Social Problem-Solving Skills Training: Sample Module from the Coping Power Program

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The Coping Power program (Lochman, Wells, & Lenhart, in press; Wells, Lochman & Lenhart, in press) is an indicated preventive intervention designed to address malleable risk factors for aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse in at-risk children prior to the middle school transition. Manualized child and parent group components feature intervention activities that target distal and proximal risk factors for children’s aggressive behavior. This paper will describe the contextual social-cognitive model of risk for aggression upon which the Coping Power program is based, provide an overview of the program and its empirical support, and present manualized session-by-session content on social problem solving from the child component module.

Contextual Social-Cognitive Model. Developmental psychopathology research indicates that two sets of factors mediate the onset and maintenance of externalizing behavior problems in children: child level social cognitive factors and contextual parenting characteristics. Lochman’s (2006) contextual social-cognitive model summarizes these factors. Aggressive children have difficulty at a number of levels of social information processing. They tend to pay more attention to negative social cues and to misattribute others’ intent as hostile. When they reach the problem solution stage, aggressive children generate fewer and less adaptive solutions to perceived problems and expect that aggressive solutions will work for them. The family context in which children develop plays a critical role in shaping these social-cognitive processes. Several parental risk factors have been directly linked to childhood aggression, including low involvement in the child’s life and an overly harsh and inconsistent disciplinary style (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). The Coping Power program seeks to address these child and parenting risk factors directly, as well as to impact more distal contextual risk factors, including parental stress, the level of social support that parents receive, and inter-parent conflict.
Overview of Child Component. The Coping Power Child Component (Lochman et al., in press) includes 34 manualized sessions centered on building social cognitive competencies to address the deficits described above. The sessions are designed to be delivered in a group format, typically including four to six students and two co-leaders. A range of topics are covered during the child group sessions, including: (1) behavioral and personal goal-setting; (2) organization and study skills; (3) emotion recognition; (4) anger management training; (5) perspective taking and attribution retraining; (6) social problem-solving; and (7) positive peer affiliation and resistance to peer pressure. Sessions run 45-60 minutes and include a variety of interactive games, role-plays, and activities to facilitate active practice of new social-emotional and coping skills.

To promote generalization of skills outside the group setting, students set weekly personal behavior goals. Classroom teachers are asked to provide input on appropriate behavioral goals at the beginning of the program. Students are responsible for obtaining daily feedback on goal completion from their teachers while the program is underway. The students earn tangible reinforcers during group sessions for goal and homework completion, positive participation, and following group rules. To promote retention of information across sessions, students are asked to recall the main topics discussed during the previous meeting at the start of each session. At the close of each session, students are offered an opportunity to purchase prizes with points they have earned. To end on a positive note and to further reinforce gains made, each student is also asked to identify a specific behavioral improvement that he or she has made and that one other group member has made at the close of each session.

Overview of Parent Component. The Coping Power Parent Component (Wells et al., in press) consists of 16 manualized parent group sessions offered over the same 15 to 18-month
period as the child group. Parent meetings last approximately 90 minutes each and are typically run with groups of up to 10 parents or parent dyads and two co-leaders. The parent program is derived from social learning theory-based behavioral parent training programs. It focuses on teaching parents to: (1) identify and reinforce positive child behaviors; (2) give effective instructions and establish age-appropriate rules and expectations; (3) ignore minor disruptive behaviors; (4) apply effective consequences following disruptive child behaviors; (5) foster family cohesion; and (6) establish ongoing structures for family communication and parental monitoring of child behavior.

In addition to these behavioral parenting skills, parents learn additional skills that support the social-cognitive and problem solving skills that children learn in the Coping Power Child Component. The parents learn to apply the same problem-solving model that the children are taught to resolve family problems more effectively at home. Parents also learn to support their child’s academic work by establishing a structure for ongoing communication with their child’s teacher, establishing a contract for homework completion, and supporting the organizational skills that their child is learning. Finally, the parents practice mood and stress management skills to better allow them to cope with the stress of parenting and to create more positive relationships with their children. The parent sessions are also designed to be highly interactive and to include group discussions, role plays, and homework assignments. The parents are frequently updated about what the children are learning in their group and are encouraged to facilitate their children’s use of newly emerging skills at home.

*Empirical Support for Coping Power.* The efficacy and effectiveness of the Coping Power program have been examined in a number of randomized controlled trials.
Children participating in Coping Power have been shown to have statistically significant reductions in aggressive behavior and improvements in social cognitive processes by the end of the intervention (Lochman & Wells, 2002b). In two different studies, positive program effects on reduced delinquency, substance use and school behavior problems were still present one year following the end of the intervention (Lochman & Wells, 2003, 2004). The combined child and parent intervention had more significant effects on adolescents’ delinquency and substance use than the child-only intervention at one-year follow-up (Lochman & Wells, 2004). Importantly, program-induced changes in key target behaviors, including children’s hostile attributions, outcome expectations, and locus of control, and parents’ consistent use of positive parenting strategies, have been shown to mediate long-term child behavioral improvements (Lochman & Wells, 2002a).

The Coping Power program has also been effectively implemented with clinically disordered youths in psychiatric outpatient clinics (van de Wiel et al., in press; Zonnevyle-Bender, Matthys, van de Wiel, & Lochman, in press) and in residential facilities for specialized populations such as deaf children (Lochman et al., 2001). Van de Wiel and colleagues (2003) found Coping Power to be a more cost-effective intervention method than other care as usual procedures. Coping Power has been successfully disseminated to a range of “real world” clinic and school providers. We are currently examining how level and type of training and individual and organizational factors affect intervention fidelity and outcomes. Further information regarding the Coping Power program and the steps to obtaining training is available at www.copingpower.com, or by contacting the authors directly.

