

November

What exactly is problem-solving?

We use problem-solving skills on a constant basis. Problem solving is not about memorizing facts like historical dates or the letters of the alphabet. Instead, it is about using two very important skills - the ability to think logically and the ability to think creatively when using and applying facts to solve problems. Engaging in problem-solving activities play a vital role in developing a young adult's ability to learn, think, feel confident, and be competent at understanding their world. What could be more important!

Creative-thinking and critical-thinking skills are essential components of problem solving.

Critical Thinking is the ability to mentally break down a problem or an idea into parts and analyze them. Sorting, classifying, and comparing similarities and differences are all a part of this important skill.

Creative thinking is the ability to look at a problem in many different ways. This might involve seeing a different way to do something, generating new ideas, or using materials in unique ways. To be a creative thinker is the willingness to take risks, to experiment, and even to make mistakes.

Let's get started!

What you can do: Part of encouraging creative thinking is helping individuals become both fluent and flexible thinkers. Fluent thinkers have the ability to come up with ideas; flexible thinkers are able to see many possibilities or view objects or situations in *new* ways. Just as problem solving takes place all day long, so can the activities you do to encourage young adults to be creative thinkers. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Brainstorm.** Invite your young adult to be fluent thinkers by asking them to respond to questions that have many right answers. Incorporate these questions into the interests young adults are involved with and the situations they are in. For instance, if young adults are having a discussion about nighttime, you might ask them to think of everything that lights up in the night, all the people who work at night, all the things they'd like to do if they stayed up all night.
- **Reflect.** Help your young adult to be flexible thinkers by asking them to comment on specific objects or situations in your room. (Remember, this activity, too, works best in the context of what is going on.) For instance, Carla is at the grocery store and can't find a specific item she is looking for. What are some ways she can look for this item? Or, when watching a television show or movie, and the character looks upset. What are some reasons he might look this way?