

Adult Problem Solving

Adult problem solving is really important to understand. In this article I will address how adults can do effective problem solving in relationships and in life in general.

Problem-solving for adults can seem more complicated than problem-solving for children but actually the key principles are the same. They are just applied to a more mature person, to more mature relationships and maybe more mature topics as well.

Although sometimes it's interesting the topics that adults have hard time problem solving. They really are the same types of topics as children.

The Six Steps to Problem-Solving for Any Relationship, and Any Age

1. Recognize There is a Problem.

The first step is to recognize that there is a problem. When you sense something is wrong (or when it is obvious), you have to do an assessment.

- What is happening?
- What's going on with the climate?

And usually this is when you know you have got a problem.

Let's do it for instance on a husband and wife relationship:

So all of a sudden there is tension in the air. All of a sudden you're not looking at each other when you are talking to each other anymore. You pass each other without looking in the eyes. You say the least amount of words possible.

That's obviously a passive aggressive way to handle a situation but once you find yourself here the key thing is to recognize the problem. And to not just recognize the problem with the other person but to recognize the problem with yourself. That's super important.

If you can, get to that place--where every time you have got a struggle in a relationship you actually look to yourself and say, "What do I need to change about me?" (That was a time when things really

changed for me with my relationship with my spouse especially.)

When I was annoyed with him I would go to God and I would say,

“Dear Heavenly Father I know that there is something I need to work on for myself in this situation. What is it that I need to see about me? What is it that I can fix about me? How can I help myself be better prepared for this relationship? How can I help myself love more?”

Usually when I was offended or I was having a hard time loving the person. I was feeling distant. I realized that in no way could anyone handle the situation unless I first addressed what was going on with me. So that is probably, in an adult situation, the first place to start just so you know.

So this also applies to situations with children or anybody. I mean you walk into a room and there is contention going on.

Okay there is a problem. Let's assess what's happening here. How did this start? What's going on? That's when you would do a group problem-solving and hopefully you've seen that before on the Aponte DVDs. On the Aponte DVDs there is a time when there are those two little children Ella and Abraham and they are sitting on the stairs and I'm talking with them and doing a group problem-solving with them.

That would be something you would do with children. Not all adults want to group problem solve with you just so you know. So sometimes the best thing you can do is look to yourself and figure out what's happening with you in the situation. Get that fixed and under control. Control your climate. Get yourself in the right place and then you can move on from there.

2. Get Calm

The second step is to make sure you are calm.

After I recognize that there's a problem, then I look at myself and I say:

- Where am I at?
- What do I think I can change about me?
- And the first thing that comes to my mind is, am I calm?

If I'm not calm, I can't change anything either about myself or anybody else. I've got to get myself calm.

Without calmness problems really can't be solved properly. A person can rationalize in an emotional state. They just keep rationalizing and rationalizing their behaviours and it's always going to be somebody else's fault if the emotions are still running the situation.

So if I'm not calm, I've got to get myself calm. I need to go and sit down and sing a song or go say a prayer. I need to go and put thoughts and ideas into my head that are going to be the most productive and the most helpful.

So getting yourself calm, is step number two and it's very important. If you want more information about calmness you can get the CD- The Power of Calm or sign up for the implementation course where the class is also offered.

3. Determine Your Role in the Situation

The third step is to determine your role in the situation. Sometimes your role in the situation does not allow you to really correct another person or it hasn't been determined that that's okay to correct the other person yet. In some cases, like in an employment situation, it might not be your job to correct the boss unless there's something going on immorally or something illegal that needs to be taken care of and addressed. That's when it would make sense to step in even though it's not necessarily your role to correct your employer.

It is important to consider your role. Your role in your employment, in other relationships, and especially in your family. Parents in a family have the role to lead children and correct them. That's what it means to train another person-- you really are duty bound to correct them. That's your job and you need to remember that.

In a husband and wife relationship technically you should still be able to correct each other. But that is usually only where the relationship is healthy. It's not going to work if the relationship is not healthy. Some couples establish rules ahead of time about how they'd like to be corrected. When a couple deliberately determines how they will correct each other as situations arise, it helps the

relationship to be stronger and healthier. It helps the couple to be more open and ready to accept correction from each other, which you really need to do. That's kind of why you have each other; it's to help each other along.

Let's say you're not in that kind of a relationship (yet) then you need to say:

- Is it really my role?
- Have I determined or does my spouse understand that it's my role to correct him?

If he doesn't or if I haven't, then instead of correcting my spouse, I need just pray for his heart to be softened and that's about all I can do unless the situation requires action.

