Facilitating a Problem-Solving Approach for Families

Utilizing consistent problem-solving strategies can help families become more autonomous and self-reliant. Families can practice basic steps of problem-solving in many intervention activities so that they can effectively deal with future concerns. The basic steps include:

- **Defining the concern/problem - What is the concern/problem?**
  Family teams need to learn to be specific, to get to the "root" of the problem or concern. Questions that may help them focus on the specifics include:
  * What's demanding my attention?
  * What demands are really most pressing?
  * What will happen if I don't deal with these?
  * What do I most hope to preserve, achieve, attain or avoid?
  * What would I like to do, do more, or do better?
  * What have I been trying unsuccessfully to avoid?
  * What are my priorities?
  * What kind of risk-taker am I?
  * What risks are worth it? What risks are necessary?
  * What are my "bottom-line" goals or concerns?
  * What must change immediately for our family to move forward?

- **Identifying the data - What are the facts?**
  * What's the real essence of this mess?
  * What concerns or opportunities must be addressed first?
  * What do I really know to be fact about this mess? When does it occur? How often? Where? With whom?
  * What patterns do I see in these data?
  * What's already been tried? With what results?
  * What might I have overlooked? What else?
  * When am I concerned? When is it on my mind? Where?
  * What feelings, hunches, impressions, ideas, questions or observations might be involved?
  * What information do I have? Must I get? Would I like?

- **Generating ideas - What things can I (we) do?**
  * How might this problem be solved?
  * What's my greatest fantasy about how to do this?
  * What would I do if there were no obstacles?
  * Can I visualize or imagine solutions?
  * How might I use some ideas or objects from a totally different context or purpose?
  * Which alternatives are most appealing? Attractive? Least intrusive?
  * What ideas deserve closer examination or consideration?
  * What ideas offer me the best chance to do something?
  * What ideas surprised me or caught my attention?
  * What options suggest new and promising ways to solve this problem?
  * What ideas do I really like best?
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• **Choosing solutions - Which is the best?**
  * What factors or criteria might be considered?
  * Ease of implementation?
  * Resources necessary available?
  * Expense?
  * Time?
  * Intrusiveness to other family members?
  * What standards or "yardsticks" might be applied to these ideas?
  * How might we determine the strengths or weaknesses of these ideas?
  * How might interesting ideas be made stronger or better?
  * What criteria are most important and necessary to use?
  * What solutions can be combined to improve outcomes?

• **Developing the plan - Who will do what, when?**
  * How might we take these actions?
  * What might be sources of assistance or resistance?
  * What might make action easier to take? More difficult?
  * What are some possible obstacles, objections or concerns?
  * Who or what could make your action a "breeze"?
  * What might go right? So what?
  * What might go wrong? So what?
  * Who will help? How will their support be gained?
  * What specific actions are necessary? What should I do within 24 hours? What sequence of steps should be planned?
  * How will we monitor and document progress?
  * What are the most important steps to prevent problems?
  * What are the most likely contingent steps, if problems arise?

• **Evaluating the plan - What happened?**
  * How will we know when we get there?
  * Did it work?
  * What changes were necessary?