

Problem Solving for Partners

Create an environment for productive problem solving:

1. Identify a place for discussing concerns (kitchen table, patio, living room couch, etc.)
2. You might create a recurring problem solving event to get in the habit of problem solving
3. Create ground rules for problem solving discussion, such as:
 - Agree to be willing to participate in problem solving as needed.
 - Affirm that the only person whose behavior you can control and whose choices you can make are your own.
 - Agree to not engage in criticizing, complaining, blaming, threatening, nagging, shaming, belittling, or any other form of external control.
 - Create a “safe word” for conveying the need to take a break from the conversation.
 - Keep emotional charge at a 3 or lower on a 1 – 10 scale. Take a break separate from each other when emotions escalate. Come back together to continue the conversation at an agreed upon time.
 - Listen with the intent to understand each other’s perspective. Don’t discount the other’s perspective if it is different from yours.
 - Don’t interrupt your partner when they are speaking. (You might try a talking stick for turn taking.)

Problem Solving Discussion

1. Identify the problem that you want to discuss with your partner. Be objective and specific. Do not proceed with a problem that is a complaint about the other person.
2. Check in with your emotions to see if you are in a calm state that will contribute to a productive discussion.
3. At a time when your partner is not busy or distracted, tell them that you would like to discuss the topic you identified and ask if it is a good time for them. If they say “yes”, proceed to present your topic. If they say “no”, ask them when they would be willing to circle back around to the conversation.
4. Once both parties have agreed to enter a problem solving session, convey your concern and invite your partner to share any thoughts they might have on the matter.
5. Avoid “you” statements that invite external control and distract from personal responsibility.
6. Stay focused on the specific problem solving topic.
7. After this sharing of perspectives, each person asks themselves, “What am I willing to do to support the relationship with regard to this concern?” Both parties need to have an action they are willing to take to productively address the concern.
8. Each party conveys to the other what they are willing to commit to doing for the relationship.

Choices That Support Relationships

- Listening
- Supporting
- Encouraging
- Accepting
- Trusting
- Respecting
- Negotiating

Choices That Harm Relationships

- Criticizing
- Complaining
- Blaming
- Nagging
- Threatening
- Shaming
- Holding grudges
- Belittling
- Aggression – verbal, emotional, physical

