal when kicking the ball
- To read the instructions step by step and gather the pieces needed

Do: Carry out the plan.

Check: Ask the child to check if their plan has worked. If it has, build upon this and move on to the next section of the goal. If the child's plan has not worked encourage them to change their plan and try again. Continue this process until they have achieved their goal.

When your child finds it difficult to come up with a new plan, you could use some of the following questions to help guide them:

- What could you change about your plan?
- Could you change how you are positioning your body?
- Could you change something about the task?
- This is how I would do it (demonstrate), what is different about how you do it?
- Is your plan working?
- What else could you do differently?

Remember:

It is important to support any plans your child comes up with, even if this means they fail a few times before finding the technique that works. We all find our own way of completing activities and just because their plan may not look typical, does not mean it will not work. Give your child the opportunity to practise plans and find out what works best for them. For example, a child may want to practise using cutlery in opposite hands to see if they are more successful doing it this way.

Contact details

Children's Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

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We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk

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