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## READY for SCHOOL News: Problem Solving

Being able to solve problems independently is an essential READY for SCHOOL skill. As parents, it is easy (and almost always quicker) for us to try to solve problems for our children. However, giving our child enough uninterrupted time to solve a problem independently or with help is an important skill for success in school and life.

Certainly, there are lots of problems that, due to the busy nature of our lives, can't be solved at the moment or must be solved with help; but when there is the luxury of time, we should take advantage of it.

Some sample problems a preschooler might face:

- Juan has been asked to put his bike away, but he can't seem to get it to fit in the already full storage shed. He pushes other things around, but there still isn't enough space.
- Stephanie wants to make her own peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but the bread tears every time she tries to spread it.
- Darryl wants to buy a new toy he saw at the store, but his mom has told him he will have to save up the money himself.

How can we help preschoolers with these problems and maximize the learning experience?

**Understanding the problem:** Allowing plenty of time in the beginning to explore the problem is important. Don't rush in with our own solution too quickly.

**Planning how to solve it:** We can play a crucial role by asking open-ended vs. "yes-no" questions. Asking questions like "What could you do to make this work?" and "What other things can you think of?" will be important.

**Carrying out the plan:** Many children will want to move quickly to trying out solutions. Trial and error learning is useful. We can offer our children chances to try things and make mistakes. Our role will be to help our child reflect as he/she tries things. "Why do you think that didn't work?" "Do you have some other ideas?"

**Reviewing the solution:** We can assist the learning process by reflecting on what was tried and how he/she got to that solution. "Which worked better to spread the peanut butter, the plastic knife or the metal knife?" "Did you notice a difference between the white bread and the wheat bread?" It is equally important to reflect on both what didn't work and what did work. At the same time, don't ask too many questions. If your child is ready to move on to a new challenge, allow him or her to do that. The whole problem-solving process may just take a matter of minutes, or it could take quite a bit longer depending on the problem, your child's interest in the problem, and the time available.

Children also learn from watching adults problem-solve. We can model the process as we solve our own problems. "This ground is too hard to dig. I wonder what I could do to help get it softer?"

It is not always possible to take all the time needed for our children to solve simple problems, but when we do have that luxury, take full advantage of the opportunity.