

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING PLANNING SHEET

See [Lives in the Balance](#) for more info

1) EMPATHY STEP: Gather info to achieve a clear understanding of the kid's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem.

- WORDS: "I've noticed that...(insert unsolved problem)... what's up?"
- DRILL FOR INFO: listen *reflectively* and ask *clarifying questions* to get at the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem from the kid's perspective, and *why the problem might occur under some conditions and not others*.
- DON'T: Skip or rush through this step, assume you already know what the kid's concerns are, or start talking about solutions.

2) DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP: State the concern of the collaborating adult

- WORDS: "The thing is (insert adult concern)..." or "My concern is (insert adult concern)..."
- FOCUS: Most adult concerns fall into one of two categories: 1) How the problem is affecting the kid or, 2) How the problem is affecting others
- DON'T: Start talking about solutions yet, or sermonize, judge, lecture, use sarcasm

3) INVITATION STEP: Generate solutions that are realistic (meaning both parties can do what they are agreeing to) and mutually satisfactory (meaning the solution truly addresses the most important [1-2] concerns of both parties).

- WORDS: Restate the concerns that were identified in the first two steps, usually beginning with "I wonder if there is a way..."
- FOCUS: 1) Try to give the kid the first opportunity to propose a solution, but remember generating solutions is a team effort. 2) Odds of solution working should feel like they are above 60%-70%. If not, revisit previous steps. 3) This step always ends with agreement to return to Plan B if the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING PLANNING SHEET – EXAMPLE

See [Lives in the Balance](#) for more info

1) EMPATHY STEP: Gather info to achieve a clear understanding of the kid's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem.

- WORDS: "I've noticed that...(insert unsolved problem)... what's up?"
- DRILL FOR INFO: listen reflectively and ask clarifying questions to get at the who, what, where, and when of the unsolved problem from the kid's perspective, and why the problem might occur under some conditions and not others.
- DON'T: Skip or rush through this step, assume you already know what the kid's concerns are, or start talking about solutions.

Mom: I noticed **you're having a hard time** leaving your backpack in your locker when you go to Science class. **What's up?**

Kid: I don't know.

M: It's OK. Take your time to think about it.

K: It's a stupid rule.

M: you think it's a stupid rule (*reflective listening*). Tell me more about why you think it's stupid (*drilling*).

K: they tell us that it's a "safety issue," but I don't think it is. They just don't want us to have them in class.

M: Right. They don't want you to have them in class and you don't believe their reason for it (*reflective listening*). Is there anything else that's making it hard for you to leave your backpack in your locker for Science (*drilling*)?

K: Science is at the end of the day, and I have to meet my little brother to walk him home. If I don't show up right away, he'll get scared or leave without me.

K: so you're worried that if you don't have your backpack with you during the last class, you'll be late meeting up with your little brother, and that he might get scared or leave without you (*reflective listening*).

K: yes.

M: Any other reasons why it's hard to leave your backpack in your locker during Science (*drilling*)?

K: My Science teacher doesn't care if I bring it. She even lets me sometimes. It's the Assistant Principal who gets mad.

M: So, just to make sure I've got it all... it's hard to leave your backpack in your locker during Science because you think it's stupid rule, that it's not a "safety issue," that Science is at the end of the day and you need to meet your little brother after school to walk him home and you're worried if you go to your locker, you'll be late and your brother will be scared or leave without you. You also think that even your teacher doesn't mind you bringing in your backpack, but the Assistant Principal does (*summarizing*).

Did I get it all? Anything else?

K: That's all.

2) DEFINE THE PROBLEM STEP: State the concern of the collaborating adult

- WORDS: "The thing is (insert adult concern)..." or "My concern is (insert adult concern)..."
- FOCUS: Most adult concerns fall into one of two categories: 1) How the problem is affecting the kid or, 2) How the problem is affecting others
- DON'T: Start talking about solutions yet, or sermonize, judge, lecture, use sarcasm

M: OK, got it. Thanks for sharing all of that. It really helps me to understand what's going on from your point of view. I do have a concern, though. **The thing is**, when you bring your backpack to class, when it's against the rules, and you've already been told that, it sends the message to your teacher and the assistant principal that you don't care about why the rule is there in the first place. You can disagree with the rule, but if you keep breaking it, you'll get in trouble. I also worry that if other kids see you in class with your backpack, they'll want to bring their backpacks, too, which could cause even more problems for your teacher.

K: OK, but it's a stupid rule, like I said.

M: I hear that you think it's a stupid rule, and I understand why you think that. But I'm not sure your teacher or assistant principal would agree with you about that.

3) INVITATION STEP: Generate solutions that are realistic (meaning both parties can do what they are agreeing to) and mutually satisfactory (meaning the solution truly addresses the concerns of both parties).

- **WORDS:** Restate the concerns that were identified in the first two steps, usually beginning with "I wonder if there is a way..."
- **FOCUS:** 1) Try to give the kid the first opportunity to propose a solution, but remember generating solutions **is a team effort**. 2) Odds of solution working should feel like they are above 60%-70%. If not, revisit previous steps. 3) This step always ends with agreement to return to Problem Solving the first solution doesn't stand the test of time

M: Let me ask you... of all of the concerns that you told me about: that the rule is stupid, that you're afraid your little brother will get scared or leave if you have to go to your locker at the end of the day to get your backpack, or that your teacher doesn't seem to care about you bringing your backpack, **what is your BIGGEST concern** (*summarizing, prioritizing*)?

K: I worry about my little brother.

M: I thought you might say that. And I'll bet your teacher and assistant principal have no idea that you are worried about that. **I wonder if there's a way** for us to make sure that your little brother isn't scared and doesn't leave without you, but still gives you time to grab your backpack from your locker so that you don't get in trouble for having it in class. Have any ideas? (*invitation*)

J: My little brother could come upstairs and meet me at my locker after school.

M: That might work. Do you think your little brother would feel comfortable doing that, with all the middle school kids around?

J: Maybe not. We could meet outside his classroom. But he'd have to promise he'd wait for me, and not leave without me.

M: That sounds like a good solution, and I can talk to him about that. **How do you feel about this plan?**

J: Good.