

Problem Solving: It's Never Too Early to Teach

Jean Piaget (1972, 1990) and other researchers in the area of cognitive development purport the advantages of teaching early problem-solving skills in an effort to enhance learning skills later in life. Below is a chart showing tips to encourage problem-solving skills from early childhood through adolescence.

Preschool

- Use props, drawings, and media along with gross and fine motor skills to teach the emerging skills of sound/symbol association, counting, adding, and other cognitive tasks.
- Explain an activity or give instructions by demonstrating the task.
- Discuss personal preferences by asking the child to share her own experiences. Listening to other children helps little ones see the world from different perspectives.
- As children play with clay, water, or sand, have them talk with their peers about what they're making, feeling, or seeing. This helps children understand that clay is clay and sand is sand, no matter how they're shaped.

Elementary School

- Use timelines for plotting your student's progress. Start the timeline at your first session and plot his progress along the way so he'll understand how far he's come and when he's expected to complete therapy.
- To teach classification, similarities, or differences, give your student separate pieces of paper with items for grouping and have him explain how they can interact with one another. Use unlikely go-togethers, such as pig/house, fork/piano, and swing/guitar. This task encourages flexible thinking.
- When teaching new concepts, use old ones already established in the child's language repertoire. For example, when teaching the concept of "freedom," compare the word to his personal experiences (freedom to ride a bike around the neighborhood; freedom to choose what to eat for lunch, etc.).

Adolescence

- Present hypothetical situations to teach socially-appropriate language to teens with language deficits. This provides you with teaching opportunities to broaden their perspectives and consider other cultures and mores.
- When working on language skills in groups, have your students work in pairs. One student acts as the problem solver, talking through the problem out loud while her partner listens to check for logic and sequence.
- Use lyrics from popular music to teach new vocabulary and concepts while discussing the music and artistic appeal. This encourages your students to think beyond facts and offer their opinions.

Piaget, J. (1972). *The psychology of the child*. New York: Basic Books.

Piaget, J. (1990). *The child's conception of the world*. New York: Littlefield Adams.

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