

The ICPS Dialoguing Ladder

The rungs below describe four levels of communication with a child when problem situations arise. These levels, placed on a ladder, progress from negative threats, demands, commands and forms of punishment, to more positive suggesting, explaining, and problem solving.

The goal is to reach the highest, problem solving rung, a true dialogue involving both the adult and the child, making the child an active participant, rather than a passive recipient. Research shows that teaching children *how*, not *what to think* is a new way to guide behavior, having more impact than focusing directly upon behaviors themselves.

Rung 4: Problem Solving Approach.

Using specific questions, adult prompts the child to think about the problem, how s/he and others feel, and identify possible solutions and their potential consequences before making a choice. Given skills to think for themselves, children feel **empowered**, not overpowered, are more likely to carry out their own solutions, and think of genuinely empathic consequences.

Rung 3: Explaining Approach.

Adult explains what might happen if a child chooses a particular solution. Again, while a positive approach, the thinking about potential consequences is done by the adult. Child may tune out explanations heard many times before, or because s/he is unable to understand them.

Rung 2: Suggesting Approach.

Adult provides suggestions to children to promote socially adjusted behaviors. While this approach is positive, it is the adult who is doing the thinking for the child. Suggestions can stifle the child's thinking and the child may not think of what else to do if a solution is unsuccessful.

Rung 1: Power Approach.

Adult gives orders or makes demands to elicit changes in the child's behavior. Behavior change is motivated by the external source, rather than the child's internal processes. The child may comply to avoid punishment, but may still feel angry or frustrated, and may become immune to feeling overpowered.

