

One of the challenges in parenting is to grow along with our children. We start out doing everything for them, knowing that at some point in the future they will be able to do things for themselves. But during those years in between, it can be hard to know what is effective for problem solving. Is it possible to do too much for a child? When do we stop jumping in to rescue the child from something they can do (but that we can do more quickly and 'correctly')?

- **To decide who owns the problem, ask yourself:**

1. Am I being disrespected? (If you see everything as disrespectful to you, you will be the only one to find solutions for issues, your child will be off the hook, and you will get tired of being the only one learning to think proactively; you may even get angry at your child for not insisting **you** teach them the skills to solve their own problems.)
2. Could anybody get hurt because of a safety issue with this problem?
3. Are someone's belongings threatened?
4. Is my child too young/unable to be responsible for this problem?

- If the answer to **ANY** of these questions is "**yes**", then **YOU or YOU and your CHILD** own the problem to solve together. (Young children fall into this category)
- If the answer to **EVERY** question is "**no**", then **your CHILD** owns the problem and is the one responsible to find the solution. (Young children will need your coaching).

The person who "owns" the problem is the person responsible for solving it. With young children, you will sometimes want to guide them through the steps. But if the child alone owns the problem, the child is in charge of doing what is necessary to address the problem.

“Talking it Through” to problem solve

Even when our children are willing to be responsible for their actions and decisions, they may not know how to think about a problem from several different viewpoints. Their understanding of just what the problem is could also be different than ours. Going through the following steps will help.

1. Make sure the problem is clear to both you and your child.
Use your 'I' – Messages and Reflective Listening skills
2. The family brainstorms ideas to solve the problem, remembering that at the brainstorming stage, all ideas are put out.
3. Family discusses each idea respectfully perhaps asking questions such as:
What might happen if.....?
How do you see that working in this family?
Is that something we have the money for?
Focus on solutions rather than complaining.
Keep the focus on this particular issue; it is too easy to get distracted.
4. Decide which idea both of you can accept.
5. Use the idea for an agreed-upon time that is measurable.
6. Set a time to discuss if the idea was successful in dealing with the problem. If not, maybe there was a second idea in your original brainstorming that you might want to use now.