

Solving problems and achieving goalsⁱ

Structured problem solving is a simple and effective technique for dealing with problems in your life. It is a step-by-step approach for tackling those aspects of a problem that can be changed. Tackle only one problem at a time.

Step 1: Identify the problem

This first step sounds simple and sometimes it is. However, sometimes it is hard to get clear what exactly the problems are and which is the best one to tackle first. If this is the case, it may help to talk to someone you trust and who knows you well. Then write down exactly what you believe to be the main problem or goal.

Step 2: List as many solutions as possible

List all ideas that occur to you, even if some seem silly or 'way out'. Don't censor any solutions at this stage. List *all* possibilities without any evaluation of them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Step 3: Discuss the pros and cons of each possible solution

Go down the list of possible solutions and assess the main advantages and disadvantages of each one. Keep going, even if all options seem unpleasant. Sometimes there is no easy answer.

Step 4: Select the best or most promising solution

Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily with your present resources (time, money, skills, etc.). It may help to discuss this with someone you trust.

Step 5: Plan how to carry out your chosen solution

List the resources needed and the main problems that need to be overcome. Practise difficult steps and make notes of information needed.

Step 6: Try it out, review what happens and praise all efforts

The solution you have chosen may work perfectly or it may not. If it doesn't, go back to your list of solutions and try something else. Many solutions are helpful, but do not provide the complete answer. Whether your solution has worked completely, partially or not at all, praise yourself for your efforts. Revise your plans if necessary. Continue with the problem-solving process until you have resolved your problem or achieved your goal.

ⁱ The leaflet has been adapted with permission from Andrews G, Jenkins R. *Management of Mental Disorders (UK Edition)*. Sydney: World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, 1999. Distributed for the publishers in the UK by IN 2 Mail Ltd; Fax: +44 (0)1252 322315, PO Box 35, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4FP.