

Shifting Words, Shifting Mindsets: Problem-Focused to Solution-Focused Words

One word can change everything. By replacing a problem-focused word with a strength-focused word, you can completely change how your child is seen and open the door to their potential. This handout can help you spot problem-focused words and shift them to solution-focused words, giving you a new way to talk about your child's abilities and growth.

Problem-Focused	Solution-Focused
aggressive	assertive, bold, confident, strong, protective
anxious	careful, thoughtful, aware, sensitive
avoidant	cautious, reflective, observant, private, thoughtful
below	growing, improving, learning, progressing, developing
blunt	honest, direct, clear, straightforward, confident, expressive
bossy	leader, organizer, confident, decisive, responsible
careless	relaxed, easygoing, flexible, creative, adaptable, open-minded
chronic	ongoing, resilient, enduring, managed, supported, stable
clumsy	playful, active, energetic, risk-taker, explorer
defiant	strong-willed, determined, strong beliefs, confident, independent
deficient	capable, emerging, expanding, progressing, advancing, developing
delayed	emerging, unfolding, learning, progressing, patient
demanding	outspoken, determined, focused, persistent, goal-oriented, motivated
dependent	cooperative, connected, team-oriented, trusting, loyal, seeks guidance
disengaged	motivated by relevance, self-directed, purpose-driven, preferential
disorganized	creative, flexible, spontaneous, big-picture, free-spirited, resourceful
disruptive	energetic, expressive, lively, passionate, outgoing, connection-seeker
distracted	curious, multi-focused, interested, observant, aware, inquisitive
dramatic	expressive, passionate, articulate, enthusiastic, charismatic
fearful	cautious, careful, safe, thoughtful, alert, protective
forgetful	busy, creative, idea-filled, flexible, easy going
fragile	gentle, sensitive, caring, thoughtful, kind, resilient, persevering
frustrated	motivated, goal-focused, determined, persevering, growth-minded

Problem-Focused	Solution-Focused
hyperactive	energetic, enthusiastic, busy, lively, spirited, on-the-go
impulsive	spontaneous, quick-thinking, lively, bold, instinctive
inconsistent	developing, adaptable, open-minded, inventive, persistent, brave
inflexible	structured, consistent, dependable, steady, predictable
insecure	careful, thoughtful, observant, reflective, learning, mindful, self-aware
lazy	conserving energy, thoughtful, calm, selective, reflective, patient
limited	expanding, developing, growing, exploring, building
lost	discovering, open-minded, courageous, finding direction, flexible
messy	creative, expressive, inventive, busy, engaged, experimental
moody	thoughtful, sensitive, feeling, caring, aware, passionate
needy	connected, caring, trusting, cooperative, supportive, loyal
noncompliant	independent, self-directed, confident, questioning, brave
off-topic	creative, connector, idea-rich, imaginative, interest-driven, associative
oppositional	independent thinker, advocate, confident, strong-willed, persistent
passive	calm, peaceful, patient, gentle, observant, thoughtful
repetitive	consistent, detail-focused, persistent, thorough, structured
resistant	determined, self-assured, careful, protective, structured
selfish	self-aware, independent, confident, secure, focused
sensitive	caring, empathetic, kind, aware, compassionate
slow	careful, thoughtful, steady, patient, thorough, intentional, own pace
stubborn	Persistent, determined, committed, loyal, steady
struggling	persistent, determined, improving, resilient, hardworking, growing
talkative	social, expressive, friendly, communicative, outgoing, enthusiastic
tattletale	justice-minded, honest, fair, rule-following, caring
tired	conserving energy, self-pacing, thoughtful, mindful, restorative, careful
unmotivated	interest-led, selective, intentional, practical, purpose-driven, capable
unprepared	spontaneous, adaptable, flexible, resourceful, creative, improving
weak	gentle, cautious, thoughtful, steady, improving, patient
withdrawn	reflective, observant, independent, peaceful, quiet, self-aware