

Problem Solving

Problem solving skills are helpful for dealing with and finding solutions to everyday problems – whether large or small. We can have problems but not always know how to address them. Problem solving makes it more manageable and is an alternative to catastrophizing or procrastinating over a situation. It is a skill which can be learned and practiced.



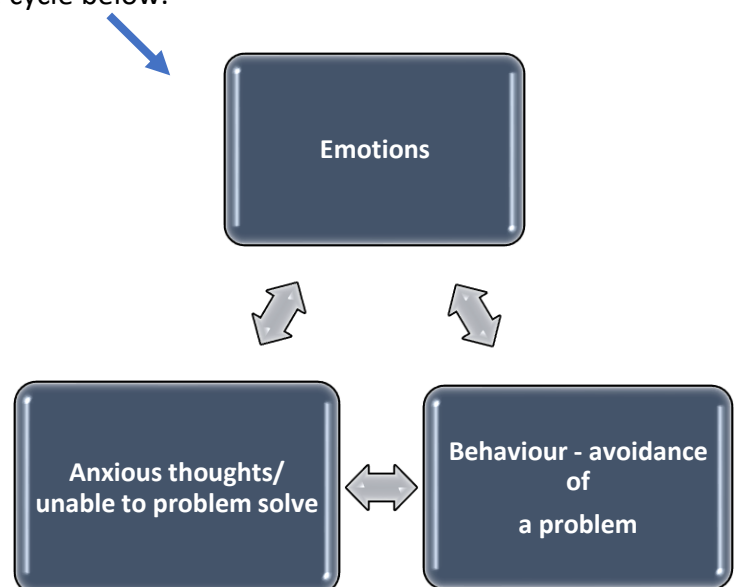
A problem can arise if a person has an aim but doesn't know how to solve it. If you are a worrier you may be more likely to underestimate your ability to deal with a problem, and instead focus on the worst possible outcome and avoid tackling the problem. Those who are anxious are more likely to feel overwhelmed by a problem. If you notice this happening it is helpful to use structured problem solving.

Finding solutions will help you feel better about a situation. It is helpful to learn to investigate a variety of solutions as we can sometimes become stuck and have rigid patterns of thinking which get in the way.

If depressed it may feel like you have tried everything. This is due to paying attention to negative thoughts and can result in changes to your behaviour. When either low or anxious this can cause negative styles of thinking which can get in the way of problem solving and result in the cycle below.



Problem solving also gives us hope, it challenges our thoughts, realising that it isn't a helpless situation. It also encourages us to find alternative solutions. It helps to identify what the problem is and then to pinpoint what you want to work on and how to do it. You can also think about what a friend or colleague would do in the same situation or seek the help of others when generating ideas.

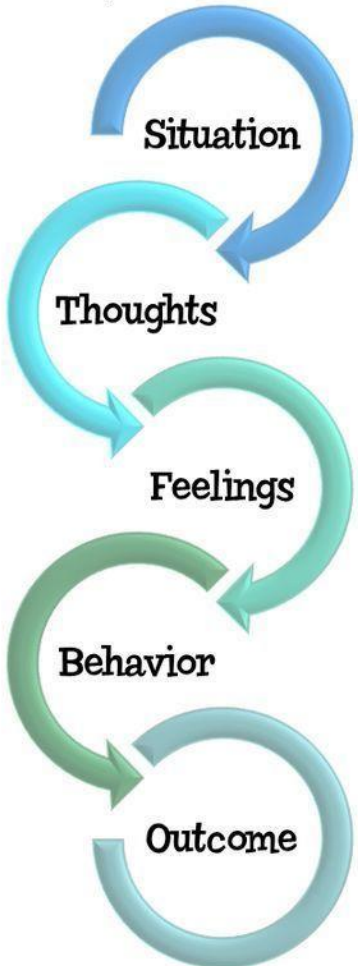


Problem Solving Steps



PROBLEM SOLVING

When an event happens, what you think will affect what you feel and what you do.



Describe the situation:

What were your thoughts?

How did you feel?:

What were your behaviors (how did you react?):

What was the outcome?

Firstly, define the problem and consider what it is you want to change.

