



## The Power of Collaborative Problem Solving with Your Kids

As parents, we want our children to grow up to be responsible, thoughtful, and cooperative members of society. An effective way to nurture these qualities in them is to embrace a collaborative problem solving approach in our parenting. By making it a habit to include our kids in discussions, decision-making, and finding solutions to problems, we are setting them up for success in school, their careers, and relationships.

### **What is Collaborative Problem Solving?**

Collaborative problem solving involves two or more people working together to find a mutually agreeable solution to a shared problem or challenge. Unlike authoritarian parenting where the parent makes unilateral rules and decisions, collaborative parenting values the child's perspective, empowers them to think critically, and promotes open communication and compromise.

Some key principles of collaborative problem solving with kids include:

- Inviting input: Asking your child to share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings is crucial. Make it clear you want their contribution.
- Active listening: When your child explains their viewpoint, listen attentively without interrupting. Make sure you understand them before responding.
- Considering all perspectives: Be open to seeing the issue from your child's position. Don't reject their ideas outright. Blend their input with your own.
- Compromise: The solution should address the interests of both sides as much as possible. Be flexible and creative.
- Shared decision-making: Come to a joint agreement on the best way forward, so everyone feels heard and included.
- Teamwork: Work together cooperatively with your child rather than imposing rules. Maintain a collaborative spirit.
- Respect: Value your child's contribution. Don't belittle their ideas even if you disagree.

## Why Take a Collaborative Approach?

Here are some of the prime benefits of embracing collaborative problem solving with your kids:

- Teaches critical thinking: By including kids in solution finding, you encourage analytical and strategic thinking as they learn to weigh options and perspectives.
- Fosters communication skills: Listening, expressing ideas, and negotiating are exercised during collaborative discussions.
- Builds conflict resolution abilities: Kids learn to compromise and find win-win situations rather than needing to dominate.
- Empowers kids: Collaborative parenting respects kids' input and builds self-confidence and independence.

- Strengthens relationships: Working together brings you closer and builds trust between parent and child.
- Develops responsibility: Kids feel accountable for agreements they help make and learn to consider others' needs.
- Promotes creativity: More minds expanding on ideas leads to more creative solutions.

## How to Use Collaborative Problem Solving

Here are some tips to effectively use the collaborative problem solving approach day-to-day with your kids:

- Invite participation: When issues arise, ask your child to sit down together to talk it through. Say “I need your help to figure this out.”
- Define the problem: Discuss the challenge at hand and allow each side to explain their perspective without interruption.
- Brainstorm options: Have your child suggest solutions and contribute their own ideas without judgment.
- Discuss pros and cons: Weigh the upsides and downsides of each proposed solution. Blend your child’s ideas with your own.
- Reach a decision: Come to a joint agreement on the best way forward. Make sure both feel heard.
- Follow through: Stick to the plan and have your child help implement the solution. Review how it went.
- Use “I” statements: To avoid confrontation, frame suggestions with “I” instead of “you,” e.g. “I’m worried about...” vs “You did...”
- Remain patient: Your child is still learning these skills. The process may take time at first.
- Offer encouragement: Compliment your child when they make an effort to think collaboratively.
- Be a role model: Practice active listening, compromise, and teamwork yourself. Kids emulate what you do.

## When to Use Collaborative Problem Solving

Collaborative problem solving is a helpful approach in many common parenting challenges:

- ▶ Chores and responsibilities: Have your child help set expectations and routines.
- ▶ Rules and discipline: Discuss consequences and boundaries together.
- ▶ School and homework: Work through academic struggles as a team.
- ▶ Sibling conflicts: Have kids brainstorm solutions rather than stepping in.
- ▶ Money and allowance: Involve your child in budgeting and spending decisions.
- ▶ Bedtime problems: Ask your child's input on a reasonable lights-out time.
- ▶ Diet and nutrition: Plan healthy meals collaboratively. Grocery shop together.
- ▶ Screen time: Agree on technology limits and schedules.

Practicing collaborative problem solving from an early age nurtures critical thinking, communication, conflict resolution, and other vital life skills in children. They will reap the rewards as they grow into collaborative teenagers and adults. While it requires patience as kids learn, it's a hugely rewarding parenting approach.