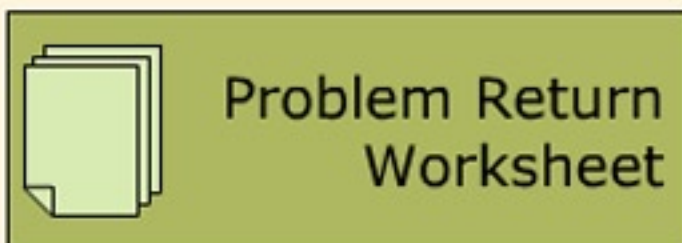


Problem Return Technique

Selecting a Problem

Take some time to think of a situation in your classroom where a student or group of students was not demonstrating needed self-responsibility. If you are not teaching presently, you can use an example from your past. Record the details of your situation on your worksheet under "Beginning with a problem."

Save your worksheet often to avoid losing your work.



Each time you see this symbol you will complete an activity in your "Problem Return Worksheet."

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Problem Return Technique

Problem Return Technique Steps

Click on the steps to review them

Step 1: Deliver Empathy and Ownership Statements

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Step 3: Get Permission to Suggest Alternative Solutions

Step 4: Give Alternatives

Step 5: Analyze Alternatives (Optional)

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Step 7: Give a brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

Step 8: Exit

Before you start the assignment, you need to identify a student's or group of students' problem to solve

Select your problem

After you've completed each step in the assignment. Click on the "Home" button to return to this navigation page.

Problem Return Technique

Step 1: Deliver Empathy and Ownership Statements

It's important to identify the students problem and respond with empathy (Why?)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)



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Problem Return Technique

Step 1: Deliver Empathy and Ownership Statements

It's important to identify the students problem and respond with empathy (Why?)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)

Student: "I forgot my lunch again"

Teacher: "Bummer. Sounds like you have a problem."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 1: Deliver Empathy and Ownership Statements

It's important to identify the students problem and respond with empathy (Why?)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)

Student: " My mom didn't sign the slip."

Teacher: "That's too bad. An interesting problem you have there."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 1: Deliver Empathy and Ownership Statements

It's important to identify the students problem and respond with empathy (Why?)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)



[Read Text](#)

Student: "My group partners won't listen to any of my ideas. I want to join a different group"

Teacher: "I bet that feels frustrating. Sounds like you've already begun to search for solutions."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

After you make an Empathy and Ownership Statement, follow it with an Idea Question.

"I failed my test and I still don't understand what I did wrong"

Response

"I need a partner for my project and no one will work with me"

Response

[Click](#)

More Idea Questions

Dealing with "challenging" student replies?

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

After you make an Empathy and Ownership Statement, follow it with an Idea Question.

"I failed my test and I still don't understand what I did wrong"

Response

"What do you think you'll do next?"

"I need a partner for my project and no one will work with me"

Response

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More Idea Questions

Dealing with "challenging" student replies?

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

After you make an Empathy and Ownership Statement, follow it with an Idea Question.

"I failed my test and I still don't understand what I did wrong"

Response

"I need a partner for my project and no one will work with me"

Response

"How are you going to solve this? What are your alternatives?"

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More Idea Questions

Dealing with "challenging" student replies?

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

After you make an Empathy and Ownership Statement, follow it with an Idea Question.

"I failed my test and I still don't understand what I did wrong"

"I need a partner for my project and no one will work with me"

Often students respond to Idea Questions with answers such as "I don't know" or "Beats me." Even if you suspect that you will get an "I don't know" answer, as an Idea Question anyway. We only extend this kind of invitation to people we see as capable. Our words are "What do you think you'll do?" but the underlying message is "I see you as capable" and "I see you as a problem solver."

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More Idea Questions

Dealing with "challenging" student replies?

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Take some time to consider the example of your student or students. In your Problem Return Worksheet under "Step 2: Ask an Idea Question" record several idea questions you would use with your student(s).

Move on to the Problem Return Technique step



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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Additional Idea Questions:

- "What have you thought of so far?"
- "What ideas do you have to solve this?"
- "What are your choices?"
- "What options are available?"

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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Take some time to practice following up with "Idea Questions." Use your Worksheet to record three possible idea questions that respond to these statements.

Mouseover

Practice 1

Practice 2

Practice 3



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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Take some time to practice following up with "Idea Questions." Use your Worksheet to record three possible idea questions that respond to these statements.

Mouseover

Practice 1

"I've been to the library and can't find any books on my topic."

Practice 2

Practice 3



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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Take some time to practice following up with "Idea Questions." Use your Worksheet to record three possible idea questions that respond to these statements.

Mouseover

Practice 1

Practice 2

"My mom threw out all the old magazines, so I couldn't bring in a photograph."

Practice 3



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Problem Return Technique

Step 2: Ask an Idea Question

Take some time to practice following up with "Idea Questions." Use your Worksheet to record three possible idea questions that respond to these statements.

