Solving problems

Life can chuck all sorts of stuff at us, and effective problem-solving skills can mean the difference between being able to cope and feeling completely overwhelmed.

By learning to negotiate solutions to everyday problems and make decisions for themselves, your child will gradually become more **independent and responsible**. It also helps them feel confident and good about themselves, which is an important part of mental health and wellbeing.

You can support this process by practicing with your child, giving them space to figure things out themselves, and helping them reflect on what works and why.

A strategy to try

This strategy works best when your child is feeling calm and relaxed. If they're very anxious or angry, help them to calm down first (quiet time, take some deep breaths) or leave problem-solving for another day when they are feeling calmer.

1. Identify the problem

Kids don't always have the words to tell you how they feel or know exactly what the problem is. Finding a quiet space where they feel comfortable and relaxed may help them to start talking about it. Remember to step back and not jump in to solve the problem.

2. Find solutions and try them out

Brainstorming two or three solutions is a good place to start – any more can be overwhelming. You can encourage their thinking with questions like "what do you think you/we could do?" With practice and support from others, they will gradually be able to come up with more of their own solutions. If they get stuck, you may need to make some suggestions in the beginning.

3. Check in: how did it go?

Once you have both identified some options, you can decide together which one to try first. Work out a plan for how they will try out their solution.

Do they need support from you, another child or a teacher? When will they get a chance to try it out – at home or in the playground? Once your child has tried the solution, check in with them as soon as possible. Did it work? If not, why not? What can they try next?

Remember to give them lots of support and encouragement if the solution didn't work out. Sometimes we have the right solution, but need to practise it many times. Other times, we may need to return to step one to see if we correctly identified the issue.

Other ways you can help

- **Model your own problem solving.** Next time a problem arises (like running late, feeling stressed, losing your car keys) talk through the problem and solution out loud. This will help to show your child that everyone has problems and that we can work through them by coming up with different solutions.
- **Encourage your child to find support people.** These could be family members, friends or teachers they can turn to when they've got a problem. As well as helping with the immediate problem, this shows your child they can share their worries and reach out for support when they need it.