

Solving Problems Effectively

Engaging in effective problem solving enables you to identify exactly what is causing the problem and to develop a workable solution. Additionally, learning to set realistic, measurable goals helps to establish “do-able” implementation plans and to know when a plan is successful and when it might be necessary for additional problem-solving.

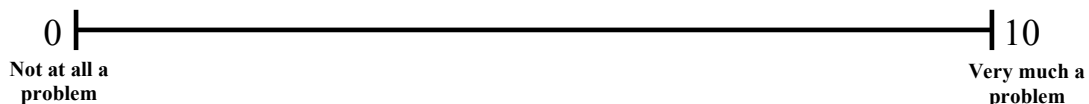
Problem Solving

When you take time to think about problems or concerns in your life, it is helpful to think about them in a constructive way. The technique described below will help you to develop effective solutions to problems that can be resolved. **The goal of SOLVE is to try to find new and better ways of responding to problem situations.** The letters in the word **SOLVE** are used to help remember the steps in the problem-solving process.

SSTATE THE PROBLEM
OUTLINE THE PROBLEM
LIST POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
VIEW THE CONSEQUENCES
EXECUTE YOUR SOLUTION

SSTATE THE PROBLEM.

The first step to solving problems is to identify what they are. Once you’ve identified a situation, rate how much of a problem it is for you on a 0 to 10 scale (like the one below). This will help you put the problem in perspective and will give you a way to measure your success at managing the identified problem.



OUTLINE THE PROBLEM.

Outlining the problem may be the most important part of the **SOLVE** exercise. Accurately describing a problem often helps reveal good solutions.

When you outline the specific aspects of the problem, include information such as:

- a) **WHO** was there?
 - b) **WHERE** did it occur?
 - c) **WHEN** did it happen?
 - d) **WHAT** led up to the event?
 - e) **HOW** did you respond to the event?
 - f) **WHAT** happened after the event?
- ◆ How you responded to the situation is very important. Why? Because many times you can't change what happens but often *you can change how you respond* to what happens.
 - ◆ Be sure to ask yourself what role *you* are playing in the problem situation. Pay special attention to how your thoughts may be contributing to the problem.

Once you have identified the **current** problem, you must decide how you want things to be ***different in the future***. These are your goals. How to identify and “test” your goals will be discussed more on the last page of this handout.

☛ Outlining the problem can be difficult. The point is not to make yourself feel guilty or give yourself a hard time but to help you realize that there is a lot you can do to resolve the problem.

LIST POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.

The goal here is to think of many possible solutions. Here are some guidelines to help you generate as many ideas as you can:

- ☑ Be creative and willing to give “off the cuff” solutions. Don't be afraid to come up with unlikely or unusual suggestions. At a second glance, the “unlikely” solution may be the most likely to succeed.
- ☑ Quantity is best. The more ideas you can generate the greater the chance that you'll come up with a solution that will work well.
- ☑ Combine and improve your ideas. Go back over your list to see if any of your ideas can be grouped together. Sometimes a combination of solutions is your best bet.
- ☑ Consider changing your reactions as a possible solution. Sometimes problem situations cannot be resolved or the solution takes a long time to be effective. In either of these cases, helpful solutions often include doing things to change how you are reacting to the situation.



☠ **Be careful** not to evaluate any of the solutions before you have finished listing possible options! Evaluation will lead to criticism, and criticism might stop you from thinking of possible solutions before you have discovered the best one!

VIEW THE CONSEQUENCES.

After you have listed the solutions, decide which one is best. Examine the possible positive and negative consequences of each solution, and make some notes on what these consequences are.

It may help to ask yourself questions like these:

- ❖ Is this a long-term or a short-term solution? What will happen in the short run if I carry out this solution? What will happen in the long run?
- ❖ Will more good come from this solution than harm?
- ❖ How will this solution affect other people?
- ❖ How likely is it that I really can carry out this solution?
- ❖ How will I feel if I choose this solution? Might I regret it? Will I be proud of myself?
- ❖ Will this solution only partly solve the problem? Will it completely get rid of the problem?

✱ Try to come up with at least one positive **and** one negative consequence of each possible solution. After you have carefully considered the possible solutions, choose the best one.