Think about what would happen if you **don't** or if **you do** solve the problem.

Brainstorm a list of possible solutions.

Think what the **pros** (advantages) and **cons** (disadvantages) for each solution are.

Use **SMART** questions when identifying your goal.

Pick the **solution** that you are most confident in.

Plan – consider barriers and how you might overcome them.

Finally, put your plan into action. Evaluate – how did it go? Learn from it, whether you had a positive or negative result.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Timely
S	M	A	R	T
G	O	A	L	S
What do you want to do?	How will you know when you've reached it?	Is it in your power to accomplish it?	Can you realistically achieve it?	When exactly do you want to accomplish it?

(See our separate resource on **goal setting**. It is also helpful to consider if goals or solutions are 'SMART' as below)



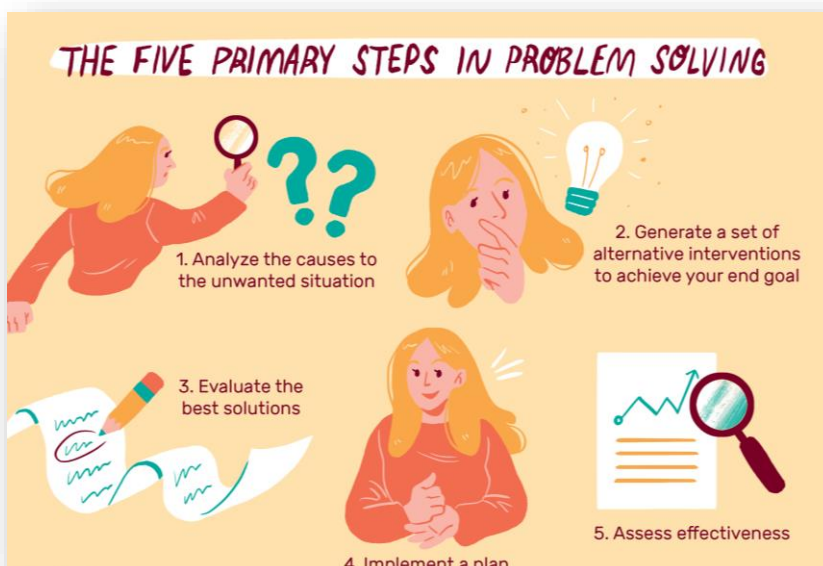
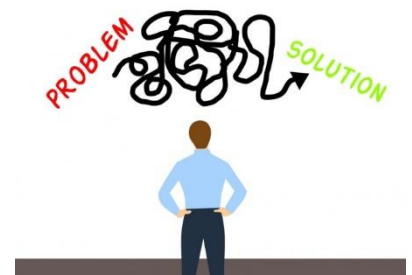
Remember

- Consider one problem at a time.
- List all solutions however ridiculous they may seem!
- Use your imagination!
- Seek help from others if necessary.
- When considering if you can or cannot do something about the situation, you can still look at solutions to manage the feelings you are experiencing in relation to the problem.

Example...

An example could be being anxious about a piece of work you have not handed in yet, to either college or to your boss. The longer you leave it, the more anxious you become.

By going through the steps shown you would identify what might happen if you don't address the problem such as missing a deadline. You would then brainstorm solutions such as asking for an extension or extra time or asking for help if you are struggling.







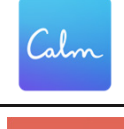

You should end up less stressed about it by discussing with others or seeking help. You could then set out a plan including setting time aside to work on it. You would then review afterwards what helped, in order to learn from it and to help you manage a situation like this in future.

Good luck and remember you can learn from each time you use problem solving, as we don't always get it right as there can be a range of different solutions to a situation and not only one.

Our recommended resources (click for direct access):

NHS Inform	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. Please visit: NHS Inform
Wellbeing	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. Please visit: Wellbeing Website Glasgow
Mental Health Foundation	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. Please visit: Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation
NHS Every Mind Matters	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. Please visit: Every Mind Matters
Psych Central	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. Please visit: PsychCentral for Mental Health
MIND	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. Please visit: MIND Information Hub
SAMH	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. Please visit: SAMH Guidance for Mental Health

Useful Apps:

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.