

# **Speak Up! Guide**

## **3. Problem Solving**

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# Speak Up! Guide

## Chapter 3: Problem Solving

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## 1. WHY DO WE NEED PROBLEM SOLVING?

- **To be in control of what happens to us and not to allow others to decide for us.**

Example: Mary has planned to go out for lunch today since she has just received her paycheck. She asks Susan to join her but they have to decide where to go eat. Mary likes Mexican food but Susan wants to go to a fast food restaurant. Mary knows she might not be able to afford going out for a while and she feels she should go eat what she really wants. On the other hand she does not want to upset Susan who said she would not consider her a friend anymore if she does not go with her to McDonalds. Mary finally lets Susan decide where to go because she wants her to continue to be her friend.

- **To avoid the negative consequences of bad decisions.**

Example a: John accidentally bumped into Bill on the way to sharpen his pencil. Bill called John a name. John punched Bill in the nose. John is suspended for starting a fight.

Example b: The supervisor comes to check on the work of Mike who is stuffing envelopes. He discovers that Mike has been putting the wrong flyers in the envelopes and tells him that. Mike becomes upset because he has already done 200 envelopes and now he has to redo them and miss his lunch break. He yells and threatens the supervisor and leaves the workplace to outside for a break. The consequence might be that he does not get a raise or he might even be terminated for his impulsive behavior.

- **To attain your goals in spite of the barriers**

Example a: Betty needs a ride to go to work but Gary said he couldn't come anymore to pick her up. Betty is very concerned that she cannot get to work on time but she cannot think of anything she can do. She just sits there and cries when she could have checked the bus schedule or asked someone's help with getting there.

Example b: Francis goes to the movies but the person in front of her gets the last tickets for the movie she wants to see. The cashier tells her that all the tickets have been sold for that night but she can come back tomorrow.

Example c: Her supervisor at the fast food place gives Sue a task. After the boss leaves, Sue realizes that she does not remember exactly what

tables she has to clean and prepare for the new group that is to come. She wants to do her job but she forgot the instructions. As a result, she just sits there unable to do anything.

- **To make and maintain friendships**

Example a: Susan has moved to a neighborhood and does not know anyone. She wants to make friends because she does not have any in this new area. Problem solving can help her attain this goal.

Example b: Susan was on her way to class when Marci stopped to talk to her. She told her to wait so that she can tell her about the note she received from Justin before school. Susan stayed and listened because she did not want to hurt Marci's feelings. She was also anxious to hear the latest. As a result, Susan was tardy to her next class and had to serve detention.

- **To cope with difficult situations**

Example a: A co-worker tells Helen to help her clean the floors but the boss has told her to empty the garbage cans. Helen wants to be helpful to her friend but she does not want to disobey her boss and risk being fired.

Example b: A neighbor keeps borrowing money from Joe and he never pays him back. This way, Joe does not have enough money to buy things for himself and he would like this situation to stop.

Example c: Steve wants to watch a TV program but his roommate wants to watch another one. The roommate has been watching TV for the last hour and now Steve feels that it should be his turn to watch what he wants.

## 2. WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW TO BE ABLE TO PROBLEM SOLVE?

- **Recognize feelings and how emotions can influence your decisions**
  - ◆ Exercise: Identify how you feel when you have a problem on Faces handout #1.
  - ◆ Exercise: Identify what emotions will make you take bad decisions on Faces handout #1.
- **Learn relaxation techniques**

In order to be able to make a good decision you should be calm, have a cool head, and have complete control over your behavior. That way you avoid impulsive decisions.

### Brief demonstration of the relaxation procedure:

Remember when you are ready to relax, choose a place where you can concentrate and not be interrupted by other people or activities. Choose a quiet place and choose a chair with a straight back so you can sit up straight in a relaxed position with your feet flat on the floor. Sometimes it's hard to pay attention and do everything that is necessary to relax, so you might want to have someone sit and relax with you and help you remember to do the things that we talk about on this tape.

