



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY  
CHILDREN

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

When we guide our children in learning how to solve problems, we can help them to feel more in control of what is happening around them. Children may actually be feeling nervous or restless and may have behaviors that are different than normal. Family members play a huge role in helping children learn how to solve problems. This can also foster resilience! By learning the four simple steps to take when solving a problem, we can teach our children how to use the steps when confronted with life's challenges.

### Steps of Problem Solving

1. Name the problem
2. Write down some solutions
3. Think about what would happen
4. Try it out

### Supporting Problem Solving

Part of problem solving involves trying out different solutions. It's important for children to try their ideas, even if they may not work. If a child is having a hard time or asks for help, it's useful to provide just enough support to get them to the next step. Reminding children of the steps of problem solving can help them to think about the problem in different ways.

### Problem Solving During Activities

Any activity can be a chance to try new problem-solving skills. When children are bored or restless, an opportunity to try something new can help them to feel good about themselves. Communicating with your child during playtime is a great way to teach problem solving. It is effective to talk about what your child is doing, step-by-step. This helps your child to better understand the process, and therefore supports their development of problem-solving strategies.

- Provide items that may or may not fit into each other (containers, small toys, etc.). Encourage your child to put things in and take them out. Include materials that make noise or feel good to touch. If something doesn't fit, talk about why and what your child might do to solve the problem.
- Encourage your child to trace the edges of puzzle pieces to figure out how they fit together. Talk about the process. Example: "That piece has a round edge. The other piece has a straight edge. Do you think they will fit together?"
- Practice problem-solving skills when playing board games. Encourage your child to name problems and come up with solutions.

To learn more about the science behind developing problem-solving skills in young children, you may wish to read the research below:

- [Development of Social Problem Solving in Early Childhood: Stability, Change, and Associations With Social Competence](#)
- [Social Problem Solving and Strategy Use in Young Children](#)
- [I Can Problem Solve \(ICPS\): An Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving Program for Children](#)



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

YOUTH

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Let's just be blunt — the pandemic sucks. It's scary and heartbreaking and has turned so many things upside down. Spending more time with family can cause new problems. Our teens may have different ideas about how to social distance or ways to connect with friends. The ability to solve problems is an important skill for everyone. With guidance and patience we can help our teens learn to solve current problems and problems they may face in the future. Flexibility, patience and understanding can go a long way in better understanding our teens and helping them to become more resilient as they solve problems.

### Reframing

Reframing is a tool used in [Collaborative Problem Solving®](#) (CPS). Making a habit of positive reframing may help our teens to develop better ways of thinking and behaving over time. Choosing to look for positive solutions to tough times enables us to cope better and reduces stress. Negative thoughts about problems only complicate the process of solving them. Reframing can help our teens to look at negative things in a more positive light.

### Reframing Activity

It's important to listen to how your child feels and to let them vent. Then you can try to help them reframe the situation. With communication you can help your teen to understand the importance of their feelings. It's important to try to look at things in a more positive, supportive and encouraging way. These kinds of conversations aren't easy, but necessary in helping young people to deal with things that cause them stress. Consider helping your teen to reframe their problems and look at them in a new way. Below are some examples of reframing:

*Example:* "I feel like I'm going to go insane since I've had to be home so much because of COVID-19!"

*Reframe:* "I need to take this time to learn something new so I feel better about spending so much time at home."

*Example:* "I don't think I can take another day of being asked to wear a mask!"

*Reframe:* "Wearing a mask is one of my least favorite things to do during this pandemic. I know this is only going to last for a while and then I won't have to wear a mask anymore. I need to try to feel better about it by thinking about how it's helping me and others around me."

Reframing doesn't mean that a teen's problems don't matter. Rather, it helps teens put things into perspective and helps them to better reflect on the moment they are experiencing. Teaching teens that life has its ups and downs is important in helping them to navigate future problems and strengthen their ability to become resilient.

