

## The PSST! Method: Teach Your Child How to Problem Solve

Children who feel confident in their problem-solving abilities can better tolerate and handle unexpected events. All children of any age can benefit from learning problem-solving skills. Adjust your language or extent of experimentation based on your child's age/ability/tolerance level. The steps stay the same. (Ideally, use them all in order. But using any is great.)

**SAMPLE PROBLEM: Young John's ball just rolled under the couch.** John scrunches up his face, ready to cry. Daddy jumps up to go grab a broom handle and solve the problem.

WAIT! John needs to learn the steps BETWEEN the problem and a successful solution.

1. **Pause.** Just briefly. See if the child will attempt to problem-solve. If not, proceed to step two. Eventually, your child may make the attempt.
2. **Frame the Problem.** "Wow, the ball rolled under the couch, and we can't reach it." You can also provide "emotion" and "help" words. "Your face is turning red and you look really frustrated. You can say, "Please help me solve this problem."
3. **Play "Dumb."** Whether you instantly have a solution or not, you can pretend you're not quite sure what to do. Crinkle up your forehead and look thoughtful. "Hmmm...."
4. **Think Out Loud.** Most adults problem-solve in their heads. If you can role-model the problem-solving process, you're giving him valuable insight, and showing that it's not magic. "The ball's is under the couch. We have to get it out somehow...maybe we can try..." With an older child, you can ask them if they have any ideas.
5. **See What Happens.** You may know that your hand won't fit or his arm can't reach, but he doesn't. When it's feasible to experiment (not a safety hazard or massive inconvenience), try it out. He learns a lot more that way. "Let's see if your arm is long enough. Can you lie down and reach for it?"
6. **Repeat Steps # 4 (Think Out Loud) and #5 (See What Happens), until problem solved.** "That didn't work because the ball's too far away, will my hand work? ...No, too big. Hmm, maybe something small but long to help us get the ball.. see if this will work...no....hmm...let's see if we can find something...oh, let's try a broom handle!"
7. **Frame the solution.** "The ball rolled under the couch and we were really frustrated and we didn't know what to do. But we tried lots of ways to solve the problem and now we have our ball back. We are great problem-solvers!"

Repeat this process regularly. As he becomes more proficient, you can take more of a back seat to the problem-solving process.

Bonus: Consider sprinkling "What If's?" into your conversations/play time. "We solved that problem! What if the ball landed in a tree? Or this hole? Or under the bed?" Talking is great, acting it out is even better. Play a game called "Problem-Solving Superheroes" where you deliberately practice these kinds of things.

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