

January

Nurturing a problem-solver...Continued

As a facilitator:

Watch for times when he/she is engaged in problem solving and interject provocative questions to propel them into new ways of thinking. Remember open-ended, divergent questions have many possible answers and, so, invite him/her to think and problem-solve. Closed-ended, convergent questions have right and wrong answers and can actually block his/her thinking processes.

Encourage him/her to express themselves. Rather than telling your young adult about what they can make at the art table today, try showing them the materials and inviting them to brainstorm ideas. You might say, "I need your help. I brought in this bag full of art materials. What do you think we can make?" Then let him/her act on their ideas and make whatever they choose, offering your suggestions too. This approach is a very successful way to help him/her feel comfortable solving problems. When they see that you don't have one "right" answer or method in mind, they can move past fears of being "wrong" and draw on their wonderful creative thinking.

Provide a variety of problem-solving experiences. Offer games, puzzles, discussions, literature, and projects - a wide range of activities that inspire creative and critical thinking and encourage him/her to stretch their minds.

As a model:

Think about your own approach to problem solving. Whether you're aware of it or not, he/she is always watching you. They observe how you deal with problems as examples of ways they might solve problems themselves. Talk about problem solving. When problems arise in the room, discuss your thought processes as you work through the problem. For example, you might say, "I have a problem. I planned to make tacos today, but we've run out of ground meat. What do you think we should do? Should we use different meat? I wonder how that would work? Should we wait until tomorrow because we can buy take out tonight? Or maybe I could run to the store and buy it?" In other words, model fluid thinking and a positive attitude as well as a process for solving the small problems of everyday life. And involve him/her further by asking them to suggest their own solutions.

Be willing to make mistakes. It is reassuring to him/her to discover that adults make mistakes too. So let him/her see some of the mistakes you make, then ask them to help you solve the resulting problems. They feel important and, at the same time, learn that making mistakes isn't really such a bad thing after all. Instead, it's an opportunity for learning.