

## **PROBLEM SOLVING TALK**

1) Agree on a time to discuss the problem. Pick a time when each person is rested and able to focus on the problem without feeling too emotionally overwhelmed or sensitive. Choose a time and place where there won't be any distractions or interruptions such as demands from children, visitors, and so forth. Give yourself enough time to discuss the problem fully without rushing or running out of time. If the discussion gets too "hot" and you are getting angry, it is OK to take a time out, but schedule a time to continue the discussion later in the day when you are both cooled down, or in a day or two. Avoiding a problem just leaves it to fester and increases anger and resentment.

2) Agree on what the problem is. Define the problem in a way that is solvable. For instance, a problem would not be "we have teenagers," since you can't solve the problem by getting rid of the teenagers. Also, the problem is never a person or someone's personality. Focus on specific behaviors that can be changed. Focus on only one problem at a time.

3) Each person should share their views or perceptions on the problem. The idea here is not to prove one person right or wrong, but to get as complete a description of the problem from several different perspectives as possible. Focus on hearing and understanding the other person's position. Even if you don't agree with their position, you should be able to understand their perspective well enough so that you can see how if you were in their place, you might feel the same way. Often if you can understand how the other person can feel and see things the way they do, and they know you understand, the problem is half solved. Even if you can't solve the problem and have to live with it, understanding your partner's perspective and being able to see it as valid can help you live with something you can't change.

4) Brain storm possible solutions to the problem. Don't judge or evaluate the ideas at this point, just focus on getting a number of ideas for solving the problem out on the table.

5) Discuss and evaluate the possible solutions you have come up with. Keep the discussion respectful, and even if a suggested solution won't work as it is, see if there is a way to change it so that it would work. Remember, this process isn't about winning. If you win and your partner loses, you have both lost, because you will have to live with an unhappy and possibly depressed partner. Look for compromises and be prepared to be flexible.

6) Agree on one or more solutions, and implement them. This is the action phase of problem solving. Be clear on who will do what, and when they will do it. Don't leave it ambiguous, or it won't get done. Agree on a time to discuss the problem again, and to evaluate how the solution is working.

7) Meet again in a week or two to discuss how the solution is working. If it is working well, commit to continuing what you are doing. If only part of it is working, then try to refine it and improve it so it works better. If none of it is working, then go back to Step 1 and start this process again.

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