Introduction to the Manual

To illustrate the structure and content of the Coping Power Program, six sessions from...
the Child Component manual (Lochman et al., in press) are presented in the following section. These sessions were selected as representative of one of the core foci of the Coping Power Program: addressing aggressive children’s characteristic deficits in social-problem solving skills. Toward this end, the Coping Power Program instructs students to use the “PICC model,” a structured sequence of steps to apply to problem situations (Problem Identification, Choices, and Consequences). Students learn to accurately identify problem situations, to generate a variety of possible solutions, to identify and evaluate possible consequences associated with each solution, and to choose the solution with the most favorable consequences. Leaders play an active role in helping students to come up with adaptive solutions (e.g., verbal assertions, compromise) and to recognize the negative consequences associated unfavorable solutions (e.g., aggression, overly dependent on adult intervention).

The first session presented below is also the first session in the full Child Component manual and is designed to introduce students to the purpose and structure of the intervention. The remaining five sessions are drawn from Coping Power’s 14 social problem-solving sessions (the numbering of the sessions reflects their placement in the full manual). Social problem-solving sessions that are not included here provide additional opportunities for practice (e.g., through creation of a group video) and application of the model in a variety of contexts (e.g., to conflicts with teachers, siblings, and peers).

The following sessions have been slightly modified so that they may be used as a stand-alone module. Using these sessions, clinicians might conduct a brief intervention to enhance the problem-solving skills of an at-risk group of students; clinicians conducting longer-term group work may wish to incorporate some of the ideas and activities from these sessions while retaining their group’s pre-existing structure. An important caveat to the use of these sessions is
that dismantling research has not been conducted on the Coping Power Program, and it cannot be assumed that the program’s documented empirical support translates down to individual portions of the curriculum. For maximum benefit to students and families, our recommendation is that both the Child and Parent Components be implemented in their entirety.

References


Lochman, J. E., & Wells, K. C. (2003). Effectiveness study of Coping Power and
classroom intervention with aggressive children: Outcomes at a one-year follow-up.

*Behavior Therapy, 34*, 493-515.


Session 1: Establish Structure of the Group and Behavioral Goal Setting Procedure

Primary Goals:

1. Discuss Group Purpose and Structure.
2. Begin Developing Group Cohesion.

Materials Needed:

- Handouts 1.1-1.4
- Folder for each group member
- Posters for rules, point system, and recording points
- Ball (optional)
- Prize Box with a variety of items ranging in value

Objective 1: General Purpose and Structure

A. Introduction

Introduce the leader(s) of the group to the group members and provide a brief overview of what the children can expect to experience over the course of the year (e.g., talk about the general purpose of the group, provide details about length and frequency of meetings, and the expectations that will be placed on them).

The following paragraph is an example of how the leader might introduce the purpose of the group: “We will be working with you in this group to improve your ability to cope with strong feelings and with difficult situations (such as peer pressure, tough schoolwork, and getting along with teachers). One of the goals of the group is to
provide you with enough information so that you are better equipped to make a smooth and successful transition to middle school when the time arrives. As part of the group you will learn new ways to solve problems that come up at school, in your neighborhood, and at home. Have any of you heard the term ‘coping’ before?” If the answer is yes ask, “What does coping mean to you?” Elicit or shape a response from group members for the definition of the term coping. For example, assist children in stating that coping may mean being able to manage or handle stressful situations when they arise without becoming too angry or upset. “Why do you think this is called the Coping Power Program?” Elicit or shape a response that would indicate that they could increase or strengthen their coping skills in this group. “During our meetings, we will work on coping with problems that come up in your life and making smart choices in difficult situations.”

B. Group Rule Generation

“Now it is time for us to decide on how we want to run this group. In general, we have found that it is useful to have rules established before we start so that each of us knows what is expected. What are some of the rules that you think we should have in a group?” Have one child go to the poster paper that is taped to the wall and ask him/her to record the rules that the group generates. (You will retain this poster for display at subsequent meetings.) Leaders can also have the group members take turns recording the rules that are generated. Try to make sure that all group members participate in generating rules. If a child offers a “strange,” unclear, or silly rule, try to reframe this into a useful rule. General rules for the group should include:

❖ No physical contact.
- No name-calling.
- No swearing.
- Arriving on time.
- Having a positive attitude.
- Not interrupting each other.
- Keeping everything private (confidential).
- Following directions.

If these general group rules have not been generated, the group leaders should suggest them. The confidentiality rule should be defined for group members: “What we say in here, stays in here.” Indicate that this rule applies to both the group leaders and other group members. Note that the children can talk to their parents about group discussions, but should not talk to other children about information shared by their fellow group members.

Provide Handout 1.1 (Group Rules) and ask the children to record the rules on this form so that they have their own copy. Ask them to place the forms in their folders.

C. Point and Strike System

Prior to this meeting, leaders should create a poster describing the Point and Strike Systems and a poster for recording students’ points (a sample Point Tracking System follows the handouts for this session). These should also be displayed during this and every subsequent group meeting. Direct the students’ attention to the Point and Strike System poster and provide them with Handout 1.2 (Point System), then describe the procedures as follows.

Group members can earn one point for:

- Following rules
Positive participation

Group members can earn **two points** for:

- Completing homework assignments

Group members can earn up to **five points** for:

- Meeting their weekly goal.

Strike System

The Strike System should be used for dealing with problem behavior displayed during the meetings or, if appropriate, outside of the meetings (e.g., breaking the confidentiality rule). The first two times a student breaks one of the group rules, he or she receives a strike. The third time the student breaks a rule, the student receives “Strike 3” and does not earn his or her point for following the rules. **Note:** If a child receives three strikes during one group session, he or she may need to leave group for that day if he or she is not able to regain behavioral control.