BE OPTIMISTIC when viewing possible solutions. An important purpose of **SOLVE** is to encourage you to identify and try new solutions you may not have considered before. Being negative or pessimistic will reduce your chances of carrying out new solutions.



USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM. When trying to change your behavior, it can be very helpful to have the support of your family and/or your friends. It's often a good idea to take the time to talk to a friend or a loved one about the changes you are trying to make.

Ask them for...

- ❖ help in generating solutions to your problem situation, and
- ❖ feedback about a solution you have chosen. Knowing that someone you can trust and depend on agrees with your choice can help you have confidence in your decision.

It's nice to have someone to depend on for help in case everything doesn't work out just right. And it's nice to have someone to share your accomplishments with when things go well.

EXECUTE YOUR SOLUTION.

This is the toughest part of the exercise. In order to execute your solution effectively, you should follow these steps...

- . **IMAGINE YOUR SOLUTION:** Before trying to carry out your solution, go over it thoroughly in your mind.
- . **ANTICIPATE ROADBLOCKS:** Try to anticipate any possible roadblocks in your solution. This will help minimize your discouragement if/when problems arise.
- . **EXECUTE YOUR SOLUTION:** Just Do It!

ASSESS YOUR RESULTS: Write down some notes on how things turned out. Ask yourself...

- ◇ Is the problem situation less stressful?
- ◇ How satisfied are you with the outcome?

Rate your problem again using the same scale you used in Step 1. If you're not satisfied, try going back over Steps 2, 3, and 4, selecting a different solution, and trying again.

☞ **Remember**, effective solution execution *maximizes* your chance for success, it *does not* guarantee your initial solution will be successful 100% of the time.

Effective Goal Setting

Goal-setting serves two main purposes.

Goals...

1. **provide focus and direction, and**
2. **provide a source of feedback on the effectiveness of our solution**

However, in order for a goal to do these things, it must be identified and measured. Below are questions you can use to evaluate the effectiveness of your goal.

- ρ **Is The Goal is Realistic?** Is the goal statement realistic? Can the goal actually be achieved?
- ρ **Is There a Target Date for Completion?** When will the goal be accomplished? It's a good idea to set a target date to act as a guideline and then re-set if needed. Plan short-term and long-term goals.
- ρ **Is The Goal is Measurable?** How will you know you have reached your goal? How will the goal be measured? Do you have a method to keep track of your progress?

Examples: Minutes spent doing some activity such as exercise or relaxation.
A specific type and number of pleasurable activities to engage in each week.

- ρ **Is The Goal Broken Down Into Small, Realistic Parts?** Remember to start at a point that you already know you can do, and build onto it from there. Program the steps for a sense of early success to help give you the boost and momentum to keep you going.
- ρ **Is the goal "I" centered?** Are "you" the one engaging in the actions or behaviors to be measured? Don't set goals for other people.
- ρ **Once Accomplished, What Rewards Will You Use?** Remember that actions which are rewarded are more likely to reoccur.
- ρ **Is The Goal Desirable?** Do you want the outcome enough to put forth the effort? You are much more likely to strive toward a goal that you care about and the result becomes a reward for the effort.
- ρ **Is A Relapse Plan Clearly Established?** What happens if you do not reach to goal as you originally planned? What will you do to get started again?

Example of Goal Setting

GOALS

Week	How Far?	met?	How Often?	met?
1	Walk 8 minutes per day		3 days	
2	Walk 10 minutes per day		3 days	
3	Walk 10 minutes per day		3 days	
4	Walk 12 minutes per day		4 days	
5	Walk 14 minutes per day		4 days	
6	Walk 16 minutes per day		4 days	
7	Walk 18 minutes per day		5 days	
8	Walk 20 minutes per day		5 days	

Now it's YOUR turn...

PART I: Pick an area in your life you are having problems with and work through the **SOLVE** process described above to develop a solution.

Examples of problems...

- ⊙ Working long hours
- ⊙ Difficulty living with a chronic medical condition
- ⊙ Family adjustment, etc.

PART II: Use the information on effective goal setting to develop a specific and manageable way to implement your plan. **Be sure and write your plan out!** Then engage in doing your plan.