

# Problem Solving

## **We all face problems**

– occasionally we are faced with a problem that seems overwhelming and we may try to cope with the problem by avoiding it or by worrying excessively about it. These strategies are usually not very helpful – doing little to resolve the problem and sometimes just making it worse.

One strategy that clearly is helpful is the method of structured problem solving. This is a method that can help guide you in finding solutions to a problem you are faced with. With just a little bit of practice, you'll find that the method is easy to use and can help you better deal with any problems.

There are six steps to structured problem solving.

**1. Identify and define the problem** – Identifying that there is a problem is usually not too difficult - often we know that there is a problem because we feel stressed or find ourselves worrying. What can be a bit more difficult is defining exactly what the problem is. By spending some time thinking about all the different elements of the situation, you can usually figure out what the problem is. If you've spent some time thinking about it, but still don't have a clear definition of the problem, it is often useful to talk through the problem with someone you trust.

## **2. Brainstorm around possible solutions to the problem**

– In brainstorming, you come up with as many solutions as you possible can and write them all down. You do not reject any ideas or try to think of just the best idea. You should use your imagination and think of all possibilities. Even ideas that are clearly impractical or not possible may have elements that are useful.

## **3. Examine these solutions**

– Consider the pros and cons of each solution you have thought of. For each solution ask yourself the following questions. Are there any potential negative consequences (both right away or in the near future)? How much time will it take to carry this out? Is this going to require much money? Do I have the skills to carry this out? Do I have the necessary resources? Does this require the cooperation of other people and if yes, are they likely to cooperate? Am I likely to be faced with difficulties when carrying out this solution?

**4. Decide which solution you will try** – Which solution you decide upon will depend on the urgency of the problem and the difficulties you anticipate in implementing the different solutions. In a situation where the problem needs to be dealt with quickly, you may choose a solution that you can apply right away (even though this might not be the ideal solution).

**5. Plan how you will carry out this solution** – In order for your solution to impact your problem, you need to put it into practice. Many solutions will have several steps to them. Break your chosen solution down into these steps and determine how and when you will carry out each step.

## **6. Review your progress**

– Problem solving is an ongoing process and requires you to regularly review your progress and revise your solution. You can't think of all potential difficulties you might be faced with when carrying out your solution. The review of your progress can help you identify any problems. Steps may need to be revised or new steps added. You may need to consider a different solution if the current one you have been working with is not helping.

## **7. Congratulate yourself**

– Solving problems takes patience and persistence. Always remember to congratulate yourself on both your efforts and your progress.

The problem solving method is a tool to help you with many of the problems you are faced with. It will not make all your problems go away nor will it help with all of your problems. However, with time and practice using this method, you will find that you are better able to cope and experience less stress when difficulties present themselves.