TOOLBOX OF PARENTING SKILLS (TOPS)

Family Problem Solving

Family problem-solving involves negotiating issues and resolving problems between you and your child/teen. Your teen takes an active role in the problem-solving process which will help them when they face tough choices to make wise decisions. Adolescents can be included in making decisions about curfew hours, chores, routine responsibilities, sibling conflict, house rules, and acceptable hairstyles and clothing. While each family may have a different perspective about which issues are negotiable, it is important to make decisions about this before the issues come up.

Not only does this encourage positive communication between the two of you, but it also equips your teen with an approach to solving problems that he or she can use when faced with difficult situations in life. Expressing anger and frustration with your teen will only cause problems between you and your teen; therefore, to be effective, parents must control their emotions for family problem-solving to work. When parents yell, roll their eyes, or throw their hands up in frustration, these actions model for your teen the wrong way to deal with conflict.

There are four steps involved in family problem-solving.

Step 1 – Define the problem.
When people disagree on an issue, they’re likely to define the problem in different ways. Allow each member to define the problem from their perspective, using “I” statements. It’s okay to have different definitions of the problem. Focus on one problem at a time.

Step 2 – Generate possible solutions.
Family members take turns generating a variety of alternative solutions to the problem. Create 6 to 12 possible solutions, having 1 or 2 ideas that are acceptable to all. Use brainstorming techniques: (a) list as many possible solutions as you can; (b) don’t evaluate the ideas; (c) be creative, use humor to lighten mood; (d) list extreme solutions first, so you can see that your own ideas are actually less extreme then you might think (e.g., stay out all night or does not go out at all on weekends).

Step 3 – Evaluate each solution, and
Each family member answers: (a) Will it solve the problem? (b) Is it practical? (c) Do you like it? Second, rate it (+) you could live with it or (-) you do not like. Select an idea rated positively or negotiate a compromise.

Step 4 – Choose and monitor a solution to make sure it’s being done correctly and is working.
Establish clear-cut consequences for compliance or non-compliance. Try the solution for 1 to 2 weeks to determine if it is working. Evaluate the implementation of the plan. If necessary, cycle through the steps again.
Family Problem-solving Worksheet

Step 1: Define the Problem

Parent definition: ____________________________________________________________

Child definition: ____________________________________________________________

Do we agree on the problem? _____ Yes _____ No

Step 2: Generate Possible Solutions

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

4. ________________________________________________________________

5. ________________________________________________________________

6. ________________________________________________________________

Step 3: Evaluate Each Solution

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Step 4: Agree Upon, Do, and Monitor the Solution

Agreed Upon Solution: ______________________________________________________

Child will do: ____________________________________________________________

Parent will do: (specify any reminders that will be given)

Consequences for compliance and noncompliance:

Plan for monitoring the solution:

Date: ________ Parent’s Signature: __________________ Child’s Signature: ____________

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