

## **A PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH TO PREVENTION OF HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS FROM THE PRESCHOOL THROUGH THE MIDDLE-SCHOOL YEARS [636]**

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### **Session Plan**

#### **Workshop Summary**

This workshop will demonstrate a unique problem solving approach to violence- and drug-abuse prevention from the perspectives of both research and practice.

More than 20 years of carefully documented research has shown that as early as preschool, children can, or can learn to identify an interpersonal problem (e.g., wanting a toy another child has, feeling left out, and being bullied), to think of their own and others' feelings, to consider alternative solutions to solving an interpersonal problem (e.g., “he can grab the toy,” “ask to play,” and “tell the teacher”), and to understand potential consequences of acts (e.g., “he’ll hit him,” “they won’t let him play,” and “they’ll bully him more.”). By age 8, children can learn more sophisticated thinking skills, including means-ends thinking, or step-by-step planning skills.

Through interactive games and activities, Dr. Myrna Shure will show participants how to train children ages 4 through 12 the above-mentioned skills with two programs: (1) the I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) program for use in classrooms or groups within agencies; and (2) the Raising a Thinking Child program—the ICPS approach for use by English- and Hispanic-speaking parents, or professionals working with individual children, ages 4 through 7.

In addition to learning formal lesson-games, participants will learn how to apply the problem-solving approach when actual problems arise at home or at school—an approach called “ICPS Dialoguing.” Instead of yelling or applying forms of punishment, instead of even more positive approaches as suggesting what to do, or even explaining why, dialoguing involves children in solving the problem by guiding them to use their newly acquired interpersonal thinking skills. To help children do this, they are asked such questions as “What happened when you (hit him)?” “How did that make *you* feel?” “How do you think s/he feels when you (hit him)?” “What can you do so that won’t happen?” Problem-solving children feel empowered, not overpowered, and our research, replicated by others has shown that I Can Problem Solve and Raising a Thinking Child can reduce and prevent early high-risk behaviors that predict later violence and substance-abuse—such behaviors as physical and verbal aggression, impatience, social withdrawal, poor peer relations, lack of empathy, and poor academic achievement.

Curry Bailey will describe how his role as peer mediator trainer led him to adapt ICPS with middle-school boys and girls identified by their teachers as displaying bullying and other behaviors that were barriers to learning. A program called Seeking Out Alternative Responses (SOAR), blends the ICPS program with

service-learning activities designed to enhance genuine empathy (e.g., making Easter gift bags for children in hospitals).

Mr. Bailey found that some bullies really do have empathy. They just need an opportunity to show it. He also found fewer referrals to the principal’s office for disruptive behaviors, less bullying, and more cooperation and concern for others’ feelings. Students also became more comfortable with generating and implementing alternatives to bullying.

Participants will learn how to teach problem-solving skills, apply service-learning activities, and learn how to model ICPS dialogue techniques in schools and agencies and with parent educators.

## Workshop Goals

- To show teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, or other student support personnel as well as parent educators techniques that teach children from ages 4 through 12 *how* to think, not *what* to think in ways that will help them solve problems with peers and figures of authority
- To show participants how to apply a problem-solving approach to real-life conflicts that will guide children to make good decisions with positive (empathic), not negative consequences
- To show participants how to adapt problem-solving skills for middle-school students and to blend empathy-building, service-learning projects
- To help practitioners as well as administrators (principals and school superintendents) understand the relationship between social-emotional competence and academic achievement
- To help practitioners and administrators become familiar with research supporting ICPS as a violence- and drug-prevention program and to conceptualize the relationship between the problem-solving approach and the development of resilience, empathy, and self-regulation

## Workshop Objectives

1. Lecture/Participant Responding
  - a. Discussion of research supporting ICPS as a behavioral mediator and of how those behaviors predict later violence, substance abuse, and such other serious outcomes as unsafe sex, school dropout, and some forms of psychopathology
  - b. Explanation of each ICPS skill (understanding one’s own and others’ feelings, alternative solutions, and consequential and means-ends thinking)
  - c. Explanation of four levels of discipline—power, suggestions, explanations, and problem solving—and their impact on children’s behavior
  - d. Description of prerequisite problem solving skills and how they help children learn good decision-making skills
  - e. Illustrations of how to apply the problem-solving approach in real life, including helping children use their newly acquired skills when actual problems arise between peers and figures of authority
2. Interactive Exercises
  - a. Participants will practice teaching children a lesson from the program manuals.
  - b. Participants will practice, through role-plays, how to apply the problem-solving approach (“ICPS Dialoguing”) to real-life.