The reframing activity was adapted from: [Reframing Your Thinking](#)

To learn more about the science behind encouraging positive thinking related to problem solving, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Constructive and Unconstructive Repetitive Thought](#)



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

YOUNG ADULTS

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Things might be a little (or a lot) tense at home or among the people we're living with. After months of sleeping, eating, working and (hopefully) relaxing all in the same place and with the same people, problems are going to arise. We have control over how we respond to those problems or how we may fix them after they happen. We can work better together when we feel safe in discussing and solving our problems together.

A recent study by Google, entitled [Project Aristotle](#), showed that the way individuals within groups act toward each other is more important to how the group functioned than who is in the group. They found that the most important part of successful group work and successful problem solving was *psychological safety*. Psychological safety is the belief that we can take risks in a group and that others will not embarrass us or put us down when we make mistakes. Building trust and psychological safety provides opportunities to respect each other's differences while working towards shared goals and solving problems. Psychological safety is also important when working with family and/or friends to solve problems.

### Working Together Effectively

Ways that you can take actions that foster psychological safety include being supportive, recognizing other's efforts, asking for help, respecting people's boundaries and limits and being open to feedback are all ways you can help make others feel safe. This helps family members or group members function more effectively while overcoming conflict and adversity. Solving problems together in a safe space is the most effective way to get things done!

Video resource for building trust and accepting the thoughts of others:

- [How to Build \(and Rebuild\) Trust](#)

### Internal Actions

- Nurture self-awareness and humility, means being open to admitting that you are not always right and being open to how others feel. Think about the perspective of others and where they are coming from.

### External Actions

- Start a roommate, family, or group conversation where each person shares five things they need in order to feel more in control and relaxed. Practice group conversations while thinking about the feelings of others.

To learn more about the science behind psychological safety and how it enhances group effectiveness and problem solving, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Psychological Safety: A Meta-Analytic Review and Extension](#)
- [Psychological Safety, Trust, and Learning in Organizations: A Group-Level Lens](#)





# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
OLDER ADULTS

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Living through a pandemic is hard for everyone. It can be especially difficult for older adults who are separated from family and friends. Resilience is fostered when we understand the importance of life stories and how they can help us to overcome difficulties and solve problems. When older adults share life's challenges and the lessons they've learned from those challenges, family members and friends can learn from their experiences. Facing challenges enables us to provide others with thoughts and resources as we share lessons we've learned and remind our families of their strengths and those able to give them support.

### Sharing Family Stories and Advice

When older adults with more life experiences offer advice to others, they may see their lives as more meaningful. It's important to encourage older family members to share their wisdom and advice with younger generations. Sharing experiences with others can be empowering and help with problem solving. Our family's story can help other family members to solve problems related to life's current stressors.

#### *Sharing Family Stories Activity*

It is helpful to encourage older adults to talk about how they have overcome difficulties. A family story is important in creating your family's identity and strengthening bonds between family members. Discussing difficulties encountered in life can help younger generations to better understand the family history and how problems have been solved in the past. You may wish to set aside a special time for these stories as you learn about your family history. Encourage younger family members to take part by listening and asking questions.

- Consider preparing questions to ask ahead of time.
- You may wish to listen through a phone call, virtual platform, or a socially distanced visit.
- If you are taking notes or recording the story, share the purpose of the interview and how the information may be used in the future. For example, you may wish to record the session to share with grandchildren.
- Listen attentively and gently.
- If something is not clear, take the time to ask more questions.
- If the topic or the story is too challenging, do not force the conversation, move to a different question or a different story.

When it comes to problem solving, no idea, action, or story is too small. Discussing a family history of problem solving can foster a sense of connectedness and resiliency. The process of working together is often as important as the outcome.

