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## THE FIVE-STEP APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING

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**Scenario:** Two children run to get a yellow hula-hoop. They reach it simultaneously and start pulling on the handle, yelling “MINE!” One child starts shoving the other child out of the way.

### 1. Approach:

- Close enough to intervene if necessary
- You’ve signaled your awareness and availability

### 2. Define the Problem:

- Describe the scene
- Reflect what the children have said
- NO JUDGMENTS, VALUES, SOLUTIONS
  - “It looks like you both want the yellow hoop.”
  - “I see you are yelling at each other and are angry.”

### 3. Gather Data:

- Not directed toward pinpointing blame or fault
- Drawing out details, defining problems
- Help children communicate vs. slugging it out
  - “How did this happen?”
  - “What do you want to tell her?”
  - “How could you solve this problem?”
  - “How could you use it without fighting?”

### 4. Generate Alternatives:

- Give children the job of thinking and figuring out what *they* are going to do to solve *their* problem
- Be there to facilitate
  - “How are we going to solve this problem?”
- Agree on a solution
- For example, they might say
  - “We could take turns.”
  - “We could both use it together.”
  - “We could both do something else.”
  - “No one could use it.”
- Some of the things that the children come up with would never occur to us but will work well for them
- For example, they might say
  - “We could count to three and then switch using it.”

### 5. Follow Through Physically:

- Model appropriate behavior
- BOTTOM LINE GOAL is to resolve the social conflict
- Last resort is to solve the problem if they can’t
  - “It looks like this is too hard for you two to figure out. This is what we’ll do...”

**Remember to always start with as little intervention as the children need. The goal is to maximize the SELF-resolution. Don’t “give a 5” (Physically Follow Through) when a 1 (Approach) or a 2 (Define Problem) will do.**