Positive Participation

Using the Point and Strike System poster, draw the students’ attention to the positive participation point and ask, **“What do you think positive participation means?”** Elicit or shape a definition that includes behaviors such as responding meaningfully to questions from leaders or other children, raising important points related to the discussion, and engaging in activities. Inform the children that the group leaders will tell them if they earned the positive participation point at the end of each session. Indicate that the group leaders will talk more specifically about the points earned for goals in a few minutes.

Prize Box

Group leaders should then explain how the points can be used. **“You will be able to use**
the points you earn to purchase items in this box (show the prize box). We will talk with you at the end of each group and tell you how many points you have earned for that group. We will keep track of the total number of points you have earned and spent on this poster (draw the students’ attention to the Point Tracking poster). **You can spend your points immediately or save your points to buy specific prizes. There are small prizes and big prizes; if you would like to purchase a bigger prize, you will have to save your points.”**

Provide group members with Handout 1.3 (Prize Box Menu) and ask them to place it in their folder.

**Objective 2: Get Acquainted/Group Cohesion**

A. **Ice Breaker Activities**

   To help group members get acquainted with one another and to foster group cohesion, conduct one of the following activities:

   **Pass the ball:** Have group members throw a ball to each other. Ask them to identify the person (by name) to whom they threw the ball, identify one thing that is the same about the two of them, and identify one thing that is different about the two of them.

   **Group naming task:** Have group members decide on a name for their group (e.g., using a combination of their first initials to form a word). Have group members generate several alternative names and vote on the name they would like to use.

**Objective 3: Goal Setting**

A. **Introduction**

   Engage students in a discussion related to goal setting: “**What are goals? Why do we set goals for ourselves?**” Elicit a response indicating that a goal is something you work toward achieving. Group leaders should indicate that we set goals in order to improve
something in ourselves or so that we have a better idea about what we would like to achieve in the future. A goal provides us with structure for the future and allows us to plan ahead.

Inform the students that each of them will be choosing weekly goals based on input obtained from their teacher, counselor, and/or parent. Be sure to tell them that, at times, more than one person may be working on the same goal (e.g., being quiet during class), but that meeting this goal may be easy for one person but difficult for another. Introduce the idea that they will be using goal sheets to keep track of their success with meeting their goals. Provide the students with Handout 1.4 and discuss how points are earned on the goal sheet.

“You can earn 1 point for each day that you meet your goal. If you meet your goal for the entire week you will earn 5 points. You will need to ask your teacher to sign your goal sheet every day. If your goal sheet is not signed, you will not earn your points.”

In the full Coping Power Program, Goal Sheets are not distributed until after the second session, during which the concept of goal setting is explored in detail. Leaders conducting an abbreviated form of the program may wish to initiate the goal sheet procedure after the first session. With input from the leaders, students should come up with a goal for the week and write it on their goal sheet (Handout 1.4.). Leaders should help the group members describe their goals in terms of observable behavior in order to help minimize their use of subjective statements as goals. For example, “being good in class” is very subjective. This goal can be behaviorally defined in terms of “not talking back to the teacher,” “no physical contact with other kids,” and so on. It is important to select a goal that is relevant and is not too difficult so that the child’s initial experiences with the goal-setting procedures will be positive. Based on the student's performance, it may be necessary to increase or decrease the level of difficulty of the chosen goals at subsequent sessions.
Rules for the goal-setting procedure include:

- Each child is responsible for his/her goal sheet.
- Each child is responsible for getting his/her goal sheet signed by the teacher.
- Each child is responsible for returning the goal sheet to group each week.

Remind students that they must have their teachers sign the goal sheet to earn points and that the goal sheet must be presented at the beginning of each group meeting. Problem-solve with group members about how they can remember to have their goal sheet signed and to bring it back to the group the following week. Some ideas may include the following:

- Putting a sticker on their desk that will serve as a reminder.
- Ask students to remind one another.
- Making sure that they leave it at school in a place that is visible

**Objective 4: Positive Feedback.**

Toward the end of each session, group leaders should ask each group member to identify one positive thing about him- or herself and/or one positive thing about another group member. Try to have the children avoid complimenting one another on their clothing or other non-behavioral or status oriented things. Work toward having group members provide positive feedback to peers on group-related behaviors or positive examples outside of group that they observed at school during the week. To assist in this process, group leaders can model appropriate compliments or positive feedback. If time permits, ask each child to identify one thing that he or she learned during the group. Praise the group for any positive achievements they may have made during the session.

**Objective 5: Prize Box.**

At the end of each group meeting, complete the point tracking form while discussing with
students whether they earned their positive participation and following rules points. Provide feedback to students who do not earn one or both points. Tally the points earned for each child in the group and allow them to select prizes from the prize box (if applicable).

**Objective 6: Free Time.**

This is an *optional* (time-permitting) free play period (5-10 minutes). Each student who has earned at least one point during group is eligible for free time. Group leaders should be aware of any potential problems that arise between group members during this free play time and use it as an opportunity to practice “problem solving in action.” Attempt to have each person involved in the situation discuss the problem and try to come to a resolution. Try to develop a plan to prevent this type of problem from occurring again. It is helpful to follow up with these issues individually and/or at the beginning of the next group session. The leaders should view this problem-solving opportunity as a process to be worked on over the course of the entire program. When possible, the first step would be to have each child discuss the problem individually with the group leader and then to work toward having the children discuss the problem situation with each other. During the discussion, the leaders should have the children accurately identify the problem, talk about possible misinterpretations, generate several solutions for the problem, discuss the consequences of these solutions, and determine which solution would best achieve the goal of getting along with the peer.
HANDOUT 1.1

GROUP RULES

1. _______________________________________________ ____________________

2. _______________________________________________ ____________________

3. _______________________________________________ ____________________

4. _______________________________________________ ____________________

5. _______________________________________________ ____________________

6. _______________________________________________ ____________________

7. _______________________________________________ ____________________

8. _______________________________________________ ____________________

9. _______________________________________________ ____________________

10. _______________________________________________ ____________________

As a member of this group I agree to follow the rules outlined above.

