THE SOLUTIONS SEARCH

Why get to problems before they can get to you?
All families have problems, but you can learn to deal constructively with the tensions, stresses, and hassles that make family life a challenge. This activity can help a family solve problems before the problems overwhelm the family.

What do we need?
- paper; pencils or pens; large piece of paper or newsprint; masking tape; kitchen table

How long will it take?
an hour or less

What do we do?
- Schedule a time when everyone involved in the problem can discuss it together. Or use this activity at a family meeting.
- Explain the rules:
  - It’s okay to disagree with others.
  - It’s not okay to criticize, insult, or make fun of people with whom you disagree.
- Select a leader to make sure participants follow the rules and have a chance to express their opinions. The leader can guide the group through this procedure:
  - Define the problem. Each person has a chance to describe the problem from his point of view. After everyone takes a turn, the group works together to write a definition of the problem.
  - Brainstorm solutions. Acknowledge every suggestion. Each person writes as many solutions as he can come up with. Participants take turns reading their lists aloud. The leader writes all of the solutions on a large piece of paper.
  - Discuss the possibilities. The group discusses all the suggested solutions. Family members choose three or four solutions that make the most sense and cross out the rest.

LIFE SKILL.
solving problems
—Vote. Family members vote for the solution they like best. A problem that affects the health and safety of family members may require a final decision by parents or adult caretakers. Implement the solution that the group agreed to follow. Try the solution for a specific period of time and meet again later to see how it's working.

Option. Using the solutions you have chosen above, write up a family contract to resolve a particular problem. Use the sample contract on page 113 as a guide. Encourage family members to be creative when putting their plan into words. Any format can be used as long as the contract is clear and everyone involved understands it.

**What happened?**

▼ Did family members really reach a decision or solution to a problem?
▼ What was the most difficult part of the activity to do?

**What did you learn?**

▼ What did you learn about problem solving?
▼ Was it difficult to agree on what the problem really was?

**Why was this activity important?**

▼ Was this way of approaching the problem helpful? Why or why not?
▼ Why is it important to know how to solve problems?
▼ What happens if you just ignore a problem and don’t do anything about it?

**What’s next?**

▼ How will you use this problem-solving method in the future?
▼ How do you think this method would work with other groups you belong to (clubs, religious or school groups, or groups of friends)?
▼ Think of a situation in which you might need a family contract and make one.
Sample Contract

Whereas I, __________________, and I, __________________, hereby agree

(name) (name)

that this situation exists: __________________________

To deal with this situation in a positive way, we hereby agree to this course of action:

I, __________________, agree to __________________________

__________________________

and I, __________________, agree to __________________________

__________________________

In the event that one of us does not comply with the above terms:

I, __________________, agree to __________________________

__________________________

and I, __________________, agree to __________________________

__________________________

This will show that the terms of this contract have been successfully completed:

__________________________

When this contract is successfully completed, we solemnly agree to this reward:

__________________________

__________________________

Date: ________________ Signed: __________________ (party of the first part)

Signed: __________________ (party of the second part)