**Helping your child develop problem solving skills**

**Source:** [www.kumon.com](http://www.kumon.com)

Children are natural problem solvers, and since birth, they have been solving their way through the challenges and unknowns they’ve encountered in life along the way.

But sometimes as the problems get more complex and less a part of natural day-to-day life, children can start to struggle. Sometimes they need a little help to hone their problem-solving skills in order to navigate an obstacle. We’ve put together a few tricks to help.

#### **Developing their “confidence to try”**

One of the reasons kids learn so much as infants is because they are learning to do things for themselves through trial and error. So, if your child is struggling to do things on their own, part of that barrier could be fear of failure or a loss of confidence.

A combination of gentle encouragement and praise can go a long way to [building confidence](https://www.kumon.com/resources/building-confidence-and-self-esteem/). It might start small with making their bed, tying their shoes, or helping with chores. And as we get more into the academic realm, some of that may come down to helping them learn to be ok with making mistakes. Making mistakes is when some of the best learning happens.

#### **Don’t always provide the answer**

It’s hard to watch our kids struggle, but the processes that our brains go through when we struggle can help us be better prepared the next time we encounter a similar challenge. So, allowing your child to struggle and even fail can ultimately lead to better learning and stronger problem-solving skills.

When your child asks for help, try responding with encouragement to try first themselves. If they aren’t sure how to approach the problem, try asking open-ended questions to help them identify the obstacle and envision solutions. If they are struggling with a math problem, ask them what kind of similar problems they have worked on before. Revisiting and reviewing how they solved those can help trigger an “aha!” moment.

In Kumon, this is a fundamental part of the learning process. Kumon aims to [develop self-learning skills](https://www.kumon.com/resources/what-exactly-is-self-learning/) in all students, and along that journey they build their confidence, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

#### **Turn emotion into motivation**

Part of what makes problem solving a challenge for children are the emotions that can sometimes get in the way. Especially in younger kids, helping them identify and process their emotions can help them funnel that energy into the task at hand.

Can your child name their emotion? What tools do they have in their toolbox to deal with those emotions? For example, try taking some deep breathes together and refocusing their energy on how good it will feel to successfully complete the task.

#### **Teaching a “stepped” approach**

Lastly, learning to break down problems into steps is a great strategy, since as the problems can get more complex as they age, the better they’ll get at tackling them.

1. Identify the obstacles. Think it, say it out loud or write it down.
2. Theorize possible solutions. This can be a list of things to fix or to try, or of things they’d need to tackle the problem.
3. Think about the what ifs. Thinking about the potential consequences to themselves and to others is an important step. Are their positive consequences or negative consequences? What might happen after I tried one of the solutions?
4. Make a decision. They might try one or more solutions depending on the situation.
5. What did I learn? Whether success or failure results, there’s always something to be learned from the exercise. Talking about it out loud can be a great way to add that information to their problem-solving memory bank.