Signature: _______________________________________ ____
HANDOUT 1.2

POINT SYSTEM

GOAL SHEETS

0 days = 0 points
1 day = 1 point
2 days = 2 points
3 days = 3 points
4 days = 4 points
5 days = 5 points

POSITIVE PARTICIPATION

1 point per session

- Active Listening
- Engaging in Activities

FOLLOWING THE RULES

1 point per session

“3 Strikes and you lose 1 point”

- If you follow the rules that you and your leader agreed upon, you will earn 1 point.
- During each session you will get 2 warnings about breaking the rules. The third time that the leader has to warn you, the point is lost.
# Handout 1.3

## Sample Prize Box Menu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pencils (for 3)/Pen (for 1)</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eraser (2 SMALL OR 1 LARGE)</td>
<td>4 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folders</td>
<td>6 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hair Clips</td>
<td>8 points</td>
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<td>Nail Polish</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<td>Lip Gloss</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<td>Yo-Yo</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gloves</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing Cards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Nerf Balls</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Potter Cards</td>
<td>18 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>20 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnetic Game</td>
<td>20 points</td>
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<td>Frisbee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wallet</td>
<td>25 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Football/Soccer ball/Basketball</td>
<td>35 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD Wallet</td>
<td>40 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disposable Camera</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clock Radio</td>
<td>75 points</td>
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GOAL SHEET

For: ________________
Week of: ___/___/___
Goal: _______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________

Monday Y N ____________________________
Tuesday Y N ____________________________
Wednesday Y N ____________________________
Thursday Y N ____________________________
Friday Y N ____________________________

(Students earn 1 point for each day they meet their goal.)

Teacher: Please sign your name on the line provided and indicate whether or not the goal was met by circling Y (Yes) or N (No). If the child did not meet the goal, please provide a brief explanation as to why.

I, ____________, have chosen the above goal and am responsible for doing my best to meet this goal and having my teacher sign this sheet daily.
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Session 17: Introduction to Problem Solving

Primary Goals:

1. Introduce Problem Solving.
2. Introduction to the PICC Model.

Materials Needed:

- Handout 1.3: Goal Sheet
- List of possible problem situations and solutions
- Prize Box

Objective 1: Review Goal Sheets and Main Points from Previous Session.

Begin the group by asking students to produce the goal sheet distributed during the last meeting. Review each student’s sheet and award one point for each day that the student’s teacher indicated that the goal was met. Engage each student in a discussion of the goal-setting process: “What goal did you set for yourself? How did you do with meeting this goal? What made it easy/difficult to reach the goal you set for yourself?”

If the goal set last week was too difficult, break it down into smaller more manageable steps; if goal was easily achieved, assess the need for setting a goal that will be a little more challenging; share with students the idea of goal-setting as a process.

Also, begin this and each subsequent session by asking each child to recall one point from the previous group meeting, using reminders as needed. As each session in the curriculum builds on the previous one, the review process enhances the opportunity for students to retain the material being covered from one week to the next. Recapping the primary message from each group meeting is one way of meeting this objective.
Objective 2: Problem Identification (Introduction to the PICC Model)

A. Introduction to Problem Solving

Problem identification will be discussed as a component of the problem solving process.

“Over the next several weeks, we are going to talk about problem solving and how to make good choices when you have problems with your friends or other people in your life. To start, we should all agree on what a problem is. Can somebody provide me with a definition of a problem?”

Encourage students to provide a definition but do not force the issue. If they are unable to describe it, provide the following definition: “A problem exists when there is something that gets in the way of a goal that we want to reach or something that keeps us from getting where we want to be. There are many examples of problems, some of which are individual problems (e.g., your bike gets a flat tire and you are miles away from home) and some of which are group problems (e.g., your Boy Scout troop is having trouble raising money for a field trip). A problem can also exist if two people have different goals and both goals cannot be met with the same solution. For example, you have homework to do but you really want to watch your favorite TV show first. Your mother wants you to get your homework done before you can watch TV. People can sometimes tell when there is a problem, because they will feel angry or sad. Can you think of any examples of problems?”

Wait for the students to respond. If they do not spontaneously offer examples, ask them to think of a problem that they have experienced in school during the last week. You may want to use one of these examples to demonstrate how to think through the steps of problem solving.
B. Introduction to PICC Model

“Now, let’s try to think of some of the steps you go through to solve a problem.”

Start by asking group members what they think the first step to solving a problem is. You are to be guiding them toward creating the words associated with the PICC model. That is, P = Problem, I = Identification, C = Choices, and C = Consequences. The “PICC” outline represents the main problem solving steps schematically and will be used throughout the problem solving sessions. “PICC” follows the form of:

Problem Identification___________________________________

Choices Consequences

Be sure to work your way through the schematic noted above and have this drawn on the board so that all group members can see it.

C. Defining a Problem in Solvable Steps

After the discussion about problem solving in general, introduce the notion of “picking apart” a problem. “Great! You have some really good ideas about getting started with problem solving. Let’s use the PICC chart (this should have already been drawn on the board during Objective 2B. above) to ‘pick apart’ a problem and to ‘pick’ good choices that really work for you. Let’s look at an example of breaking down a problem into smaller parts.” Next, conduct one of the following activities:

Option 1(a): My Car Is Not Working!

