

Summary: Collaborative Problem Solving

Why Problem Solving Matters

Helping your teen navigate challenges develops their ability to make decisions and prepares them for adulthood.

Solutions work best when teens feel heard and actively contribute to decision-making.

COPE: Steps for Supporting Your Teen Through Problem Solving

C: Clarify the problem

- Validate emotions: acknowledge and name their feelings to show understanding.
Example: *"It sounds like you're feeling frustrated because balancing homework and friends is hard. That must feel overwhelming."*
- Reflect on control: help your teen identify what they can and cannot control.
Example: *"What part of this situation do you think you can change?"*

O: Outline options

- Brainstorm together: encourage creativity without judgment. Let them think through ideas independently.
Example: *"What could you try to make this work?"*
- Weigh pros and cons: ask questions to help evaluate the options.
Example: *"What might happen if you do that? How might this affect your [friendships, schedule, etc.]?"*

P: Pick the best solution

- Frame a chosen solution as an experiment to reduce pressure.
Example: *"Let's try setting specific times for homework and breaks for the next few days and see how it feels."*

E: Evaluate the results

- Schedule a time to review how the plan is working and make adjustments as needed.
Example: *"Let's check in Thursday night to see what's going well and if anything needs to change."*

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Conflict Resolution with your Teen

When addressing conflicts:

- Listen first: understand the feelings behind their actions.
- Express your needs: use "I" statements to share concerns without blame.
Example: *"I feel concerned when you're not getting enough rest for school."*
- Brainstorm solutions together: Use the COPE method to ensure the plan addresses everyone's needs fairly and safely.

Home Practice

Plan a family problem-solving meeting:

- Identify a current challenge your family is facing.
- Choose a calm time to discuss it together.
- Use the COPE steps to guide the conversation.
- Practice validating their emotions, brainstorming solutions, and setting a plan.