

December

Nurturing a problem-solver

Think of yourself as having four roles: observer, supporter, facilitator, and model. You will be watching, encouraging, interacting as a questioning partner, and sharing with your young adult on how you solve problems.

Let's start off with the observer and supporter roles...

As an observer:

Step back and watch your young adult's independent problem solving. Sometimes it may seem easier and faster to jump in and solve a problem for him/her or to show them the "right" way. **BUT** stepping in too early can stifle their thinking or send a subtle message that you're not confident they can think problems through by themselves. Instead of intervening right away, step back and watch his/her problem-solving skills unfold. Keep in mind that your young adult's problem solving doesn't always look like a thinking activity. In fact, it can look like an argument, an experiment, or an unusual and messy way to use materials.

As a supporter:

Acknowledge his/her efforts, let them know that what they are doing is important. Offer verbal support: "Look at all the different ways you're trying to _____. You're working hard to figure it out, aren't you?" At times, nonverbal support may be all that's needed - a smile, an understanding nod, or a thumbs up can show support and encourage him/her to continue in their thinking process. Remember too, that just by sitting quietly next to your young adult, you can communicate: "I understand what you're doing, and I know it's important."

Create accepting environments where young adults feel free to express their ideas without fear of being wrong or of not being taken seriously. Make sure your setting is a protective "laboratory" where he/she knows they can experiment and practice problem-solving skills throughout each day.