Mouseover

Practice 1

Practice 2

Practice 3

"Alex keeps on bothering me while I'm doing my work. I want him to stop."



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Problem Return Technique

Step 3: Get Permission to Suggest Alternatives

When students are stuck and have trouble generating possible solutions, ask for permission to give them some help. You inquire whether or not they are interested in hearing possibilities. Most students will be receptive and appreciative, especially if you include in the question an offer to share alternatives used by students their own age.



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Problem Return Technique

Step 3: Get Permission to Suggest Alternatives

Example 1: "I've seen other kids your age face this problem. Can I share some of the solutions I've seen them use?"

Example 2: "Would you like to hear what some other seniors have done in this situation?"

Example 3: "I've seen other fourth graders solve this kind of problem. Do you want to hear their solutions?"



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Problem Return Technique

Step 3: Get Permission to Suggest Alternatives

In your worksheet describe how you would get permission to give alternatives in the section titled "Step 3: Get Permission to Suggest Alternatives."

Move on to the Problem Return Technique step



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Problem Return Technique

Step 4: Give Alternatives

When you ask for permission to offer solutions, students will usually say yes. Follow up by sharing alternatives. Give a variety, including some that will work better than others. We suggest you start and end with ideas the student is most likely to reject, and offer some meaningful ideas in between.

Problem:

Student consistently has a conflict with another student and refuses to sit next to them. The student has been assigned to work on a project in a group with this student.

Mouseover

View possible solutions

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Problem Return Technique

Step 4: Give Alternatives

When you ask for permission to offer solutions, students will usually say yes. Follow up by sharing alternatives. Give a variety, including some that will work better than others. We suggest you start and end with ideas the student is most likely to reject, and offer some meaningful ideas in between.

Problem:

Student consistently has a conflict with another student and refuses to sit next to them. The student has been assigned to work on a project in a group with this student.

Mouseover

View possible solutions

- Students chooses to work in group despite his difficulties
- Student refuses to work with group and gets failing or lesser grade
- Students negotiate acceptance into other groups with their classmates
- Class decides what the two students should do

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Problem Return Technique

Step 4: Give Alternatives

In your Problem Return Worksheet record the alternatives you could give to the student(s) in your example. Use the page titled "Step 4: Give alternatives."

Move on to the Problem Return Technique step



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Problem Return Technique

Step 5: Analyze Alternatives

Analyze the Alternatives in any of the following ways:

- Ask students to choose the three best solutions and pick the final one
- Ask them to rank the solutions in order of worst to best
- Ask them to list possible outcomes
- Ask them which solution they could see themselves doing
- Ask a "Prediction Question" If you did that, what do you think would happen?

Note: No response is needed in your worksheet for Step 5.

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Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

It is important to inspire a sense of responsibility and control over their actions in students. Doing so builds not only a sense of character, but it encourages students to gain self-confidence in their ability to solve problems on their own. A Response-Ability Statement affirms students' strengths or states your belief in their ability to solve their problems. It communicates the idea, "I see you as capable and responsible."



Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



Example 5



Example 6



Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 1 - Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"Now that you have several options, I am confident that you'll find one that will work for you. I'll stop back in a few minutes to catch up on what you've decided."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 2 - Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"I know you can make it work. I'll check back later."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 3 - Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"Solving interpersonal problems isn't always easy to do. I think the three of you are up to it."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 4 -Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"Seeing alternatives is half the battle. You're close to a solution. You can do it."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 5 - Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"I believe you can handle it that way. Check it out and see what happens."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 6: Deliver a Response-Ability Statement

Example 6 -Response-Ability Statement

Stop audio



"You sure are learning about problem solving. Trust your own best judgment."

[Return to the main page for Step 6](#)

Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

What is a Lectureburst?

Sometimes students need 'permission' to *solve* or *not solve* their problems. Let students know they choose either to be a victim or to exercise their power of choice.

A "Power/Victim Lectureburst" is an effective and brief (no longer than a minute) way to encourage students to choose the role of either victim or empowered when dealing with their dilemma an situation.

Click

View the lecture
burst steps

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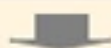
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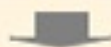
Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

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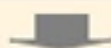
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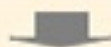
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Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Introduce the choice to students. The following is an example of an introduction:

"Now it is up to you to decide what kind of students you're going to be - a person with power or a victim. We have both kinds at this school. Some of our students choose the power stance. Others choose to be a victim."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Review the Power Stance:

- Pick an alternative
- Say to yourself, "I can pull this off."
- Implement a solution
- Enjoy being responsible for your life
- Congratulate yourself regardless of the outcome
- Repeat the steps if necessary

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

Determine if the student is demonstrating 'victim' behaviors such as:

- *Put off choosing an alternative*
- *Say to yourself, "There's nothing I can do" or "It won't matter any way."*
- *Do nothing*
- *Enjoy feeling miserable and unempowered*
- *Tell everyone how awful and unfair your life is*

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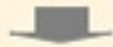
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Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Challenge the student to take control over the situation by making a choice. The following is an example of such a challenge:

"Hey, guess who gets to decide at this school whether they're going to feel empowered or unempowered? That's right, the students. And guess who gets to decide in this case? That's right, you do."

