

EFFECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

PROBLEM-SOLVING REFERS TO A PARTICULAR SET OF SKILLS THAT CAN BE USED TO DEFINE A PROBLEM, GENERATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THAT PROBLEM, AND HELP YOU TO ACHIEVE A POSITIVE OUTCOME.

Effective problem-solving helps you to avoid and resolve stressors. For example, if someone who is doing poorly at school takes action to improve academic performance, the stress of being on academic probation is averted. Or, if someone who has received negative feedback about his or her job performance is able to correct the problem and obtain a better job evaluation, the prospect of getting fired may be avoided.

Steps to Problem-Solving

1. Define the problem.

The problem needs to be assessed and understood. Ask yourself the following questions:

- In what area is the problem (e.g., school, work, relationships, finances, etc.)?
- Who are the people involved in the problem?
- How did this problem come about?
- What would I like to change?
- What is realistic to expect in this situation?

2. Brainstorm solutions.

Come up with as many possible solutions as possible. Be open-minded, creative and allow anything to be considered a possible solution.

3. Evaluate the options.

Review each possible solution to determine if it is possible, and potentially useful. Ask yourself the following questions about each option:

- Is this feasible?
- What are the advantages of this option?
- What are the disadvantages of this option?

4. Choose a possible solution.

Decide on a possible solution and determine the specific steps in which you need to engage in order to carry it out.

5. Enact the potential solution.

Do the things you decided to do to try to solve the problem.

6. Evaluate the outcome.

Decide if your actions were sufficient, or if you need to return to considering other possible solutions. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How did I do?
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What else could I try?

Beiling, P. and Antony, M. (2003). *Ending the Depression Cycle: A step-by-step guide for preventing relapse*. Oakland: New Harbinger.

**Effective problem-solving helps you avoid
and resolve stressors**

Problem Solving Worksheet

CAREFULLY REFLECT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE AS YOU ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

1. Define the problem:

2. Brainstorm solutions (Come up with as many possible solutions as possible):

3. Evaluate the options:

4. Choose a possible solution:

5. Enact the potential solution:

6. Evaluate the outcome:

Problem-Solving Tips

- If you have multiple stressors (e.g., increased responsibilities at work, upcoming exams), prioritize your time. Focus on the most important issues first.
- Time management is a positive way to reduce stress and anxiety. In addition, it will ensure you have the time you need to work on resolving problems (instead of simply meeting your basic needs and important deadlines).
- Break large demands into small, manageable parts. Work through one task at a time.
- Be clear about your goals and what you need to do to work toward them.
- Take action when stress first arises. Don't wait for the situation to worsen.
- When a problem arises, identify your needs and articulate them to people who can help.
- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings concerning the stressors in your life.
- Develop a support network to rely on in times of need.
- Don't dwell on "shoulds." Instead, remain focused on what you think you need to do to solve your problem.
- Be willing to take an honest look at your coping style and the effectiveness of the strategies you are trying.
- Be flexible. If something isn't working, it's time to try something new.
- Remember to be kind to yourself.

Tips on Making Good Decisions

MAKING GOOD DECISIONS HELPS TO AVERT PROBLEMS, LEAVES PEOPLE FEELING BETTER ABOUT THEMSELVES AND SETS THE PATH FOR MORE SATISFYING LIFE EXPERIENCES.

At some time or other, we are all faced with complicated situations that leave us unsure of how to respond. Here are some tips to consider next time you find yourself searching for a good decision.

- **Avoid the temptation to make an impulsive decision in order to get out of the work of decision-making.** While there is a time and place for quick decisions, generally good decisions have been given some thought.
- **Take the time you need to think things over, but don't use this as an excuse to avoid.** Not making a decision is, in and of itself, a decision.
- **Over-focusing on making the "right" decision can leave you stuck.** And sometimes, there isn't a "right" decision. Remember, you are looking for a good decision. And you can always continue to decision-make in response to your initial decision.
- **Use your head.** If you make a particular decision, can you explain it to others? Is it reasonable? Does it make sense?
- **Listen to yourself.** Your gut reaction/intuition is important. If a particular course of action doesn't feel right, don't pursue it.
- **Take some time to consider what you think will happen** if you choose one decision over another. Where will the different decisions take you? Where do you want to go?
- **Consider how each of your possible decisions might impact the people involved.** Will a particular decision harm you or someone else?
- **Pay attention to how you will you feel about yourself** if you make one decision instead of another. Will you be proud of yourself? Can you live with yourself?
- **Ask yourself if your decision is ethical.**
- **Talk it out.** Reviewing your options with a trusted friend can help you sort out what to do.
- **Make it your own.** Resist the temptation to allow others to make difficult decisions for you. This only serves to reduce your confidence and ability to set your own course.
- **Learn from your experience.** Pay attention to what you have done to make good decisions and poor decisions. When situations and problems repeat themselves, take the opportunity to improve your decision-making.
- **Give yourself a break.** We all have times when we make decisions we later wish we hadn't. Forgive yourself and move on.