“Let’s say I had my car towed into the automotive shop and all of you were mechanics who worked at the shop. One of you asked me to describe the reason that I had my car towed to the shop. I replied, ‘Because it won’t run.’ Would my answer be helpful to you? Would it help you to figure out what is wrong?” Wait for the children to
respond and then continue. Refer to the PICC chart on the board and write “Pick It Apart = Ask Questions” underneath the words “Problem Identification.” Leave enough room below to write the children’s responses. “What kinds of things would you need to know to figure out what was wrong with the car?” As the children generate questions, try to reframe these questions into more general categories, such as,

**Problem Identification**

Pick It Apart = Ask Questions

- How often has it happened?
- In what situations does it happen?
- What happened just before the problem occurred?
- What is *not* affected by the problem?

Make sure that responses include things like:

- It will not run after leaving my parking lights on all night (a battery or electric problem).
- I have not been to the gas station in a long time (car ran out of gas).
- There was a loud crash under the car and since then there has been a loud noise (muffler problem).

“Now you have more information about when and under what conditions my car will not run. Based on these clearer ideas of the problem, what do you, as mechanics, think might have caused the problem?” Instruct the group to solicit suggestions for what caused the problem and how understanding what the problem is helps us to understand the cause of the problem.

“There is one other thing you probably want to ask me before you start to work on
my car. You will want to know what my goal is. For example, you might ask me if I want the car fixed no matter what the cost or if I am only willing to pay a certain amount of money.” Instruct the group to solicit information that would help to identify what your goal is and then, in response to the group’s questions, you can state that you want it fixed only if the repairs cost less than $500.00, since the car is pretty old. If the repairs cost more than $500.00, your goal would be to get rid of the car and try to sell it “as is.” Be sure to discuss how considering the goal changes how you think about the problem. Frame these under the terms Choices and Consequences (e.g., you choose to only fix the muffler but the transmission needs to be overhauled – the consequence would be that you may not get much money when you try to sell it).

Option 1(b): My Nintendo Game Is Not Working!

“Let’s say that your brother wants to play a Nintendo game, but it is not working. He comes to you and tells you that the game does not work. Does this help you to figure out what is wrong? What kinds of things would you ask to figure out what the problem is?” Again, as children are generating questions, try to reframe these questions into more general categories such as,

- When does the problem occur?
- What are some of the specific difficulties encountered?

“Now, as a Nintendo dealer, try to get a better idea of why the game is not working, and I will play the role of your brother.” Encourage one group member to take on the role of the Nintendo repairman. Below are some of the questions that you would like this person to ask so that they get a better idea of what is happening.

Problem Identification__________________________
Pick It Apart = Ask Questions

- **Is the power light on?** (not plugged in, no electricity to operate the machine)
- **Does the picture come on the screen but you cannot move the figures?**
  (the joy stick is not plugged in correctly)
- **Is the TV screen on but the game does not show up on the screen?**
  (cartridge is not all the way in)
- **Does the TV work fine when the game is not plugged in?** (the Nintendo machine is probably broken)
- **Is the TV on the wrong channel?** (needs to be on the right channel)

“Now that you have more information about the problem, do you also have a better idea about what might have caused the problem?” Solicit suggestions for what caused the problem and how understanding what the problem is helps us to understand the cause of the problem. “Once you have figured out what the problem is, there is one other thing you might want to think about before you start to work on the machine. You will want to know what my goal is. For example, do I want to have the machine fixed no matter how much it costs, or would I rather buy a new machine if the expense will be too great?”

Instruct the group to solicit information that would help to identify your goal. Note how consideration of the goal changes how you think about the problem. Once again, frame these under the terms **Choices** and **Consequences**. (For example, you choose to get the game repaired no matter what the cost, and the problem is that the cartridge is jammed. The consequence might be that you need to take the game to a repairman and this would cost a lot of money. An option would be to see if a new game would cost less money than getting the old one repaired.)
Objective 3: Positive Feedback (See Session 1.)

Objective 4: Prize Box (See Session 1.)

Objective 5: Free Time (See Session 1.)
Session 18: Social Problem Solving: Part I

Primary Goals:

1. Complete Introduction to Problem Solving from Session 17.
2. Problem Identification and Generating Solutions.

Materials Needed:

- Handout 1.3: Goal Sheet
- Handout 18.1
- Prize Box

Objective 1: Review Goal Sheets and Main Points from Previous Session. See Session 17.

Objective 2: Problem Identification

A. Defining a Problem in Solvable Steps (continued)

“Last time we met we talked about the PICC Model. Can anyone tell me what that refers to?” Wait for responses and prompt them as needed. “Remember how we talked about the importance of really knowing what a problem is before we try to solve it?”

Wait for responses and prompt as needed. Put the PICC Model on the board so that all group members can see it.

Problem Identification___________________________

Pick It Apart = Ask Questions

Choices

Consequences

Activities (choose one of two options)
Option 2(a): My Friends Won’t Let Me Play!

Engage in the “Pick it Apart” procedure with a vague social problem. Introduce the problem of a child turning down another child’s request to play together. Using the PICC chart, try to determine more explicitly what the problem is. “Here is the problem. My name is Tim and I have a friend named Bob. I see Bob walking in front of my house and I run outside to ask him if he wants to play with me. When I ask him, he responds by saying ‘No’ and keeps on walking. Can you help me to figure out what the problem is? What questions should I ask myself?” Make it appear as though you think that Bob doesn’t like you so you have decided that you are never going to ask him to play again. Obviously, this is not a good solution. Ask group members to help you come up with a different interpretation to the problem; ask them to provide you with a list of possible questions that you could ask so that you could be sure of what the problem is. For example:

When are the times he will not play with you (e.g., dinner time)?

