Problem Ownership in Adult Relationships

THE OTHER PERSON HAS A PROBLEM.

- If the *other person* has a problem, the *other person* needs to solve it. If someone brings their problem to you, your role is to guide the other person through the process of finding their own solution.
- Be responsible *to* others, not *for* them:
  - Taking responsibility *for* others involves fixing, protecting, rescuing, controlling, and taking on their problems, feelings, and responsibilities.
  - Being responsible *to* others involves listening, showing empathy, offering encouragement, and guiding others, side-by-side (not dragging them), through the problem-solving process.
- Use the F-A-X Listening and problem-solving process. (Steps 1 & 3 on page 2)

I HAVE A PROBLEM.

- Use effective Communication techniques. (Step 2 on page 2)

  If your problem involves the other person's problem behavior.

  - Their problem behavior is Unintentional. The other person doesn't realize how the behavior affects me or it's just the way he/she is.
    - Consider personality traits and prior learning experiences
    - Is the person *aware* of what they are doing and how it affects others?
    - Does the person need to develop a new skill that would correct the behavior?

  - Their problem behavior is On Purpose. The other person seems to be *deliberately* acting this way. I wonder why?
    - Deliberate "misbehavior" serves one of four goals:
      - Attention: They want to feel important, that they belong
      - Power: They want to have some control in the situation
      - Revenge: They are hurt and are retaliating
      - Giving up: They are deeply discouraged and don't care anymore.
    - For each one, find a way the person can get their goal met in an appropriate way.

WE BOTH **HAVE A PROBLEM** and it might involve problem behavior.

- We both need to resolve our respective issues together in a win/win way that meets both our needs.

Effective Adult Communication

When problems arise:

Determine "who *owns* the problem."

- Avoid using "that's their problem" to blame or avoid dealing with conflict.
- The person(s) with the problem is the one who needs to solve it.

WHAT TO *SAY*

1. Address the *other person's* concern/issue/feelings:

- Avoid common roadblocks:
  - Thinking about how you feel/think about the problem
  - Judging the child's feelings as right or wrong
  - Deciding what they should do
  - Giving advice
  - Impatience
  - Why questions - imply their feelings are "wrong"
  - Smoothing over feelings or giving quick fixes
  - Competing stories
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings/perspective.
- Clarify what you think the person feels or means. Never ass-u-me anything!
- Ask helpful questions that invite more communication and pinpoint the real issue.
  - Use "open-ended" questions that encourage sharing, instead of "yes-no" answers.
  - Avoid "why" questions that put others on the defensive.

If the problem only involves/affects them, skip step 2. Do one of the following:

- *Let them figure out the solution on their own* by showing respect for their struggle and giving encouragement.
- *Listen* and help them work through their emotions, but leave the final decision up to them.
- *Use problem solving* to help them explore alternatives and plan a solution to the problem. (See last step below.)

2. Address *your* concern/issue/feelings:

- Be assertive, not aggressive.
- Avoid blaming words like "you." Say "I" instead.
- *Describe* what you see, how you feel or what you'd like to see happen.
- State the rules or what you are and aren't willing to do.
- Get an agreement
- Give a quick reminder
- If appropriate, apologize. Realize a simple "I'm sorry" does not automatically erase hurt. Instead, say "I'm sorry for _____. What can I do to help you forgive me?"

WHAT TO *DO*

3. Solve the problem by choosing one of the following options:

Solve it <u>Yourself</u> ***using the* "CAR" *method***	**Solve it <u>Jointly</u>** ***using the* "BED" *method*** (or to make decisions for yourself)
____**C**hange it	____**B**rainstorm ideas
____**A**ccept it	____**E**valuate the ideas
____**R**emove yourself from it	____**D**ecide/agree on a solution