

# Social problem solving

## Practice brief

### The practice

Teachers build student ability to solve social problems by systematically teaching the problem solving process and encouraging its use when solving a social issue.

### How does it help?

Students develop and refine their social problem solving skills throughout the early years of schooling through interactions with others, and as a result, become more self-determined. Some students, including those on the autism spectrum, may benefit from a systematically taught process which includes strategies for solving social problems. Instruction in this area benefits students because they begin to understand what a social problem is, the process they should follow when such a problem occurs, and the strategies they could use to solve it. Instruction also benefits teachers as they develop an understanding of what needs to be done to support students when a social problem occurs

### What is it?

Social problem solving is the process and the associated strategies used to analyse, understand, and respond to everyday problems, decision making, and conflicts.

### How does it work?

Teachers develop student ability to solve social problems by providing systematic instruction in relation to the social problem solving process and associated strategies. Teachers develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problem that the student is experiencing, and identifies a specific intervention process for teaching the student how to find a solution. One such process is the *turtle technique* which involves teaching students the steps of how to control feelings and calm down (i.e., think like a turtle). The social problem solving process is explicitly and systematically taught to students as a whole class, as a small group, and individually. When teaching the process teachers use direct as well as embedded problem solving scenarios, and incorporate the use of storybooks and visual supports to enhance student understanding. Teachers model the problem solving process and students are encouraged to use the process when solving social problems. Teachers can communicate the social problem solving process to families so that the process and the associated strategies are also fostered in the home environment.

### How do I do it?

- Explicitly and systematically teach a social problem solving process using visual supports.
- Model using the process to solve social problems.
- Support student use of the process in relation to their encountered social problems.



## It works better if:

- the social problem solving process taught has a small number of set steps
- students are encouraged to use the process to solve their social problems whenever they occur
- visual supports are used to enhance student understanding of the process.

## It doesn't work if:

- the student is encouraged to solve a social problem while they are distressed or overloaded
- the problem solving process is not made clear to the student, or has too many steps
- students are taught the process but not the strategies or vice versa.

## How will I know if it's working?

Students attempt to solve social problems as they occur.

## Where can I go to find out more?

- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention: "Turtle Technique"  
<http://bit.ly/2tHaATR>
- Maryland Family Network: "Tucker the Turtle: Anger Management for the Preschool Set"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ti8QD1WjCWM>
- Pam Dyson: "Tucker the Turtle"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb4xSg\\_I4Kw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb4xSg_I4Kw)
- Autism Support Network: "Supporting problem-solving skills"  
<http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/news/supporting-problem-solving-skills>
- Autism Live: "Teaching Problem Solving"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLu5iSttREU>

## Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

Implementing this practice will meet the following Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

- 3.1 - Establish challenging learning goals
- 3.3 - Use teaching strategies
- 4.3 - Manage challenging behaviour