- Is this all the time or only sometimes?
- What is he doing when he will not play with you?
- Are there other people around when you ask him to play?
- How do you ask him to play with you?
- Did he used to play with you?

Group leaders can offer responses to the above questions and create a scenario in which the only times that Bob will not play are when he has to get home for dinner or when you ask him to play tennis which is a game that Bob does not like. Point out that one way to solve the problem would be to ask him to do something else besides play tennis – find out what games he likes to play – or approach him after dinner is over.
Option 2(b): Parent-Child Conflict

Role-play a situation that involves a parent-child conflict. One group leader takes the role of the parent, and the other leader takes the role of the child. If there is only one leader, a group member can take on one of the roles. The basic scenario can be that the child asks the parent if he can go to the mall or stay up an hour later to watch a TV show, and the parent says, “No! I asked you to clean your room today, and your room is still a mess.” Ask group members to define the problem in the situation. If the child suggests the problem is that “Mom is not fair” or that “I never get to do what I want,” discuss how this problem definition may actually hinder problem solving, because there is little that the child can do to resolve the problem. Here are some suggested questions to ask the group members:

- What is the problem according to the mom?
- What is the problem according to the child?
- When would this be a problem?
- How did this problem emerge?
- What is the child’s goal?
- What is the parent’s goal?

Objective 3: Problem Identification and Solution Formation

A. Introduction

Introduce the relationship between problem identification and solution generation. Group leaders should instruct the students that they will be playing a game; the goal of the game is for them to come up with ten solutions to a problem in five minutes. If they can come up with ten solutions, each group member earns one extra point for the session; if they can’t, the group does not earn any extra points. “Now we are going to have you play a game. What
we want you to do is to try to think of ten different solutions to this problem: You are out on the playground and you see a boy in your class named Dan sitting on the ground holding his head. Another boy from your class, Tom, is standing over him, threatening to hit him. We want you to think of as many solutions to this problem as you can. We want you to do this as fast as you can – the solutions can be good solutions or bad solutions, it doesn’t matter. We will write down your solutions as you come up with them. Ready? Go!” One group leader should record the solutions as they are generated and keep them in list format on the far side of the board. We will be using the rest of the board for Part B. Possible solutions include:

1. Try to get the two boys to talk to each other.
2. Help his friend Dan by hitting Tom.
3. Go tell a teacher that there is a fight on the playground.
4. Convince Dan that it is not worth getting in trouble and they should just leave.
5. Go get a basketball and see if they will play a game and become friends again.
6. Refer the boys to peer mediation.
7. Tell Tom he will get his brother to beat him up if he hits Dan again.
8. Say to Tom that they do not like to be hit by other kids.
9. Ask Dan if he wants to come over to his house and get away from this place.
10. Begin to talk about the fun things that they did at school that day.

B. Solution Categories

Following this activity, group leaders should categorize the solutions students generate
into more general solution types. For example, you can use the following categories to help the children understand that there are some general ways to classify solutions:

- Help Seeking
- Non-aggressive Direct Action
- Aggressive Direct Action
- Avoidance

This type of categorization will help students to develop more complete ideas of how problems can be solved, and they will learn that there are several different types of solutions within each category. Write down the general categories on the board.

**Objective 4: Positive Feedback** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 5: Prize Box** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 6: Free Time** (See Session 1.)
Session 19: Social Problem Solving: Part II

Primary goals:

1. Identification and Evaluation of Consequences.
2. Demonstrate the Difference Between Automatic Thinking and Deliberate Thinking.

Materials Needed:

- Handout 1.3: Goal Sheet
- Handouts 19.1 & 19.2
- Prize Box

Objective 1: Review Goal Sheets and Main Points from Previous Session. See Session 17.

Objective 2: Identifying Consequences for Solutions.

A. Introduction to Consequences

To begin, ask the group for a definition of a consequence. “So far, we have talked a lot about how we should define a problem. We have said that we need to look at problems from many different angles or viewpoints so that we can get a complete understanding of what is going on. We have also talked about the importance of generating many solutions for a problem so that we can evaluate the solutions and choose the best one. What we haven’t talked about is how we actually evaluate our choices. How do we know which choice is the best one?” Wait for the group to respond. Praise anyone who comes up with the notion of looking at consequences or outcomes. If nobody comes up with an answer, ask the group the following question: “Has anyone heard of the word consequence?” If a student answers “yes,” ask him or her to tell the group what that word
means. If not, explain that a consequence is what happens as a result of something you do, or it is what happens after you do something. Provide a simple example of a consequence such as, “What happens if you leave a chocolate bar in the car on a hot day?” (Answer: It melts). Melting is the consequence that is associated with the behavior of leaving a chocolate bar in the car on a hot day.

B. Application of PICC Model

Leaders should provide a hypothetical problem that lends itself well to this activity or elicit a real-life problem situation from students. Have students brainstorm solutions (good and bad) using the PICC format:

**Problem Identification**

Pick It Apart = Ask Questions

**Choices**

**Consequences**

Once all of the solutions have been generated, ask group members to identify the consequences for each solution. It is also useful to ask group members to identify goals for each of the solutions. This will encourage group members to recognize relations among problem definition, the goal being pursued, and the solutions that are generated. Examples of questions to be asked during the discussion are:

- What would be the consequence for this solution?
- What would happen after this solution was used?
- What else might happen?
- What else might the other person do?
- What else might the other person feel?

*Several consequences for each solution should be generated.*
The point of the above activity is to introduce the idea that there are often several consequences for one solution and, if you want to make a good decision, you must think of all of the possible consequences.