Now that you are ready to relax, sit in the relaxed position with your hands resting comfortably on your legs, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Feel the way that your whole body begins to relax when you let out a breath. You're starting to feel better and you're starting to feel more relaxed already.

Now relax your shoulders. Let them droop down. Move your shoulders slowly so all of the tension goes away. Your shoulders are drooping down, and you feel so calm, and quiet, and relaxed.

Now this comfortable, relaxed feeling spreads down your arms all the way to your hands. Your arms and hands are resting on your legs, and they feel heavy and calm. Your whole body is feeling relaxed.

This warm, calm, comfortable feeling spreads down to your legs – all the way to your feet. Your feet are resting flat on the floor, and they feel heavy. Your whole body feels calm and relaxed.

Now take another deep breath and let it out slowly. Think about how good you feel. You are quiet, and calm, and rested. You feel so peaceful. It feels so nice, and you can remember this feeling so that any time you have a problem or start to feel upset, you can just take a deep breath and relax.

You've done a great job.

- **Learn to tell yourself positive self-statements** that increase your confidence in your ability to cope with the situation and make you feel good about yourself.

Positive self statements	Negative self statements
I can handle this	This can happen only to me
I will be calm	What a stupid thing to happen
Everything is going to be okay	I knew I was going to get in trouble
I can do this	This is more than I can stand
I can relax	I will never be able to do this

- **LEARN THE PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS**

Problem: John comes home from work and discovers that his CD player is broken. He knows Joe has been home all day and that he likes to listen to his CD player since he doesn't have one. Lisa and Steve are also living in the same house, but neither of them have expressed an interest in John's CD player. Thinking about how Joe could have broken his CD player, John starts to get angry but before going too far he remembers to use the problem-solving strategy. Instead of heading directly to where Joe is sitting and watching TV and screaming at him, he follows these steps:

**STEP 1: Relax**

John takes a deep breath and feels his tension going out when he lets the air out. He relaxes his muscles and he feels he is in control of his body as well as his actions.

**STEP 2: Positive self statement**

John says to himself, "I can remain calm" and he feels confident in his abilities to handle the situation without losing control.

**STEP 3: Identify problem**

John has to ask himself first "What is the problem? What makes me so upset?" Instead of identifying the problem by blaming Joe (e.g., Joe broke my CD player), John states the problem as being, "I found that my CD player is broken." John did the right thing because he has no confirmation that Joe actually broke his CD player.

#### STEP 4: Think of solutions

What are the different things you can do to solve your problem? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each one? What might be the good things and the bad things that might happen for each solution? Exercise: Use the Decision-Making Process worksheet for this step.

**Problem:** "I found that my CD player is broken." John's **goal** is to be able to listen to his CDs and the **barrier** is that his CD player is broken.

<b>Possible solutions</b>	<b>Advantages</b> (good things that might happen)	<b>Disadvantages</b> (bad things that might happen)
<b>A.</b> John might want to confront Joe about the CD player and ask him if he used it.	<b>A.</b> He will find out very quickly if Joe has broken it and can ask him to help pay for the repair costs.	<b>A.</b> He might upset Joe by seeming accusing and lose Joe as a friend
<b>B.</b> John might try to take the CD player to a repair shop or buy a new one	<b>B.</b> He will avoid showing his suspicions about Joe.	<b>B.</b> He will have to pay the whole cost of the repair.
<b>C.</b> John can listen to his music on cassettes or on the radio.	<b>C.</b> He will still enjoy listening to his music and still be friends with Joe.	<b>C.</b> John will still have a broken CD player to deal with later.
<b>D.</b> John can forget about music altogether and go watch TV with Joe.	<b>D.</b> He will still have Joe as a friend and find an enjoyable activity to do.	<b>D.</b> John will still have a broken CD player to deal with.

#### STEP 5: Choose and use the best solution

After carefully considering all options and their consequences, John chose to ask Joe if he knows that the CD player is broken. He will then take the CD player to the repair shop and, if it costs more money than he can spend, he will start saving some. This way, he will preserve his friendship with Joe while being able to repair something that he needs.

