

# PATHS<sup>®</sup> Parent/Caregiver Letter

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

Today during PATHS class, we started learning about a new way to solve problems. We will learn a lot more about problem solving over the year. Your child will learn to identify problems and to stop and think about different possible solutions before acting. We encourage children to think before doing anything, rather than doing the first thing that comes to mind. Your child will learn to evaluate his or her ideas by thinking about what might happen (the possible consequences). Then, he or she can pick the best idea, make a good plan and try it. The final step is to check how the solution works. Examples of problems we will work on include:

- having to share one ball at recess
- choosing between doing two different things
- dealing with aggression
- planning ahead for an activity.

I hope your child will discuss these ideas with you. You should be able to use this model to solve real problems at home. To help you solve problems with your child, we are enclosing some general information about problem solving and things that you can do at home. Please let us know if you have any questions or suggestions.

Sincerely,

# PATHS<sup>®</sup> Parent/Caregiver Handout

## Problem Solving

### Purpose

Problems are a normal part of everyday life. While it is important to learn how to avoid some problems, it is not always possible. Also, some problems are not the type that we want to avoid (such as how to plan for a fun vacation). Therefore, understanding how to solve problems well is very important for many aspects of daily living.



### Skills

Stopping and calming down is the first step in problem solving and one that is critical for being able to solve problems well. This is a step that your child has been working on already, and it will be reviewed and practiced again. Other skills that we will cover include how to identify a problem, identify feelings, think of different solutions and make a good plan. The entire problem-solving model your child will learn includes eleven basic steps. They are listed below:

#### PATHS Problem-Solving Model

1. STOP and CALM DOWN.
2. Identify the PROBLEM. (Collect lots of information.)
3. Identify FEELINGS (your own and other people's).
4. Decide on a GOAL.
5. Think of lots of SOLUTIONS.
6. Think about the CONSEQUENCES (what might happen).
7. Choose the BEST solution (evaluate all of the alternatives).
8. Make a good PLAN (think about the possible obstacles).
9. TRY your plan.
10. EVALUATE—how did you do?
11. If you need to, TRY AGAIN.

## What You Can Do at Home:

1. When your child has a problem, encourage him or her to calm down. (Sometimes you may also want to stop and calm down before you continue!) When everyone is feeling calmer, talk with your child about the problem:  
What is the problem?  
How does he or she feel?  
How do the other people feel?  
What kinds of things could he or she do to solve the problem?  
How does he or she plan to carry out the solution?  
Encourage your child to try the best solution.  
Ask him or her later how the solution worked.
2. Help your child anticipate potential problem situations before they occur. This will help your child get better at planning ahead. For example, if you are going on a long car trip, you could remind your child about feeling bored. How could he or she plan ahead for this possibility?
3. When possible, give your child several choices to pick from to solve a problem. This will increase your child's sense of competence and improve his or her decision-making skills.
4. Help your child consider the possible consequences of different solutions to a problem. This is especially important when possible solutions might result in even greater problems. ("If you hit your sister, what do you think might happen?")
5. Apply these ideas not only to problems between people, but also to school-related problems. For example, if your child is feeling frustrated with homework, have him or her stop and think. What could he or she do?
6. When you are having a problem, share your thinking by talking out loud. For example, you might say something like, "I'm having a problem because \_\_\_\_\_. I'm feeling \_\_\_\_\_. What could I do? I could \_\_\_\_\_ or I could \_\_\_\_\_ or I could \_\_\_\_\_. I think that \_\_\_\_\_ is the best idea, so I'll try that first."
7. Try to look for situations every day that lend themselves to problem solving. When you help your child solve problems, remember to offer your enthusiasm and support.