Problem solving with teenagers: demonstration

This is a transcript of the Raising Children Network video available at https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/videos/problem-solving-demonstration. Two teenage siblings, Jess and Hillary, are having a problem sharing and respecting each other’s space. So far, they haven’t been able to solve the problem themselves, and this has led to conflict and fights. Their dad uses a problem-solving approach to resolve their ongoing conflict.

Dad [as the girls sit down at the table]: Thanks girls. OK, let’s talk about the problem we’re having and see what we can do about it. To start off with I want you both to tell me what you think the problem is. How about you go first, Jess?

Jess: Well, Hillary's always taking my stuff without asking, and she never gives it back.

Dad: OK.

Hillary: It’s not just me. She takes my stuff too and she’s always hogging things when it’s my turn.

Dad: When you say hogging, what things do you mean exactly?

Hillary: Well, you know... She takes forever in the bathroom and she’s always on the computer. I never get a chance to do my stuff.

Dad: OK. So, it looks like the problem is about sharing and about having respect for each other’s time. Does that sound right?

Hillary and Jess: Yeah.

Dad: So what we need to do is come up with some ideas we’re all happy with, like, we could just not do anything and see if the fighting stops, but let’s take turns and I’ll jot them down here, OK?

[Hillary and Jess both nod]

Dad: Jess, you started last time, so... Hillary?

Hillary: How about we get a bathroom each or a new computer?

Jess: Yep. I like that one.

Dad: OK, good. Jess?

Jess: How about we have a rule about not taking each other’s stuff?

Hillary: That’s not fair, you have more stuff than I do.
**Dad**: What if the agreement is that you have to *ask* before taking something?

**Jess**: Yeah.

**Hillary**: How about... we have times for the bathroom and computer?

**Dad**: Yes. Good.

**Hillary**: Or, how about Jess gets her own place and moves out?

**Jess**: That’ll work.

**Dad**: Alright, why don’t we see which ideas will actually work? The first idea was that we don’t do anything. Well, I’m not happy with that one because that will just lead to more fighting. Don’t you think?

**Hillary and Jess**: Hmmm. [Both nod]

**Dad**: OK, gone. The next idea was that you have a second bathroom or computer. Any thoughts?

**Hillary**: I like that one, I think it will work.

**Jess**: I think it’ll work too, especially with the computer.

**Dad**: It could work but there are a couple of issues like where we’d put the bathroom, and how we’d afford it. Computers aren’t cheap either. So I’d give that one a mark of two out of ten. What do you think?

**Jess**: eight. I’d give it eight.

**Hillary**: Yep. eight.

**Dad**: OK, good. What’s next? An agreement about sharing, not taking each other’s stuff without asking, and about times for the bathroom and computer. What do you reckon?

**Hillary**: Yeah, I like that one.

**Jess**: Still, I do have more stuff than Hillary, *and* I’m older.

**Dad**: Fair point. But if we could solve that... do you think it would be a good idea? Out of ten?

**Jess**: Uhh... six, I guess

**Dad**: Six. OK. Hillary?

**Hillary**: Nine I think.

**Dad**: I think it’s a nine too. The last idea is that Jess moves out or Hillary’s adopted. That’s a zero for me.
Girls [together]: Seven

Dad: [smiles] Alright. Of all our ideas, the best two are: to have another bathroom and computer to use, or to have an agreement about using them. So which will we try?

Jess: Alright, we'll try the agreement.

Dad: Uh-huh. Hillary?

Hillary: Yeah, let's try the agreement idea.

Dad: Good, I think so too. So let's talk about how it will work. And we can check back in a week and see how it's going?

Hillary and Jess: OK.