#### In summary the problem solving steps are:

- ❖ **Relax (deep breath)**
- ❖ **Positive self statement (that makes you feel good)**
- ❖ **Identify problem (what is the problem?)**
- ❖ **Think of solutions (what can you do to solve the problem)**
- ❖ **Choose and use the best solution**

### 3. WHAT ARE THE GENERAL CATEGORIES OF PROBLEM SITUATIONS?

- ❖ **Asking for information or favors from others** (e.g., asking for help)
- ❖ **Refusing unreasonable requests** (e.g., when someone asks to borrow your new baseball cap)
- ❖ **Dealing with criticism** (e.g., when your supervisor tells your work has not been done right)
- ❖ **Handling disagreements** (e.g., when your friend tells you that you are wrong)
- ❖ **Meeting new people** (e.g., when you want to make new friends)
- ❖ **Coping with objectionable behaviors from others** (e.g., when your co-worker teases you because you always bring carrots for lunch)

### 4. HOW TO MAKE PROBLEM SOLVING HAPPEN IN EVERYDAY LIFE SITUATIONS

#### **How to make the problem-solving skills happen in different situations:**

- Practice the same strategy for different situations
- Repetition of the same agenda every day
- Use the same pictures and reminders for all situations
- The strategy should be repeated every day, even several times a day during the learning period
- Use different problems while going through the same problem-solving steps.
- Use different actors to play the roles in various problems
- Use different settings in which the same problem is occurring

#### **How to remember the problem-solving skills over time:**

- Use natural reinforcers that they might be likely to encounter in the real world
- Use less and less reminders as the participants learn the steps
- Teach the participants to design their own reminders (cues)
- Hold sessions monthly or every other week to remind the participants of the problem-solving steps
- Pair persons who know the problem solving steps with those who are just learning them so that, by tutoring, they will keep the knowledge fresh.
- Let everybody know that you are learning and using the problem-solving steps so that they can remind you to use them in a situation when you forget.

For more information on the "Problem Solving for Life" manual and training audiotape contact Irina Paraschiv, Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, CB # 7255, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-7255, Phone: (919) 966-4846, Fax: (919) 966-2230, E-mail: [iparaschiv@css.unc.edu](mailto:iparaschiv@css.unc.edu), World Wide Web address of Learning for Life Program, <http://cdl.unch.unc.edu/lfl>

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## Decision Making Process

<b>Problem to be solved</b> Name the problem as it has been Identified	<b>Possible solutions</b>	<b>Advantages</b> (Good things that might happen)	<b>Disadvantages</b> (Bad things that might happen)
	<b>A.</b>	<b>A.</b>	<b>A.</b>
<b>Barriers to solve the Problem</b>	<b>B.</b>	<b>B.</b>	<b>B.</b>
<b>Resources</b>	<b>C.</b>	<b>C.</b>	<b>C.</b>
	<b>D.</b>	<b>D.</b>	<b>D.</b>

# **Problem Solving Steps**

Step 1: Relax (Deep Breath)

Step 2: Positive Self-Statement

Step 3: Identify the Problem

Step 4: Think of Solutions

Step 5: Just do it!

# Problem Solving Steps

Step one



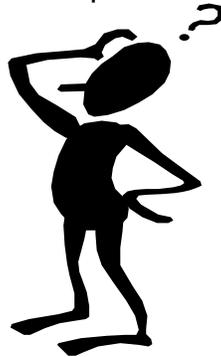
Deep Breathe

Step two



Talk to Yourself  
( you can do it!)

Step three



Identify the problem

Step four



Think of Solutions

Step five



Just Do It!

# PROBLEM SOLVING

Location: Convention workshop

Situation: Talking about problem solving.

Role Play: Have you used problem solving methods in the past?

How do you problem solve?

How has problem solving helped you in the past?

How do you stay calm when faced with a problem?

