

## Checklist for Facilitating Social Problem Solving with Preschoolers

*Teachers may want to introduce the problem solving process during group time with preschool-age or older children so that they will have an initial idea of what to expect. However, the children will actually learn to problem solve through many months of facilitated experiences. Teachers who will do the facilitating need to learn the basic components so that they can guide the children through these successful problem solving experiences.*

Problem solving may be initiated by a child who perceives a problem with another child and comes to you for help, or problem solving may be initiated by you in response to a conflict between children where an emotional outburst is signaling a reason to intervene.

Problem solving can be productive whether it is between a child and yourself, two or more children, or two or more groups of children.

Please fill out the checklist below as you observe or facilitate problem solving practice.

\_\_\_ **Step in** to the conflict. If one party has asked you for help, follow him or her to talk with the other party. Participation by the other party is required at this point.

\_\_\_ **Provide comfort** to those children who need it. Show all children that your highest priority is emotional and physical safety for all, and that you truly care about each child. Provide an idea, such as taking deep breathes, to help children calm down.

\_\_\_ **Sit down together.** Ask all children involved in the conflict to sit down or gather together to talk, and sit down with them. Placing an arm around each party can help.

\_\_\_ Take possession of any **disputed objects** or objects that are distracting a child from the conversation.

\_\_\_ **Participation** is required, unless one child gives up on a claim for a turn with a disputed object.

\_\_\_ **Listen for,** and help each child identify, his or her own **feelings**, and the **reasons** for them.

\_\_\_ Help **each party** to hear and understand the **feelings the other party** and what the **reasons** are for those feelings, as near as the children can explain. Avoid leaving one party out just because you think that one is at fault.

\_\_\_ If you think there are **additional or other reasons** for a child's feelings, explain and **ask the child** if s/he would agree or not. Perhaps a child is more scared than hurt, for example.

(continued)

\_\_\_ **Define the problem** in simple terms children can understand. Check with the children to make sure you are accurately stating the problem from each party's perspective.

Look for possible underlying or **hidden problems** that have not been identified by the children and if you see one, bring it up as a possibility, checking with the children.

\_\_\_ **Help the children brainstorm** possible solutions. Ask, "*What can we do so we can all be happy?*" Ask this again several times during the brainstorming to keep children focused.

\_\_\_ At first you will need to help the children begin to think of these. As they become more experienced with successful problem solving, they will get better and better at thinking of alternative solutions.

\_\_\_ Help by suggesting 3 or more possible solutions, avoiding suggesting your favorite solutions or ones that are commonly used in the classroom. Make at least one of suggestion outlandish or fantastical. Help children **think outside the box**. Keep asking them for solutions and thinking of more yourself until you have hit on one the children obviously like.

\_\_\_ Come up with a number of solutions before you consider each one.

\_\_\_ **Consider the solutions** that have been suggested. If one child likes a solution, check with the other child to see if it is acceptable to him or her. Discard all proposed solutions that are not acceptable to one or more parties.

\_\_\_ **You have veto power as well** when a solution is not safe, breaks the class rules, or not one you can live with, but keep an open mind. Avoid rejecting solutions just because you don't think they are fair to all parties. If all the parties like a solution, it is fair enough.

\_\_\_ Generate more solutions if none of the first set is acceptable to all.

\_\_\_ **Decide on a solution to try.** Check to make sure that each party thinks he/she/they could be happy with the solution. Let go and have the children give it a try on their own.

\_\_\_ **Check later and review.** Check by observing and asking the children if the solution worked. If it didn't work, help the children brainstorm solutions over again until they find another one they think will work. If the solution worked, remind the children of some of the details about how they problem solved and were successful at working out a solution. Congratulate them (and yourself).