It is important to remember that there are different levels of severity in situations. If your spouse is a little bit more short tempered with the kids, is nagging going to help? No it's not going to help, so you have to remember that's not a good approach to take. But if your spouse is doing something else, like touching the children in a way that could be harsh, then in that case that's when you cross over a moral or legal problem and you have got to bring it up to them. Still you want to do it prayerfully.

In fact, you know I just don't know how you can have a good relationship with someone and be able to correct someone and have them respect you, without having that spirit of love with you. So to me, prayer is essential because when I'm having a hard time, I pray that I will love that person, that I will feel love for that person when they're really being hard to love right then and you know to me that's a vital part of trying to heal a relationship. I would rather first seek that love for them and that always is your role, just to try and understand and love no matter what. So that's number three.

4. Make a Plan

The fourth step is to make a plan. This means that you start your situation with a SODAS exercise.

If you have not heard of SODAS before, SODAS are a problem solving exercise. You take a **SITUATION** and then think through at least three **OPTIONS**. Then you think through each option --three **DISADVANTAGES** and three **ADVANTAGES** for each, Review them all, and then come up with the best **SOLUTION**. (Often it is good to write them down so you can more easily review the SODAS to choose a

good solution.)

SODAS is a skill often taught to children, but adults who become skilled in this simple problem solving technique find it very useful. In fact, actually doing a SODAS might not be a bad idea.

You need to logically think through all your options. If you have a tendency to react emotionally when you're making your plan, then your plans probably aren't very good and doing SODAS could really help you.

I have had a parent contact me before and say, "Nicholeen, I love SODAS! We were trying to decide which washing machine to buy and we did a SODAS right in the store!" There are many stories like that. Adults recognize that doing a SODAS helps them make the most correct decision that they can.

At the very least, do a mental SODAS, so that you are looking at multiple options. It will help you stay away from a "It's not either this or this..." thinking. With SODAS there are at least three things that you can choose and hopefully at least two of them are productive options. And, of course, you can always have more than three options when you do a SODAS, but try to have at least three. That just seems to be the most common number that people pick.

So after you draft some of your options out or flesh them out in some way then you have to determine what action and what words would be best for you. Once you have determined that, then you pre-teach yourself if necessary.

Pre-teach means you might have to practice what you're going to do, before you actually do it. So what it looks like for me is:

I know there's a problem.

- Am I my calm?
- I think I need to go get calm.

I go into the room and I think to myself

- In this situation what role do I have?
- What have my spouse and I (or whomever I need to resolve this problem with) determined ahead of time to handle this kind of a situation?
- How can I fulfill my role here?

- I'm going to pray to love them because that for sure is part of my role and then I make a plan.

Now, I am in my room deciding

- What is it that I'm going to do?
- I think I'm going to say these words and
- I'm going to say it with this tone. Just like this
- and I am going to look him in the eyes and I plan it.
- And I might even plan exactly how my posture is going to be
- and then I can actually execute it.

There is a scene in *Pride and Prejudice* - the Keira Knightly version, where a man named Bingley wants to ask a woman, Jane, to marry him, and he gets scared and doesn't ask her when he could have. His fears and nerves kind of overcome him. Then Bingley's friend suggests that he try again, but first they practice what he is going to say and what he is going to do because, obviously, he did not get it right the first time he tried.

I love that scene. That's probably one of my very favorite scenes in the whole show. Every time I see it, I just smile real wide because I see he is pre-teaching himself! It is so important to pre-teach yourself what you want to do. Pre-teach yourself both for how you need to personally think about the problem and also for the action you need to take. I absolutely love that part of that making a plan is to pre-teach yourself... and that goes into the next step.

5. Act Deliberately

The fifth step is to act deliberately.

How can you deliberately act if you don't have a plan first? If you haven't practiced something or prepared ahead of time?

In any relationship you can prepare for how you are going to handle problems. You really can! As soon as you see the problem has occurred you can go and prepare yourself to handle that problem. Then you act deliberately.

Acting deliberately is doing what you practiced. You check to make sure that you are assertive in your actions. You say whatever you're going to say compassionately with understanding and calmness...

but also very directly so that you stand for what's morally right if you need to take that kind of a stand with this particular problem.

This seems to be the moment everyone is afraid of. The act deliberately moment. In fact, so many people psych themselves out and they say they can't handle the problem and they will not resolve the problem - or take any steps to really resolve it.

The other day I got a call from a friend who did this act deliberately step very well. I appreciated her call! Here's why she called..

