

# Problem Solving

## In this section

### you will learn to:

- 🗨 Better understand the problems you're dealing with
- 🗨 Come up with several different solutions
- 🗨 Find the best one and start solving problems

**W**hen you face big problems that you find very difficult to solve, it's not surprising that you might experience low mood. If these problems seem overwhelming and cause you a lot of stress and suffering, you might slip into a mild or major depression. Research has shown that some people who develop depression have experienced an unusual amount of stress, conflict or loss before the depression. So, helping a person to deal more effectively with life problems should help to prevent depression.

Not only that, a person who is already feeling depressed will have more trouble solving life problems. She or he might:

- 🌀 See the problem as more difficult than it truly is.
- 🌀 Have trouble coming up with different kinds of solutions, getting stuck in one way of reacting even though it isn't working.
- 🌀 Find it hard to put a plan into action

But if the depressed person feels so overwhelmed that he or she stops trying to solve problems, the problems will get worse and make the depression worse. So learning how to solve problems better should help to overcome depression.

## Problem Solving

We'll be using special problem-solving worksheets.

Here is an example:

The problem:	My teacher is always targeting me, I think it's unfair
People who can support me:	My parents; the school counsellor; my good friend in that class
What I want to happen:	I just want to be treated the same as everyone else in the class
3 things I could do:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I could give a sarcastic answer next time she picks on me</li> <li>2. I could just stay quiet in class and hope she forgets about me</li> <li>3. I could talk to the counsellor about the situation</li> </ol>



Following are the steps of **effective problem-solving**

**1 Choose a problem**

**T**he first step in problem solving is to choose a problem. After all, if you can't clearly identify a problem, it's hard to come up with a solution.

One way to identify problems is to pay attention to how your mood changes through the week. Notice what's happening when your mood goes down: what were you thinking about, where were you, what happened just before your mood changed? Your low mood can be a helpful guide to show you where the problems are.

Consider the problems that are bothering you the most. Some may be big problems (parents are separating) and some not-so-big (you've got

a project due). Some may directly involve you (an argument with a friend) and some may be things that are happening to you (starting a new school).

Choose one to start with. Pick one of the smaller problems that directly involves you and is happening now; later, you can move up to bigger problems. Try to be specific and detailed.

For example "Things suck" isn't very specific or detailed: it's not clear what the problem is. "I don't want to get into so many arguments with my dad about homework" is more detailed and makes it clear what's going wrong and what needs to change.





**The problem you choose is:**



A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thick grey border, intended for the user to write their chosen problem.

# Problem Solving

## Understand the problem

-  What supports do you have (friends, siblings, parents, other concerned adults)?
-  Have you had this problem before? If so, how did you handle it?
-  Do you need to find out more information?
-  What would be different if the problem were solved? How would you feel?  
How would other people feel?



People who can support me:

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Other ideas about this problem:

## Problem Solving

### **Think of things you might do to solve the problem**

**W**rite down 3 actions you might take to help solve the problem. Consider things you can do that don't depend on somebody else. Don't try to

decide which one is best: just come up with different actions you might do. Don't worry if you've tried something before and it didn't work – situations change.



1.

2.

3.

**Problem Solving**

**4 Compare these different solutions**


Consider which is most likely to help the problem. Look at the good and bad points for each action. The teen who felt targeted by a teacher did the worksheet like this:

Action	Good Points	Bad Points
1. I could give a sarcastic answer next time she picks on me	She would know how I felt	I'd get in more trouble. The class would be even more stressful for me.
2. I could just stay quiet in class and hope she forgets about me	I might be able to 'disappear' in class, then she wouldn't bug me.	It's pretty boring not to say what you think. She might target me even more.
3. I could talk to the counsellor about the situation	The counsellor can talk to the teacher privately. The counsellor might suggest other solutions.	I can't think of any.

**Problem Solving**

**4 Compare these different solutions, continued**

**Now you try it.** For each of your 3 actions, write down the good and bad points:



Action	Good Points	Bad Points
1.		
2.		
3.		

## Problem Solving

### 4 Compare these different solutions, continued

**H**ere's a tip on how to compare different actions. There are three kinds of actions: Passive, Aggressive and Assertive.

#### Passive Actions:

you don't state your own point of view because you don't think it's worth saying or you don't do what you want because you think what other people want is more important.

#### Aggressive Actions:

you don't listen to others' points of view and just try to do what you want, no matter how it affects people around you.

#### Assertive Actions:

you strike a balance between what you want and what others want, stating your own view and listening to the views of others.

As you've already guessed, Passive and Aggressive actions aren't usually the best ones. When you're judging a possible action, make a note if it seems either Passive or Aggressive.

### 5 Pick the best one

**L**ook over the good and bad points for each action and decide which one is best.

Then you will make a plan to carry out this action. In the next skill section, Goal Setting, we're going to explain how to make really effective plans and carry them out.