



# Problem solving



When faced with a difficult situation it can be hard to know how to act. You can sometimes feel overwhelmed and start to worry. But as you've probably noticed, worry alone doesn't tend to make the situation better. Problem solving is about finding a constructive way to try and resolve the difficult situation where possible. To do this, you need to switch on the flexible part of your brain and be open to approaching a problem from a new direction. Sometimes this will mean trying out solutions that wouldn't be your usual behaviour. The art to problem solving is a willingness to keep trying new approaches.



## Is it actually a problem?

The first step is to determine whether this is actually a practical problem that can be resolved. To be a practical problem it needs to be present, realistic and manageable. For example, if the problem was "I'm worried that I might get hit by a meteorite on the way home tomorrow", then the problem is in the future, outside our control, and probably not too likely to happen.



## Problem solving in six steps

- **Step 1.** Identify your problem. Try to be clear and concise.
- **Step 2.** Brainstorm solutions. List as many options as you can think of regardless of how silly they may seem.
- **Step 3.** Evaluate your options. Choose your top three solutions from Step 2 and draw up a list of the main advantages and disadvantages of each option.
- **Step 4.** Choose a solution. Having evaluated the pros and cons, choose an option that you think will best resolve the issue.
- **Step 5.** Plan your actions. Take a moment to stop and actually work out the specific steps of how you will enact your chosen option
- **Step 6.** Implement your solution. Time to put your plan into action! Review the outcome afterwards and if things didn't go well, go back to Step 2 and try again with a new option.

## Use the plan below to assist you with your problem solving:

### Step 1 - Identify the problem

My problem is:

### Step 2 - Brainstorm solutions

List all possible solutions, irrespective of how realistic they may be – be as creative as possible. Do not evaluate at this stage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Step 3 - Evaluate options

Choose the top 3 solutions and list the main advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

**Solution**

**Advantages**

**Disadvantages**

### Step 4 - Choose a solution

Choose the solution that will best resolve the issue:

### Step 5 - Plan your actions

Choose the solution that will best resolve the issue:

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Step 4:

### Step 6 - Implement your solution

Put your plan into action. Review the outcome afterwards. If things didn't go well, select a different solution from Step 2 and start again. The key is to keep trying new ideas.

## Student Counselling Service

Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building  
Open: Monday to Friday



## Crisis contacts

Ambulance/Fire/Police: 000  
Lifeline (24 hours): 13 11 14  
Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511