

EDITION 4

Problem Solving Conversation

Effective problem solving in the education setting (and other) involves an effective exchange of speaking and listening as pro-social skills. These replace "teacher talk" with meaningful, sustained and rich dialogue. Be mindful that your response has the power to encourage or discourage a student's future participation in restorative discussions.

In this Edition of practical tools / strategies for de-escalation, we explore these dimensions as recommendations of targeted de-escalation strategies from The NSW Department of Education and Queensland Government.

Acknowledging The Student

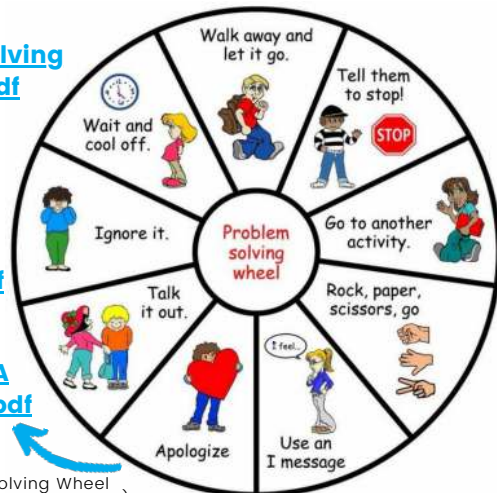
- Validate the student's emotions so they feel 'seen', understood and that their voice matters, don't trivialise their feelings. [Trauma Student Support Tool.pdf](#) ↓
- Focus on empathising with the emotion they are expressing, not the emotional intensity or delivery.
- Student's social skills are best supported when educators are cued into children's emotional/social needs. [Learn more from our EDITION 1.pdf](#) ↓

Agree With The Student's Authenticity

- Find the truth in what the student is saying and their approach to the situation, what was their inner motive?
- This can reduce emotional intensity. Although the student's approach to meeting their needs was not appropriate, their intentions may very well be valid.
- Agreeing with the student's authenticity does not imply agreeing with their escalated behaviour or choices.
- It involves empathising with the student. What were they trying to fulfil? safety? belonging? self-esteem?
- Learn more from [Trauma Impact Factors.png](#) ↓

Offer Options, Choices and Boundaries

- Guide the student to restorative actions through their own decision-making. Don't threaten them or dictate.
- Give them ownership over their choices by guiding the options given, or co-creating the choices. They can choose the option that best suits them at the time e.g. from the Problem Solving Wheel (Figure 1.0). These options can be adapted to suit different age groups:



↓ [Problem-Solving Wheel.pdf](#)

↓ [Creating Classroom Boundaries By Brené Brown.pdf](#)

↓ [How To Give A Good Apology.pdf](#)

Figure 1.0 Problem Solving Wheel (Middletown Centre for Autism, 2021)

- This can also sound like, 'I understand that you have left your homework at home. Shouting at me is not being respectful. When you stop shouting we can discuss what we can do to help you remember.'
- Set boundaries. They are a healthy way for students to experience values-based expectations e.g. Values of trust, compassion, empathy, responsibility, respect etc.

Use Clarification and Wait-Time

- Provide "wait time" to children as they absorb / process your message and formulate their response e.g. hold the silence between your question and their answer for a minute extra
- Show attentive body language and come down to their eye-level. [Learn more from our EDITION 3.pdf](#) ↓
- Avoid assumptions and make the student feel respected, safe, to build their open-mindedness for the conversation
- Stimulate their thinking, "I wonder what was happening..."
- Take the time to ask questions. Use questions to clarify their statements and empathise, again using wait-time.
- Be aware it is difficult for students to communicate clearly when they are upset. [Learn more from our EDITION 2.pdf](#) ↓
- Don't give up if children don't respond well the first time. Engage in deliberate probing, with a calm empathetic tone.

Here is a helpful-questions list adapted from the NSW Department of Education:

8 Restorative Questions

1) Ask, "What happened?"

Value the student's voice and perspective. Focus on the timeline of events without blame. Understand and identify triggers. Learn more from our

2) Ask, "What is the size of the problem?"

Is it a little problem? medium problem? big problem? gigantic problem? emergency? This can help you gauge the student's emotional intensity and helps them to reflect and achieve perspective. See [Problem Sizes.pdf](#) ↓

3) Ask, "What were you thinking about at the time?"

Develop emotional literacy by linking thoughts, feelings and actions.

4) Ask, "What have your thoughts been since?"

Assess reflection following the incident when emotions have de-escalated.

5) Ask, "Who has been affected by what happened?"

The key question to trigger empathy and remorse. Think beyond those directly involved to see the 'ripple effect' of actions and consider the personal impact.

See [Empathy-Building Classroom Activities.pdf](#) ↓

6) Ask, "In what way have they/you been affected?"

Name or describe the impact and acknowledge the consequences.

7) Ask, "What do you think you need to do to make things right?"

Devise agreed, realistic and meaningful resolutions to heal the harm. See [Conflict Resolution Games.pdf](#) ↓

8) Ask, "If the same thing happened again, what would you do differently?"

An opportunity for learning and verbalising alternative strategies: [Anger Management](#) ↓ and [Saying Sorry](#) ↓

Strategies to Help Students Listen

- Help students turn-take and listen by intentionally directing them. Use a prop to help, where the person speaking holds the prop e.g. Rubik's cube, soft toy etc.
- Limit group time and small group discussions to a reasonable time as students find it hard to stay attuned.
- If their attention starts to wander, don't push for the conversation. Bring closure, and ENSURE to revisit later.
- Provide [Vocabulary Picture Cards and Words.pdf](#) ↓ for students who have a language/processing impairment