I went on a youth activity with my daughter, during the activity it was very clear to me that this activity actually was probably a violation of conscience, and while trying not to judge anyone, I was sad. I really was sad that the girls had to experience this activity.

For the activity, the girls had made some quilts for the Children's Justice Centre where we live and decided it would be fun to go and tour the facility. I was not sure what a Justice Center was, and it seemed like a really innocent thing to do. So, we went on this little field trip and we proceeded to go into the Children's Justice Centre and in there the woman of the facility started talking to all the children about abuse, because it is a center for abused women and children. That's where they go and tell the police and get help. Now this is an important thing for kids to know, that there is a place to get help if bad things happen.

Then the conversation turned to abuse, and I was all of a sudden concerned, very concerned. In fact, I had this feeling this would be too much for my young daughter. I could see that she was a little bit concerned with the conversation turning to abuse and that she felt uncomfortable. We proceeded to hear all kinds of things--things about abuse situations that should only be processed with parents --parents should be the ones talking about these things with their children because parents are the protectors of conscience. So anyway I felt like it was a bad thing that my poor daughter's conscience was violated. In fact, when we left and we got into the car, the first thing she said to me was, "Mom, that place was evil. I wanted to get out of there."

There was a time on the tour where I looked at one of the youth leaders and said, "Is someone going to process this with the kids? Because this is pretty deep stuff."

Anyway, within the next day I got a telephone call from the Leader of the Young Women's group. She said that she heard that I wasn't very happy about the activity the night before. So then I expressed my concerns. At that point I told her that it wasn't an appropriate thing for kids to have the process without their parents and you know that I was really glad that I was there, so that I could process it with my children. And she said, "Well, you know I don't always agree with you on everything but I am really glad to know and I think I'm going to take this into consideration as we plan other activities. So, thank you." And that was it.

What she did was so fantastic. She called me and she said, "Hey, is there a problem?" I love this woman by the way. I absolutely love her. She is incredible.

So she called me and just checked with me to see if everything was okay. And then she sought to understand, and I thought, "Wow! What a neat lady! I'm so glad that she knows how to act deliberately. She knows how to make a plan. She knows to not be afraid of talking about situations." She knew there was a problem that needed to be solved and she took deliberate action which was very successful and I felt very appreciated.

6. Communicate Effectively

The sixth step is to communicate effectively. This is where you describe the problem.

When you're talking with children this is where you correct them in a way that is very understood by them.

- You describe what happened.
- You described what should have happened.
- Then you explain how you propose to fix the problem.
- And you be ready to accept no answers or to disagree appropriately if necessary.

This is even for adults; you disagree appropriately just like I did with this neighbour. I said, "You know, I know that nobody tried to plan an event that would be bad. In fact ,I know why you planned this trip and going into it I honestly did not immediately see any issue. In fact ,I've never been over there so I didn't really know what to expect and...."

I gave her the benefit of the doubt and I said, "I know nobody thought anything bad about this, but you know I have studied this issue of teaching children about abuse and actually how this is not a good thing for somebody else to be teaching a child. And I know, that you know, the way that they process it is quite deeply and can create a lot of fears. Often times children that go through abuse training look at their parents and grandparents as scary, as perpetrators and stuff. And so it's just not something that I felt was good for these children to process without their families, and then to not have any discussion after everything...." and that's what I explained.

So I described that I understood their intent was great and that they maybe didn't see things the same way that I did.

And then I described the problem with conscience and how my daughter felt her conscience was violated and how I felt that her conscience was violated. And honestly, I felt a lot of guilt for even saying she could go to that. I felt I should never had let her go. (But then I wouldn't have had the discussion that I had with her, which did turn out to be a very productive discussion about listening to her heart and what she can do in social situations like that.)

At the same time, I had to be willing to accept a no answer. The no answer was the lady who called me, the president of the organization. She might not agree with me. That's okay, not everybody has to agree with me. Sometimes people can say, "No, I don't care that you think that way. I don't". That's okay. It's fine.

Everyone can think whatever way they want. Now I know that's easier said than done. It actually can hurt when someone doesn't agree with you. It makes you feel like, "If they don't agree with me, either I am wrong or they are stubborn." Right?

It doesn't even matter. It doesn't even matter if they agree with you or not. It's a lovely blessing in life if you find another adult who agrees with you on most things. That's when you have found one of your best friends. Everybody else is not going to agree with you sometimes.

That's just how it goes and even in marriage, in fact I would say especially in marriage, your spouse is not going to agree with you every time because you just have to decide on too many things together: from where do we live, how do we set up the bedroom, what color do we paint on the walls, what

kind of towels do you like? There's just so many different things, you are just not going to agree on everything. But on the main things, on the important things, you probably do agree and that's good to recognize.