Objective 3: Evaluating Consequences

A. Good and Bad Consequences

Using the consequences that have been generated to the problem situation above, ask group members, “How can you tell if a consequence is ‘good’ or ‘bad’? What makes a consequence good versus bad?” Group leaders should introduce the idea that a consequence is good if it helps the person to reach an important goal. It may be useful to discuss the difference between long-term and short-term goals (e.g., fighting may help to reach the short-term goal of feeling strong/important/not a wimp but may get in the way of reaching the long-term goal of doing well in school, having a good job, staying out of trouble).

Using the PICC chart with consequences listed, ask group members to rate each of the consequences as good (++) , bad (-), or okay (+). Then ask group members to indicate which of the possible solutions generated would be the best solution based on the consequences. This further illustrates the idea that there may be several options or choices in every situation, and there may be several consequences for each solution. “When making a decision, it is useful to think about all the consequences and think about what you want to have happen and make your choice based on which solution will help you achieve that goal.”

The point of the above activity is to convey to the group members that, in order to make good choices, we must evaluate the consequences of our choices.

Provide Handout 19.1 (Problem Solving – PICC Model) and review with the group.
Objective 4: Automatic Responding Versus Thinking Ahead

These activities were designed to teach children to recognize the difference between solutions that are generated in an automatic mode of responding and those that are generated when people think before responding. We want to convey to the students the idea that, if they are able to stop and think before responding, they will often be able to think of better solutions.

A. Activity: Generating Solutions

“Now that you have all thought about the importance of generating many possible solutions and know that we have to look at the consequences before making a decision, I want to play a game. The goal of this game is to think of as many solutions to a problem as possible. I want each of you to respond as quickly as possible, giving me every solution that you can think of. Say the first thing that pops into your head. Don’t worry about whether the solution is “right” or “wrong” or “good” or “bad.” Use a real-life or hypothetical problem situation. “Does anybody have any questions? Here is the problem: ____________, let’s go!” Have one group leader record all of the responses on the board. Group leaders should not evaluate any of the solutions offered, but should ask for clarification if a solution is not clearly delineated (e.g., “Why do you think that would solve the problem?” or “How would that solve this problem?”). If a child offers a solution that is a variation of a solution previously mentioned, point out that this is a variation and then list it with the solutions generated.

B. Consequence Evaluation

After generating a long list of solutions, ask the group members to identify the
consequences for these solutions and evaluate the consequences in terms of being good (++), okay (+), or bad (-).

You will need a copy of the solutions and the ratings that are generated so that you can compare them to the “thinking before you act” activity that we will do at the beginning of the next session. Be sure to write them down and have them available for next week.

**Objective 5: Assign Homework**

Provide group members with Handout 19.2 (Problem Solving Worksheet). Ask that they complete this form for the next session. Remind group members that they will receive two points for completing the assignment. The target problem can be one experienced at home, in school, or in the community. The solution should be carried out and the consequences noted in the space provided. Encourage group members to think before responding and to evaluate all available options.

**Objective 6: Positive Feedback** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 7: Prize Box** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 8: Free Time** (See Session 1.)
HANDOUT 19.1

Problem Solving - PICC Model

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (P.I.)
(a) Perspective Taking
• Identify what the problem is based on each person’s perspective of the situation.
• No blaming, name-calling or put-downs in stating the problem.

(b) Individual Goals
• Identify your goal in the situation.
• Identify the other person’s goal in the situation.
• Look toward cooperation and compromise.

IDENTIFY CHOICES (C)
• Brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem. What are your choices?
• Do not evaluate the solutions in terms of outcome, just list all possible choices.

IDENTIFYING CONSEQUENCES (C)
• Identify what the consequences would be for each solution.
• Provide ALL possible consequences, both positive and negative.

CHOOSE THE BEST SOLUTION
• Choose the best solution based on a review of all the consequences.
• Weigh out the positives and negatives → choose the one that has the fewest negatives.
• Choose a backup solution in case the first solution does not work.
• Try out your solution.
PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

My problem is:

-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------

Possible choices/solutions: | Consequences of the choices/solutions:
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------

The solution I chose is:

-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------

The consequences of my solution were:

-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------------------
Session 20: Social Problem Solving: Part III

Primary Goals:

1. Complete Discussion of the Value of Thinking Ahead.
2. Illustrate How Decisions are Made, Based on Consequences.

Materials Needed:

- Handout 1.3: Goal Sheet
- List of solutions generated by group during Session 19 (recorded by a group leader)
- Pictures or object representations for use with boat activity (optional)
- Prize Box

Objective 1: Review Goal Sheets and Main Points from Previous Session. See Session 17.

Objective 2: Review the Homework Assignment

A. Review homework assignment (Handout 19.2 – Problem Solving Worksheet). Group members who completed their homework should receive two points. Discuss the target problems, choices, and consequences.

Objective 3: Automatic Responding Versus Thinking Ahead (Part 2)

A. Activity: Generating Solutions Likely to Have Favorable Consequences

The main idea in this activity is to teach the children to think before they respond.

“Remember last week we talked about generating solutions to problems and at the end of our last meeting we all played a game in which we generated a lot of answers to a problem. Today we are going to play a similar game but instead of generating all of the
answers that you can possibly think of, I want you to think about the consequences of
each choice, and then only mention the ones that you think will have a good outcome.
What this means is that you have to think about the consequences of your solution
before you mention it to the group.” (Choose the same problem that was used during last
week’s activity.)

B. Evaluating Solutions

After solutions have been generated, ask group members to look at the two lists of solutions
(one from today and one from the previous session) and decide which list has better ideas on
it. “Which list contains better solutions? Why do you think this list has better
solutions?” Ask group members to generate the consequences for each of the solutions
offered in this second activity and then rate the consequences as good (++), bad (-), or okay
(+). Point out that, in general, people can come up with better solutions if they stop to think
about the following things:

➤ What is the problem?
➤ What do I want to see happen?
➤ What are my choices for solving this problem?