To learn more about the importance of sharing family stories, you may wish to read:

- [The Power of Family Stories](#)
- [The Stories that Bind Us](#)

To learn more about the science behind the importance of family stories, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Who Are You From?: The Importance of Family Stories](#)



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

## Our Family is Creative! Collaborative Problem Solving

Many of us are struggling every day. Sometimes the stress and anxiety of navigating the pandemic makes it seem hard to solve problems. It can be more difficult to feel safe and secure when our family routines may be different. The stressors may also increase when we don't know what to expect each day. More often our families are sharing space and resources and may be looking for better ways to discuss problems and conflicts before they get worse.

### Family Meetings

Creative and successful problem solving is often done together as a group. Holding a family meeting is a great way to brainstorm family goals, expectations, and to solve problems. During times of change and adversity, family meetings are a great way to check in and see how everyone is doing. Family meetings can also help family members understand each other better, have better communication, work towards solutions, and can be fun!

#### *Family Meeting Activity*

When thinking about having a family meeting it is important to get buy-in from all family members. Family meetings can help bring your family together in many ways. Consider using your family meeting as a time to solve problems and come up with solutions together. You may wish to make regular family meetings a new routine. They can be something for family members to look forward to and rely on.

- **Make a routine** - Encourage all family members to decide on a regular meeting time.
- **Be flexible about the format** - Family meetings can take place virtually or by phone if everyone is not able to meet in the same place.
- **Create rules for your family meeting** - Encourage your family members to think of rules they think might be helpful. Examples: One person may talk at a time, electronic devices are not allowed during the meeting and use kind words and respect each other's thoughts and opinions.
- **Everyone gets to share** - Family meetings are a time for your family to talk about the kinds of activities they want to do together and to talk about what they may be having a hard time with and come up with solutions. Each of your family members gets a chance to share.
- **Keep it positive** - When your family members have different opinions, remind them to keep their comments and suggestions positive and to work together toward a solution. You can offer praise, model encouragement and active listening while supporting everyone.
- **Finish with fun** - End the family meeting by encouraging everyone to share one thing learned or gained. You may wish to close with an activity, game, story or a fun plan!

The above family meeting content was closely adapted from materials prepared by our external partners at Project FOCUS, Nathanson Family Resilience Center, University of California Los Angeles. We appreciate their generosity. To learn more about how to help families develop and plan family meetings, you may wish to read:

- [How to Hold a Family Meeting](#)
- [Planning a Family Meeting](#)

### *Internal Actions*

Set clear priorities and realistic goals and discuss action steps to reach them. If possible, try and develop a “Plan B” to help with challenges that may be ahead.

### *External Actions*

Trying to figure out work and school or childcare may put additional stress and anxiety on the family. Create a plan to reach out to friends, family, and the community to help with unplanned challenges. Create a system of shared relationships to help each other get through the challenges ahead.

To learn more about the science behind the importance of family communication and family meetings, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Mechanisms of Risk and Resilience in Military Families: Theoretical and Empirical Basis of a Family-Focused Resilience Enhancement Program.](#)



## **Welcome to Families Tackling Tough Times Together!**

We hope you find the enclosed ideas and suggestions helpful as you care for your family during the pandemic. We know the pandemic is a very big challenge. How families cope can affect both parents and children for a long time.

We are scientists, educators, and students from Purdue University, and we are here to help! For nine weeks this fall, we will provide weekly collections of ideas for families to use to build on their strengths.

These tools are free, flexible, and informed by science. They are designed for families of all types, with tailored suggestions for children, youth, young adults and older adults, and suitable for both civilian and military families. We hope that your family will try one activity each week!

### **Would you like to earn financial rewards?**

We especially welcome families living in the continental US who are interested in trying out project materials and telling us about their experiences. These families can earn financial rewards by sharing about one hour of their time over the next two months. Sign up now at the link below!

[https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ)

For more information

- Join the Families Together Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HHSFamiliesTogether/>
- Or visit the project website: <https://www.hhs.purdue.edu/families-together/>