

One Page Resource: Problem Solving with 3-year-olds

Children don't have a lot of experience solving problems independently, so their toolbox isn't particularly well stocked; with practice and support, their inventory grows.

(Young Children, September 2011)



3-year-olds exhibit their emerging problem-solving skills by:

- Demonstrating the ability to interact with an increasing number of children. EI #20.1 (Plays and Interacts)
- Developing negotiation skills with other children. EI #20.2 (Social Problem Solving)
- Beginning to use words in social situations with peers. EI #6.1 (Conversational Ability)
- Participating positively in activities with more than one other child. EI #20.1 (Plays and Interacts)

(NM Early Learning Guidelines Birth-K, 2014)

Creating a warm and nurturing environment in preschool not only helps children form trusting relationships with others but also promotes learning in all areas. Surrounded by a positive and supportive classroom climate, children are likely to become engaged and motivated learners. (HighScope, 2015)

Tips for fostering Social Problem Solving in the classroom:

1. **Know and respect each child as an individual**-warmly welcome children to the classroom and address each child by name.
2. **Show interest in the children and their activities**-Actively engage with children at their eye level. Enter children's play and participate fully by following their lead instead of directing it.
3. **Speak courteously**-Be patient and polite when speaking to children. Allow children to speak without interruption. Avoid labeling children such as mean, bad or even nice.
4. **Ask a variety of questions**-Pose questions that encourage children to think. Open ended questions invite more than a one or two-word answer. Avoid asking rhetorical questions or questions for which no real answer is expected or desired such as "Do you want to miss going outside today so that you can stay in and clean up these toys?"
5. **Use appropriate praise to encourage children**-Appropriate praise is sincere, constructive and encouraging such as "Sometimes juice spills. That's ok, we can clean it up and pour some more." Never praise a child in an attempt to motivate behavior in others such as "I wish everyone was as good a helper cleaning up as Amari."
6. **State expectations clearly**-Make positive statements in ways that are specific and clear. Avoid vague statements such as "Be nice" or "Be friendly". Instead, tell children explicitly what to do, using clear, age appropriate vocabulary. For example give a child a script "Ava, tell Amanda, 'You can ride the trike when I am finished', rather than simply instructing the child to "Use your words."
7. **Respect children's abilities**-Allow children to do things for themselves to develop a sense of autonomy and independence.
8. **Allow children to learn from their actions**-Young children learn social information by being allowed to experience the negative-as well as positive-consequences of their own actions . For example, when a child does not share materials with a peer, the natural consequence is that the peer will choose to play with someone else. Allow for natural consequences whenever the child's behavior will not result in harm to themselves or others.
9. **Give children choices**- Present children with authentic choices and allow them to make decisions for themselves. Offer only choices that you can and will allow.
10. **Include and welcome families**- Family members should feel included and welcomed. Communicate with family members regularly whether face to face, through written notes, or through other methods. Acknowledge and discuss cultural differences to child guidance philosophies.

(NAEYC, 2012)