

HELPING CHILDREN TO BECOME CAPABLE PROBLEM SOLVERS

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The Latin word for education is *educare* – it means to draw forth. Too often adults (with the best of intentions) try to “stuff in” by telling children what they should be learning from a given situation and how they should be thinking about it vs. helping them to draw their own conclusions and make their own decisions. With the myriad of choices (good and bad) that children face today it is critical that we help children become capable problem solvers. Allowing children to learn from their own mistakes and experiences and draw reasonable conclusions takes a leap of faith in their ability to do so. It also takes a lot of practice and good judgment on our part.

How can we help children learn from their experiences in a way that will help them develop their critical thinking in regards to social, moral and practical decisions? One of the methods that educators have been using for centuries is using questions to help their students evaluate information. We can help children develop good judgment skills by doing the same thing. Adults are often surprised when they begin using questions instead of lectures how capable children really are in evaluating information and making healthy choices for themselves (when they are given the chance). Here are some questions that can be used to help a child evaluate a situation, consequence or experience:

1. What happened? (listen)
2. What do you think caused that to happen? (listen)
3. How do you feel about it? (listen)
4. What did you learn from this? (listen)
5. What do you think you can do to solve the problem? (listen)
6. How can I help? (listen)

Hints for effective use of questioning:

- Only use questioning when the adult has a genuine interest in the answer.
- Understand and accept that children sometimes have different priorities than adults.
- Allow children to make their own mistakes in evaluating experiences or information. Part of learning to evaluate information and make good decisions is through making mistakes and learning from them later on. (You can always ask these types of questions again later on).
- Avoid judgment.
- Accept that the process of thinking about the questions may be as effective as the answers that a child is giving you (simply seeing them thinking about a situation in a thoughtful and intentional way means that you are helping them).

Some useful times to use this type of questioning:

- When a child experiences social frustration or difficulties
- When a child is discouraged
- When a child has experienced logical or natural consequences of their actions
- When a child is trying to process or understand a social or personal dynamic outside of themselves (friends, family, etc.).
- When a child is trying to solve a problem (academic, social, practical, moral).