## Workshop Activities (in sequence)

1. First Hour: Lecture and Participant Responses
  - a. Importance of social-emotional learning and How I Can Problem Solve (ICPS), Raising a Thinking Child, and Seeking Out Alternative Responses (SOAR) fit into the social-emotional genre of education
    - i. Behavioral impact
    - ii. Academic impact
  - b. ICPS skills taught
    - i. Feeling concepts
    - ii. Alternative solution skills
    - iii. Consequential thinking skills
    - iv. Means-ends thinking skills
  - c. Behaviors impacted by ICPS skills
    - i. Aggression (physical and verbal)
    - ii. Inability to wait and cope with frustration
    - iii. Social withdrawal
    - iv. Lack of empathy
    - v. Poor peer relations
  - d. Levels of Communication
    - i. Power (demands, commands, time-out, etc.)
    - ii. Suggestions (telling child what to do, in positive tone)
    - iii. Explanations (explaining why to do what adult suggests)
    - iv. Problem Solving (involving the child in the process of thinking what and what not to do, and why)
  - e. Why the SOAR program combines service-learning for middle-school students
    - i. Who the recipients are
    - ii. How and when SOAR is implemented
    - iii. How manage ‘ICPS Dialoguing’ in after-school setting
    - iv. Service-learning projects
2. Second Hour: Interactive Exercises
  - a. Participants will practice pre-problem-solving vocabulary and ICPS dialoguing—the problem-solving style of discipline.
  - b. Participants will view a brief video of high-school youngsters exposed to SOAR in grade 7.
  - c. Participants will discuss obstacles to implementing programs and ways to overcome those obstacles.
  - d. Participants will discuss the role of student support personnel in schools, including guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and nurses.
  - e. Participants will discuss ways to implement the programs in their own settings.
  - f. Questions and answers

## Resources

1. Observations of children when Shure was a nursery school teacher, and how the children handled (or did not handle) conflicts with peers and adults.
2. George Spivack, chairman of research and evaluation at the Hahnemann Community Mental Health Center in Philadelphia was studying how adolescents navigate their interpersonal worlds, and his and Dr. Shure’s common interests led to them working together, beginning in 1968.
3. Curry Bailey, working with middle-school students who had been identified for disruptive and bullying behaviors, learned of ICPS and believed the program designed for younger students could be adapted successfully for those in grades 7 and 8 when combined with empathy-building, service-learning projects.
4. Websites  
<http://www.thinkingchild.com>  
<http://www.researchpress.com>

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“A problem solving approach to prevention of high-risk behaviors from the preschool through the middle-school years”

## **Handouts**

Go to <http://www.thinkingchild.com/conferencehandouts.htm>

## **Assessment**

Participants will create a dialogue before and after the workshop to determine whether they learned the problem-solving approach to discipline.

A Problem-Solving Approach to Prevention of High-Risk Behaviors from  
the Preschool through the Middle-School Years

**Evaluation Form**<sup>1</sup>

Presenters: Myrna Shure and Curry Bailey

Using the following 5-point scale, please rate the statements below from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree:

- 1=Strongly agree
- 2=Somewhat agree
- 3=Neutral
- 4=Somewhat disagree
- 5=Strongly disagree

- \_\_\_ I was satisfied with the quality of the workshop.
- \_\_\_ I found the training useful to my work.
- \_\_\_ I will be able to incorporate material from the workshop into my work.
- \_\_\_ The presenters had adequate knowledge of the topics covered.
- \_\_\_ Presentation of the material was understandable.
- \_\_\_ My questions/needs were addressed.
- \_\_\_ The opportunity to actively participate in and practice curriculum components was helpful.
- \_\_\_ The handouts provided were helpful.

**Comments**

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<sup>1</sup> This Evaluation Form is adapted from the Model Assessment Tool, which was developed by The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute.