

Asking 5 Questions to Increase Problem Solving as a Coaching Strategy

Problem solving is a very useful coaching strategy. Surprisingly, it is not used as frequently as many other strategies, even though caregivers identify it as very valuable to them. To increase our ability to embed problem solving in our coaching sessions, let's look at what, how, when/where/who, and why we should include it several times throughout the home visit. Then we can identify ways we will know when it is working!

Why?

Problem Solving is an important communication and critical thinking strategy used to gather information about what is and isn't working and why with the intention to build a strategy or solution individualized for the caregiver. It challenges us to think about multiple ideas that could be useful for the caregiver- not only what we usually do as EIs. Problem solving gives caregivers a voice to continue to explore their ideas and issues as the EI asks reflective questions, listens carefully, and encourages the caregiver to contribute to the solutions. Problem solving with a trusted EI is identified by caregivers as their preferred coaching strategy. It builds on their ideas, supports their decision making, sense of competence and confidence and facilitates generalization of targets, routines and strategies for caregivers.



What?

Problem solving is about more than problems; it is about ideas, thinking deeply about familiar or out of the box alternatives, identifying the best options and collaborating to develop a solution. It can be about expanding successes, e.g. where else can he pick up and put objects away? Or, trying another strategy that encourages more independence, e.g. what do you think will happen if you let him hold the cup? You can problem solve about the caregiver's role, e.g. what routines and activities occur after dad gets home from work that might be good opportunities for them to work together? Problem solving strategies can also be used to explore why something is not working, e.g. what would make bath time easier and maybe even fun for you and Cameron? Whenever you decide to try problem solving strategies be sure to be genuinely interested in the caregiver's ideas, be open to their solutions, and respect their decisions.

How?

We use the 4 steps, 1) define problem, 2) generate ideas, 3) evaluate, and 4) decide on solution described in "Facilitating a Problem Solving Approach for Families" handout to guide the process. It often starts with a reflection such as "how do you think hand washing went today" or "tell me about bath time." We start the exchange and listen, encouraging more ideas from the caregiver and sharing ours only to support the process. We clarify and ask the caregiver to reflect on the best options encouraging them to build on what works but also to try some new strategies or new routines to expand opportunities. We can also share information or resources as a starting place for problem solving.

When/Where/Who?

Problem solving fits within SS-OO-PP-RR! For example, as the caregiver shares updates, if something didn't work as planned, you may want to gather data and process alternatives. As you set the plan for the session, you may brainstorm on routines to add for practice. While you are in the routine, discuss how the child responded and what else the caregiver might do to expand responses. Encourage the caregiver to make several suggestions to provide alternatives that may be used between sessions. During review, exchange ideas on what to do if it doesn't work so a back-up plan is ready. Brainstorm who else can participate.

Is it working?

There are many ways you can measure problem solving as a coaching strategy. Caregivers will share what worked (and didn't) during their updates. You will hear about new routines and strategies they used. Caregivers will ask you to problem solve with them about what to do next or with other family members to increase participation. You will hear the caregiver telling you what works, what was tried and didn't, and how she solved the problem! You will hear and see the caregiver taking the lead and making decisions.