

Problem Solving Tips

1. When it comes to working through some of the issues regarding parenting your children, you should try your best to use some of these problem solving steps.
 - a. *First, some problems can't be solved; also, no relationship is perfect, so lower your expectations. If you and your co-parent can come up with a solution, perfect!*
 - i. **Recognize your own emotional process, state, and reactions!**
 1. Becoming aware of yourself is the first step!
 - b. **Stay on task; stick to topic of discussion**
 - i. Push through on one topic at a time. If you can't agree on something, move on to a new item on the agenda.
 - c. **Don't become historical**
 - i. Many parents stockpile issues to address all at the same time because they have bitten their tongue for so long. Keep things in the present and follow the rule "That was then, what do I want for my children in the future?"
 - d. **Never communicate with your Co-parent in anger**
 - i. This is a tough rule to follow...because if things were going well, you wouldn't be needing to communicate to solve a problem.
 - e. **Manage the negatives – don't respond in kind**
 - i. Filter through anything that is not related to the well-being of your child. Dwell only on the things that pertain to this too; ignore the stuff that does not need your response!
 - f. **Wait to respond (texts, calls, emails, etc.)!**
 - i. There is no rule that you have to immediately respond to a text message or return a call if you missed it. Don't wait for five days either...
 - ii. Find healthy ways to clear your mind (not ignoring issues either or blocking them by drinking) and then come back to the issue
 - g. **Take a "time out" (*a basic skill of co-parenting)**
 - i. Like a coach: Stop, regroup, determine what needs to happen, create a plan
 - ii. Better to let each other calm down than risk blowing up and making things worse for children
 - iii. Unlike in sports, most relationship time outs require at least 30 minutes to calm down and allow the stress hormones to get out of your system. If you come back together too soon your body will be primed to fight.
 - iv. Attend to danger signs of communication: withdrawing, making negative interpretations, invalidating, etc.
 - v. Meditate, pray, etc.
 - vi. Take deep breaths; calm heart rate down
 - vii. Write things down; Journal
 - h. **Rule: Agree to never fight in front of the children!**
 - i. This should be your very first rule!
 - i. **Find a mediator who can help you work things out**
 - i. Call a friend and vent; but set stage for turning the venting into something productive rather than them simply validating your position and getting you more stuck! Find friends who won't simply validate your side but who will truthfully give you their opinion. Be open to hearing it, good or bad.

1. Four Steps of Problem Solving (PREP):

a. Agenda Setting

- i. Decide on which specific part of the problem to work on
- ii. Plan to work on other areas at another time
- iii. *What do we want to do differently about ____ this week?*

b. Brainstorming

- i. Come up with as many solutions as you can
- ii. Try for specific positive suggestions
- iii. Do NOT criticize someones ideas
- iv. Get creative
- v. Write ideas down

c. Agreement

- i. Discuss pros and cons of each potential solution
- ii. Work toward creating a plan that you both can agree to give a try
- iii. ****A "Good Solution"**
 1. Is good for the child
 2. Meets his needs
 3. Meets her needs
 4. Is good for the co-parenting relationship
 - a. ****each person does not have to sacrifice the same though**
 - b. Each person also does not have to move the same amount of distance from their original position

d. Follow-up

- i. Agree on a time limit for trying your solution
 1. Make an appointment to revisit tried solution
 2. Be purposeful in making this happen
- ii. Agree to try different ideas
- iii. Quit trying to create a "win" for self only

Anger Management Tips

- From “When Anger Hurts” by McKay, Rogers, & McKay (2003)

1. **Commit to act calmly**

- a. Be purposeful and proactive, not reactive!

2. **If you become reactive, Stop what you are doing**

- a. You are better off stopping and not solving a problem than doing damage and saying something that you will regret later or is not productive now

3. **Watch what you say to yourself**

- a. Talk less and listen more. Know that what you mean and what you say can be two different things. Your listener has a filter too, so attend to that as well.
- b. Self-talk can either keep you calm or feed the flames of angry rage. You can be proactive in talking yourself out of having to react or you can allow your defensiveness and frustration override what you end up doing.
 - iv. Do say things to self like “I can do something different this time.”
- c. Don’t review the events that led up to the emotions
- d. Act the opposite of the way you are feeling

4. **Keep track of failures and successes (your own process)**

- a. Failures and successes. Monitor the times and situations where things don’t go as you had planned. Plan to do things differently next time and celebrate when things go successfully.
- b. Many people really struggle understanding themselves and knowing how to take responsibility for their actions. Becoming more aware of yourself and aware of how you relate with others can assist with responsibility taking.
- c. Combat trigger thoughts. Learn what “sets you off” and ask yourself if this is an accurate picture of what is really happening or if some other thing could be causing it. Aim to stop these automatic thoughts from changing how you feel and react.
- d. Check “fairness” issues (entitlement). Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Make sure that your actions are treating others fairly in the way you would “want” to be treated—even if they aren’t treating you that way. Reacting negatively leaves both parties in a lose-lose situation even if it feels like reacting helps you “win”.

5. **Avoid blaming**

- a. This will not help move the conversation anywhere!
- b. Realize what you can control versus what you can’t
- c. But be boundaried where needed!
- d. Win-Win means that you must win as well.
- e.

6. **Avoid black or white (either or) thinking**

- a. This goes back to the need to avoid terms like always/never
- b. Find a way to be more flexible than you used to be...
- c. Think of reasons why the person may be justified in doing or saying what they did.
- d. Ask, “What might I have done for them to react in this way?” Then do something different to see if they respond differently.

7. **Get help if needed**

- a. Someone who will keep you in check rather than let you rant