

Problem Solving

Problem solving has a time and a place.

Problem solving has an agenda.

Problem solving is task-oriented; it is not a power struggle.

Problem solving has two distinct phases: a problem definition phase and a problem solution phase.

When defining a problem

1. Be specific (refer to what both partners can observe).
2. Be brief.
3. Express your feelings about the behavior, which is the subject of the conflict.

When solving problems

1. Brainstorm solutions.
2. Evaluate their costs and benefits to each partner and to the relationship.
3. Decide on the best solution.
4. Be willing to compromise; problem solving involves give-and-take.

Also, when defining and solving problems

1. Discuss only one problem at a time.
2. Paraphrase what you hear your partner saying and check the accuracy of your paraphrase.

Remember, the attitude with which you approach problem solving is very important. Problem solving requires collaboration and problem solving requires that each problem being discussed is seen as a mutual problem.

This handout is adapted from Jacobson, N. and Margolin, G. (1979) Marital Therapy. New York: Brunner/Mazel.