

# Assessing and Reacting to Problems

Helping our children to become effective  
problem solvers

# Building Blocks for Problem Solving

- Problems come in different sizes
- Emotions and reactions come in different sizes
- Reactions come from Emotions
- Its expected that the size of the emotion and the size of the reaction match the size of the problem. Small problem=small reaction

Goal: By making children aware of the size of the problem, emotion and reactions we help them to think about their problems and understand that they can have control over how they react to them. We can't expect that children will always be able to match their reaction to the size of the problem and we can't tell them how to feel, but we are teaching strategies and giving them tools that will help with social emotional regulation.

# Defining Concepts

- **Problem:** A problem is an event that occurs that was not part of the plan and negatively influences it. Problems make people feel upset or uncomfortable.
- **Size of the Problem:** Small problems can be taken care of quickly and can usually be solved by ourselves or with minimal help from others (i.e. losing a game) Medium problems may take more time and typically require the help of an adult (i.e. breaking your IPAD). Big problems take a lot of time to take care of and require a lot of help (i.e. emergency).
- **Feelings:** Feelings are what happen inside our bodies that can be described with words such as mad, happy, sad. When problems occur, we have different feelings of different intensities. Feelings related to problems are often described with words such as frustrated, stressed, anxious, afraid, or worried.
- **Reactions:** Reactions come from feelings. A reaction is what we show on the outside by what we say and do. Reactions also come in different sizes. It is expected that the size of our reaction matches the size of the problem.

# To figure out the size of the problem we think about:

- How much time will it take to make the problem smaller or fix it
- How much help we need and from whom (kids or adults)

# Small Problems

- Child can fix it themselves or with very minimal help from others.
- Does not take very long to fix small problems.
- Options: ignore or fix
- Can successfully employ strategies to deal with a problem including but not limited to positive self-talk and calming techniques.
- Examples: losing a board game, being told no, not being a line leader, pencil breaks, don't have my favorite food in lunch, getting an answer wrong.



## Medium Problems

- Child will likely need help from an adult to help fix the problem.
- Will take a longer time to fix or make better.
- Takes some effort to solve.
- Can successfully employ strategies to deal with a problem including but not limited to positive self-talk and calming techniques
- Examples: missing the bus, broken phone/iPAD, feeling sick, don't understand the homework.



# Big Problems

- Child needs to get help from an adult right away. It may take many people to work through the big problem.
- Can take days, weeks, months or even years to solve a big problem.
- Examples: injury, fire, accidents, moving to a new place, being bullied, an emergency
- Good news: Most problems we encounter on a daily basis are small.



# Home Activities

- Highlight times when you as a parent encounters a problem during the day. Discuss what happened, the size of the problem, how you felt about it, ideas for making the problem smaller, what you did
- Example: When I went to the store they were all out of ice cream. That wasn't my plan. I stayed calm and said, "this is a small problem. I can get ice cream next time." I was proud of myself for having a small reaction to a small problem.
- Reinforce times when you witnessed your child demonstrating a small reaction to a small problem. Keeping it positive and not always identifying when the size of problem and the reaction do not match.
- Example: I know you wanted to keep playing your video game when it was time for school. You were flexible and knew it was just a small problem. We can make a plan to play after school. Thanks for staying calm.



# Home Activities

- Worksheets: How big is the problem? Size of the Problem (Please refer to handouts)
- [www. Boomlearning.com](http://www.Boomlearning.com)
- YouTube
- Pinterest

**Superflex Curriculum:** a book series by Michelle Garcia Winner focusing on teaching expected social behaviors and strategies to regulate it. *Superflex takes on Glassman and the Team of Unthinkables* is the second book of the huge series targeting problem solving skills.

**The Incredible Five Point Scale** is a visual method developed by Kari Dunn Buron to help students become aware of the level or intensity on any construct. Students can rate intensity or levels on pain, anger, volume, feelings, and behavior.



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## The **problems** Scale

What it looks like

5

Disaster

4

Major problem

3

Problem

2

Small Problem

1

Glitch

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# References

Winner, M.G., Hendrix, R., Palmer, K.Z., Tarshis, N. (2016). *Size of the Problem*. Think Social Publishing, Inc.

Winner, M.G., Madrigal, S. (2009). *Superflex takes on Glassman and the Team of Unthinkables*. Social Thinking Publishing.