

Session Eight Problem Solving

One of the keys to successful family functioning is the family's ability to solve problems. All families have problems to deal with. However, research indicates that competent families solve problems as they arise; whereas, families that avoid problem-solving, or seem incapable of dealing with many of their problems, have more difficulties

When we decide that we do have a problem, and that the problem needs to be solved, we have achieved the most important step in resolving our conflicts. Many people ignore and suppress the fact that they have conflicts. It is too ugly and painful to bear and thus it is easier to deny it.

After this first step the partners must sit together to decide how the problem is going to be solved. The approach to this must be carried out with control and thought. Although not easy, this is vital, for a blotched attempt to resolve a conflict only makes it worse than it was. Problem-solving is a process skill that, like other skills, can be learned by the family. The following are some important steps in this process:

Problem Identification and Agreement

The first step in the problem-solving process is problem identification. Knowing the real problem or issue is half the battle. Although this may seem like a simple first step, many families have difficulty with it. Members tend to blame someone in the family for the problem. Instead, families need to define and agree on what type of problem they are dealing with.

Families may not identify the problem correctly and wonder why the issue wasn't resolved. A family member may feel his/her feelings were not heard or addressed and will not agree to go along with the solution until the hurt feelings are dealt with. Therefore, families must practice problem identification and agreement as the first step in problem-solving. Some times we are vague and general about the problem.

Creating Options and Alternatives

The second step in the problem-solving process is creating options. By brainstorming, the family generates options or alternatives surrounding the identified problem. What are some things the family or family members can do to resolve the issue? What are some of the possible solutions to the problem? Make a list of your alternatives. Encourage brainstorming without evaluating the ideas until many options are on the table. The creative options step leads to effective solutions to problems.

Evaluate Alternatives

Step three is evaluating the alternatives the family has generated. Ask what your family thinks of each of the options. Each family member should give his/her opinion of the idea. Eliminate the alternatives that the family is unwilling to try. The goal is to find an option that each family member will agree to consider. Next, decide whether or not the family has the resources to carry out the alternative.

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Choose a Solution

Once you have evaluated all the alternatives, decide as a family which idea or ideas you are willing to follow. This is known as the action plan. The action plan includes what the family is going to do, which family member is going to do it, and when it will be done. Once you have chosen a solution, write down a summary of it. This will help your family remember what the plan is supposed to do.

Putting the plan in writing enables everyone to better understand the plan and their part in resolving the problem or issue. A written plan is also helpful for monitoring your family's solution, which is the next step in the problem-solving process.

Monitoring the Solution

Monitoring the solution is critical to the problem-solving process. By monitoring the action plan, your family can keep track of their progress. This will remind you of what the family decided to do, which family member is going to do it, and when it will be done.

Evaluating the Success of the Plan

The final stage in the problem-solving process is to evaluate the success of the family action plan. This stage involves reviewing what happened in order to learn from the situation. The review helps the family to make adjustments to the plan and to evaluate what worked and what didn't.

Parents who problem solve will affect their children in a positive way. Relationships in the family will improve, and the children will be able to solve their own problems better.