So the last part of step six is, don't take things personally or emotionally, just describe what you see.

- Describe what you know about it
- and what you think should have happened
- and then propose how you think the problem might be fixed for the future.

Don't be emotional. It's not worth being emotional. That's the hardest part.

As you go through all of these steps, don't blow it at the end by taking things personally if they don't agree. Don't feel like that wasn't a success. The very fact that you went through all six steps and you kept yourself self-governed is a tremendous victory. You really did solve the problem and you did it in a way where you wouldn't become more of the problem. Because generally speaking when adults try to solve problems with each other they often end up making the problem worse. They become part of the problem themselves. That's very generally speaking, but they have a tendency to get very emotional. In fact, you know I guess children do the same thing right?

So keep your cool, stay self-governed and count it as a victory. If not this time, there will come another time when things will all work out as you hoped, because you did govern yourself. Keep at it, and you may find yourself quite amazed at the outcomes that come from this type of problem solving.

In Summary

Problem solving for adults seems like it would be more complicated than problem solving for children. But, actually, the key principles are the same. They are just applied to more mature relationships and topics.

- First, recognize that there is a problem. Assess what is happening and the climate.

- Second, get calm. Am I calm? Without calmness problems can't be solved properly. A person can rationalize in an emotional state.
- Third, determine your role in the situation. Sometimes it is not your role to correct another person. In some cases it is only your role to correct if the person is morally or legally wrong.
- Fourth, make a plan. This means starting with a SODAS mentality. After drafting options, determine what action and words would be best. Pre-teach yourself if necessary. This means you might have to practice.
- Fifth, Act deliberately. Do what was practiced. Check to make sure you are assertive in action, and say things compassionately, but directly. Seek to understand, stay calm, and stand for what is morally correct.
- Sixth, Communicate effectively. Describe the problem, describe what should have happened. Then, explain how you propose to fix the situation. Be ready to accept no answers and to disagree appropriately if necessary. Don't take things personally, or emotionally. Describe what you see only.

RESOURCES

- I Believe Podcast Interview:
<http://parentingselfgovernment.com/i-believe-podcast-interview>
- Problem Solving in Groups:
http://parentingselfgovernment.com/problem-solving-in-groups_377
- TSG with Older Children: http://parentingselfgovernment.com/tsg-with-older-children_298
- Even babies problem solve....(problem solving can seem so serious...this may help lighten up the subject...enjoy): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBkcEA2dlrg>
- Fathers, Parent or Playmate --Problem Solving about laundry and in parent meetings:
<http://parentingselfgovernment.com/fathers-parent-or-playmate-part-3-105>
- Teaching Self-Government to Anyone, Not Just Children:
http://parentingselfgovernment.com/life-advice-with-self-government-principles-teaching-self-government-to-anyone-not-just-children_942
- Problem or Principle -Correcting Children:

- <http://parentingselfgovernment.com/preference-vs-principle-family-unity-1635>
- Training the Teaching Tone (tone of problem solving):
<http://parentingselfgovernment.com/communication-skills-training-teaching-tone-1217>
- Managing Conflict:
<http://parentingselfgovernment.com/miracle-anger-cure-managing-conflict-1228>
- Stressed Out to Chilled Out:
<http://parentingselfgovernment.com/stressed-out-chilled-out-my-true-story-1475>

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- In what situations would you see these steps as effective or not effective?
- Do you think this could work for you in your situation?
- What may be the hardest part for you in using these problem solving steps?
- What may be the easiest part of using these problem solving steps?
- Do you think it is a good idea to first look at yourself when solving a problem? Why or why not?
- Is there something in this article which stand out to you that may make 'all the difference' in your life?
- What is the role you have in the area of your life where there is the most problem solving?
- What does 'being assertive' mean to you?
- Is being 'assertive' as good as it is chalked up to be? Why or why not?
- If you have had to train yourself to be assertive, can you describe 'what it took' for you to become skilled in being peacefully assertive? What was the hardest part? What was the easiest? What differences do you notice now (vs. before)?

CHALLENGE

- Make a cue card with the 6 problem solving steps. Keep it with you at all times, and over the next month, deliberately use these steps every time a problem arises where you need to solve a problem.
- Note what is different than in the past, note how you felt using the steps in the beginning of the month and contrast the experience to using the steps toward the end of the month.
- Was it effective? How did it feel for you?
- Be prepared to share your experience with your circle.