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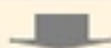
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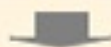
Step 7: Deliver a Power/Victim Lectureburst

Mouseover the steps to view the descriptions

Step 1: Present
The choice



Step 2: Review the
Power Stance



Step 3: Review the
Victim Stance



Step 4: Issue a
Choice Challenge



Step 5: Deliver a
Response-Ability
Statement

Here are some examples of Response-Ability Statements you could use with your students:

"I'm looking forward to hearing how you handle this one."

"I know you can handle it."

"You're a powerful chooser."

"You're really in control now."

"This sounds like something you're up to."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

View the examples of a Power/ Victim Lecture Burst

[Read all examples](#)

[Click to view the examples](#)

Primary School

[Read Example 1](#)

Elementary School

[Read Example 2](#)

Middle School

[Read Example 3](#)

High School

[Read Example 4](#)



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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

- Now take some time to fill out your worksheet in the section titled "Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst."
- Use the student example you selected at the beginning of this activity.

Move on to the Problem Return Technique step



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Problem Return Technique

Step 8: Exit

Your final step is to hand the problem brought to you back to the student. Has/have your student/students resolved their problem? In this step you would step back and evaluate if this has happened.



Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

Power/Victim Lectureburst: High School

1. **Present the Choice:** "There are two types of people in this world. One person chooses to be powerful, while the other type of person decides to be the victim."
2. **Review the Power Stance:** "The person who chooses to be powerful makes a decision to find a possible solution and follows through with his or her plan. Whether the solution works or not, at least the person has taken a power stance."
3. **Review the Victim Stance:** "Victims wallow in self-pity, trying to convince themselves how bad their lives are and that there is nothing they can do to change their situations."
4. **Issue a Choice Challenge:** "You are the only person who can control your life and your choices. And now you get to choose to be a powerful person or not. It's up to you."
5. **Deliver a Response-Ability Statement:** "I know you are capable of handling this situation. I am looking forward to finding out what you choose and how it turns out for you."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

Power/Victim Lectureburst: Middle School

1. **Present the Choice:** "In situations like this there are choices you can make. You can choose to be a 'Problem Solver' or you can choose to be a 'Problem Keeper.'"
2. **Review the Power Stance:** "A 'Problem Solver' makes a decision to solve a problem confidently, follows through with his or her plan, feels good about putting forth his or her best effort, and makes a second effort if needed."
3. **Review the Victim Stance:** "A 'Problem Keeper' gives away his or her power and decides not to attempt to solve the problem. Usually this type of person feels unhappy and wonders why outcomes are not positive."
4. **Issue a Choice Challenge:** "The wonderful thing is that the choice is up to you! Think it over and let me know which person you decide to be."
5. **Deliver a Response-Ability Statement:** "I know that you can and will handle this!"

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

Power/Victim Lectureburst: Elementary School

1. **Present the Choice:** "Kids always get two choices in this class, Marti. You can choose the victim stance or the power stance."
2. **Review the Power Stance:** "The power stance involves picking an alternative and doing it. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But people with personal power take a shot at it, and it helps them feel more powerful even if it doesn't work."
3. **Review the Victim Stance:** "Victims say 'These are stupid' when they look at possible solutions, and then they choose to ignore the situation. They feel that the world is being unfair, and they don't do anything to change it."
4. **Issue a Choice Challenge:** "Guess who gets to decide in this room whether you pick the power or the victim stance? That's right, you do. You'll get a chance to make a lot of those choices this year, and you're getting one now."
5. **Deliver a Response-Ability Statement:** "I am sure you will find a way to deal with this, no matter which choice you make this time."

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Problem Return Technique

Step 7: Deliver a Brief Power/Victim Lectureburst

Power/Victim Lectureburst: Primary School

1. **Present the Choice:** "You have two choices. You can either decide to stay stuck in a pickle, or you can decide to be a star. You can be a problem solver or you can be a problem keeper."
2. **Review the Power Stance:** "Stars are problem solvers. They are the kinds of kids who look for solutions."
3. **Review the Victim Stance:** "A 'pickle person' decides that he or she cannot find a solution and then complains and tattles. The pickle person is a person that lets something bother him or her without doing anything about it."
4. **Issue a Choice Challenge:** "Remember the posters we made about a pickle person and a strong star? You decide which one you want to be, the pickle or the star!"
5. **Deliver a Response-Ability Statement:** "You are in charge of yourself. You decide how you want to handle it. I trust you to make a choice that you can be proud of - a choice that is right for you!"