This sequence usually produces better results than if the person simply responded without
thinking about the choices first.

C. Self-Calming

Remind group members to use breathing techniques or other methods to help them calm
down before they make a decision. Inform them that, right now, we are focusing on their
ability to “stop and think” rather than their ability to think quickly. This is because they are
at the early stages of learning how to make good decisions and, because of this, they need to
proceed slowly. As they get better at making good decisions they will be able to do so faster and the whole process will not seem as tedious and difficult. One way to explain this to the group is to use the example of learning to play Nintendo or Play Station: “Learning how to make good decisions is like learning to play a new game. The first few times you play a new game you need to really think about what you are doing and how to win the game. You make mistakes and you learn from those mistakes. After playing the game for a while, you can play without thinking very much, and your playing becomes much more automatic. It is the same for solving problems. First you will have to really stop and think about what options are available and what the consequences are for each solution. But, after a while, your responding will become much more automatic and you will not have to think as much as you do now.”

Objective 4: Trouble at Sea

This activity is designed to introduce and extend the concept of consequence identification and to assist students in better understanding the problem solving process. Explain that the group as a whole will be discussing a situation and that they must come to some agreement regarding items to keep and items to discard. Having pictures of the objects or the actual objects themselves generally heightens the level of interest and participation among group members. Explain the story as follows:

A. Activity

“You are all members of a fishing party on a boat which has run into bad weather and some engine trouble several miles from shore. The captain of the ship has told you that because of the rough weather, the boat needs to be lighter in order to make it through the storm and to avoid sinking. You as members of the crew need to decide which items
to keep and which items to throw overboard. You need to decide, as a group, the order in which you throw the following items overboard:”

**List of Items:**

1. Box of matches
2. Radio (ship to shore)
3. Compass
4. Navigational map
5. 10 gallons of water
6. Signal flares
7. Life rafts
8. 100 feet of rope
9. Flashlight
10. Life jackets

Allow group members five minutes to discuss the problem and which items would be thrown overboard first. Encourage students to identify the consequences for throwing each item overboard and to use the identified consequences in their decisions about which items to keep and which items to discard. Ask group members:

- What was the problem in this situation?
- Did different people have different ideas about which items to throw overboard?
- How did you decide which items to keep and which ones to throw overboard?
- Did thinking about the consequences help you decide which items to keep?
Objective 5: Positive Feedback (See Session 1.)

Objective 6: Prize Box (See Session 1.)

Objective 7: Free Time (See Session 1.)
Session 25: Application of Social Problem Solving to Teacher Conflict

Primary Goals:

1. Enhance Perspective Taking Ability.
2. Discuss Teachers’ Perspectives.
3. Practice Problem Solving with Teacher Conflicts.

Materials Needed:

- Handout 1.3: Goal Sheet
- Handout 25.1: Problem Solving Worksheet
- Materials for “Top Ten” game
- Prize Box

Objective 1: Review Goal Sheets and Main Points from Previous Session. See Session 17.

Objective 2: Understanding the Teacher’s Perspective

A. Teacher Expectations – “Top Ten”

Inform students that a group of teachers were asked, “What do you (teachers) expect from students in the classroom?” Divide the students into 2 groups and ask each group to come up with the top ten responses they think teachers gave to this question. Give the groups a few minutes to come up with some responses, then allow each group to suggest an answer. If the answer is one of the “Top Ten,” write the answer on the board. Alternate between the groups until all answers have been provided or neither group can come up with additional responses. To increase student interest, group leaders may wish to create a “Family Feud” style board and conduct this activity as a game.
The top ten answers in our survey were:

1. To be involved, working and learning something.
2. To be happy or excited about learning something.
3. To participate.
4. To be prepared and ready to work.
5. To be respectful.
6. For students to work to their best ability.
7. To follow the rules.
8. To be creative/have fun.
9. To pay attention and understand the material.
10. For students to seek out answers to questions they have.

Objective 3: Use Problem Solving Model to Discuss Teacher Issues

Problem Identification

Have group members brainstorm about differences of opinion that have occurred or could occur between a teacher and a student, as well as possible differences in the perspectives of teachers and students. Try to focus this discussion on the teacher’s expectations for students in the classroom. For example, “What do teachers expect students to do in the classroom? If they expect you to do your work independently, how can you ask teachers for help when you need it? What do teachers expect from students in terms of homework? You may think that homework is boring or takes away from your free time, but your teachers probably think that homework is a great way to help you retain what you have learned in class.”
Provide each group member with Handout 25.1 (Problem Solving Worksheet). Ask each child to write down a problem that they have with a teacher and use the worksheet to help generate solutions to that problem. Make sure that the form is filled out completely, including possible consequences associated with each solution generated. You can go over this as a group activity, or have each person complete the form independently and review each and assist as needed.

Consequence Evaluation

Have group members rate each consequence in terms of whether this consequence is good (++), okay (+), or bad (-). Record the rating next to each consequence.

Develop a Plan

Have group members decide what the best solution would be and then discuss possible obstacles for that solution. Repeat until you have discussed three or more possible solutions and their associated obstacles.

Role Play

Have group members role-play the problem situation and several alternatives. Ask each of them to choose a solution that has been rated good (++) or okay (+), and ask them to enact the solution with another group member acting as the teacher in the role-play.

**Objective 4: Positive Feedback** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 5: Prize Box** (See Session 1.)

**Objective 6: Free Time** (See Session 1.)
## Handout 25.1

### PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

**My problem is:**

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Possible choices/solutions:  |  Consequences of the choices/solutions:

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

___________________________________________________________________________  |

The solution I chose is:

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

The consequences of my solution were:

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________