

PROBLEM SOLVING

Why “problem solving”?

When faced with a difficult situation, people often find it hard to cope. It can feel as if there is no way out of the situation, or that you have no control over it. This can lead to emotional problems such as stress, depression or anxiety.

By learning how to “problem-solve” effectively, you can take control and learn to cope. You can also use these skills to help you face the challenges of daily life.

What is effective problem solving?

There are 5 steps to affective problem solving.

1 GENERAL ATTITUDE

Before you start to problem solve, you first need to:

- Accept that problem situations are a normal part of life and that you **can** cope with them.
- Learn to detect problem situations when they happen - often a strong emotional reaction (e.g. anger, anxiety) to a situation tells you that there is a problem.
- Begin to stop and think before reacting to a problem situation. This prevents you from rushing headlong into what may not be the best solution.

2 DEFINING THE PROBLEM

You need to work out what exactly is wrong with the situation you are in. To do this, you need to think about how you want the situation to be **ideally** and how it is **in reality**. By doing this you can work out what is standing in your way. This is the “problem” that needs to be solved.

What is the background to this problem?

(How long you have felt this way?)

What are the specific problem details?

(What is it that is troubling you most?)

(What is happening in your life at the moment?)

(What thoughts and feelings are you having?)

How things would be ideally

V.

V.

V.

V.

What is standing in the way

3 BRAINSTORMING

This is where you think of as many solutions as possible to the problem you face. It is done in two stages:

- 1 What to do about the problem
- 2 How to go about doing this

(1) What to do

At this stage you are only concerned with **what** you could do to solve the problem. **How** you could go about this will be considered later.

There are four basic rules to follow whilst doing this:

- a) Don't judge your ideas as good or bad until later.
- b) Don't worry if some ideas at first seem impractical - you can always delete them later.
- c) The more ideas the better.
- d) Combine two ideas to make better ones, or improve on ones you've already given.

Have a go at brainstorming your ideas on **Worksheet 1**.

4 MAKING A DECISION

For each possible solution that you came up with on **Worksheet 1**. Think to yourself "If I were to do this, what would be the likely consequences?"

Give each idea a **rating** on a scale of:

++	+	0	-	--
Very Good	Good	No Consequence	Bad	Very Bad

For the consequences of each possible solution -

- 1) To yourself
- 2) To others
- 3) In terms of how well it would solve the problem

Doing this will help you decide which solution is likely to be most effective in solving the problem you are facing, with minimal negative consequences.

Note: In some situations, there may be several problems that you have to solve. When this happens, these different problems should be identified and this exercise should be carried out for each different problem. It may also be that no one solution will **solve** the whole problem, it may just make it easier to live with.

(2) How to do it

Now you have decided **what to do**, you need to work out **how to do it**. You must return to stage 3 "**Brainstorming**" to remind yourself of the four basic rules and go through the process again. You can do this on **Worksheet 2**.

Once you have thought of different ways of carrying out your chosen solution, go back to stage 4 "**Making a decision**" and repeat the process.

You are now in a position to decide upon the best course of action to take to solve your problem.

5 TRYING IT OUT

You have now worked out:

- 1 What your problem is.
- 2 What you are going to do to solve it.
- 3 How you are going to carry out your chosen solution.

The next step for you is to try it out. Have a go at solving the problem in the way you decided. Then think, "Is this working? Am I solving the problem?"

If the course of action you have chosen is working - great! You did it!

If it is not, think to yourself:

- 1) "Have I worked out what the problem really is?" You may have been too vague or not admitted to yourself what was really bothering you. If so, go back to stage 2: "**Defining the Problem**" and start again.
- 2 "Did I really come up with all the possible ways of solving this problem?" You may be able to combine some of your ideas to make better ones, or maybe you thought that some of your ideas were silly. If so, go back to stage 3: "**Thinking of a solution**" and go through the brainstorming process again.
- 3) "Did I fully consider all of the consequences of each chosen solution?" When deciding which solution was best, you may not have considered the full effect that it would have on yourself or those around you. Or it may not have been the most effective solution to the problem. If so, go back to stage 4: "**Making a decision**".
- 4) "Did I really think of all the ways of carrying out my chosen course of action?" You may not have considered all of the possibilities. If so go back to **Worksheet 2** and repeat the brainstorming process.

WORKSHEET 1: Thinking of a solution/Making a decision (1)

What can I do to solve this problem?

Consequences
Self Others

Overall

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WORKSHEET 2: How to carry out chosen solution/Making a decision (2)

Chosen solution: _____
 (From Worksheet 1)

<u>How can I do this?</u>	<u>Consequences</u>
	<u>Self</u> <u>Others</u> <u>Overall</u>

