

GUIDELINES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Begin by stating saying something positive. Give more information. Don't accuse. For example, say something positive about the other person (everybody has strengths). Talk about your hopes for a good outcome – and getting things get resolved. Don't take back the positive statement with a lot of exceptions. ***"I know you want to be a good father, and I want that for our son"*** should not be followed directly with ***"even though you never act that way,"*** for example.

Describe the problem as you see it. Don't be negative and blaming. Instead, talk about an example of when something happened, or was said, that upset you. "When were at the park, you... (said or did something) and I felt (hurt, angry, not listened to...)"

We all see problems differently, at times. Sometimes, it takes awhile for the person to see your point of view. Keep trying, give more examples, so the person can "see" what you mean!

No abrupt endings. Don't say, "I'm leaving," "I give up," you will end the argument and the problem will still be there.

No threats, physical or emotional. Physical emotional threats and actions are never appropriate.

Never say never. Don't exaggerate. Don't say, "You're ALWAYS late" when that person has been late just a few times. In general, avoid using words like "always" or "never."

No sulking or pouting once the argument is over. If you still have feelings left over but you've had enough talking for one day, acknowledge them and suggest another time to address them.

Give it more time. Sometimes we can't solve the problem right away. Don't give up, hang up, stomp out, or just walk away. Plan another time to keep talking and keep solving the problem.

No name calling. Remember – it's the person's actions you're upset about, not the person.

No mind reading. Don't say things like, "you did this just to hurt me." Instead, listen and ask. Ask the other person what they meant. Ask them to explain more

Deal with one problem at a time. Don't bring up everything at once – that can get very confusing.

Stay on one topic until is it resolved. If you can solve one problem, then you feel like you can solve the next problem.

Try to see the problem from the other person's point of view. Ask questions that help you get more information. That way, you may be able to clear up misunderstandings and focus on real concerns.

No interrupting. Take turns presenting both sides of the argument and be courteous enough to let the other person finish.

No insults. Insults hurt people and they stop listening to you. Once the insults start, both people start to lose

No ridiculing. The other person is not "crazy" just because they don't see things the way you do. Find out more about what they think & why.

No whining, yelling or nagging. That's not communication, it's blackmail and intimidation and everyone just shuts down.

STATING THE PROBLEM

Say directly what you are thinking and feeling. Don't assume your feelings are obvious. Begin statements with "I feel..." rather than "you make me feel..." Take ownership and responsibility. These are your thoughts and feelings.

Be brief. After you have stated the problem, be quiet and wait for the other person to respond. Repeating the same thing over and over doesn't help.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

There is always more than one way to solve a problem. **There are solutions that work for everyone.** Be creative. If one idea doesn't work, try another possible solution.

Arrange a convenient time and place to talk. Don't wait for the "right moment." Pick a neutral, quiet place where you can talk together, away from your child. Keep your child safe and free from worry.

Take turns speaking. Let the other person finishing talking, before you respond. Really listen to what they are saying – there is always some truth in what people say.

Suggest a solution to the problem – think of how the solution fits the other person's needs as well. Respond with information. Think of how many ways the problem can be solved.

RESPONDING TO THE OTHER PERSON

Really listen! Try "walking in the other person's shoes" as they are speaking, so that you have an understanding of how the problem looks from their view. Understanding someone is difficult agreeing with them.


Let the other person know you really heard them. Use their words. ("So, what I heard you say.... So, you think my visits need to be supervised because you want the child to be safe.") Because you know the other person's reason, you can talk about how you too want the child to be safe, and how you can make sure that happens.

Saying you may be at fault takes a lot of courage, and also helps everyone solve the problem. Who knows? The other person may also say how he or she is at fault too.


Focus on the here and now. Digging up the past can keep you going around and around on old stuff. Talk about how to make the future different from the past.

Listen to the sound of your voice – are you loud? Is that helping? Keep your body relaxed. Frowning, gesturing, sighing says to the other person you are not really listening.

Get the facts. Maybe you are reacting to something the other person said but didn't mean how it sounded. Check it out. Ask the other person what they meant.



The chances of conflict at some point in every important relationship are very high. Arguments can be healthy, and can lead to constructive changes. But the fighting has to be fair. The following is a list of rules adapted from "Your Healthstyle", 1989.



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