

# ANXIETY & SOLVING PROBLEMS

Anxiety is about thinking you are in some kind of danger. When a person is anxious they are usually thinking about the future and making negative predictions. It is not enough to tell yourself “don’t worry about it.” When we worry it’s because we find it difficult to let go of a subject which we see as important.

An alternative to worry is **structured problem solving**. If you are going to think about something then why not do it in a way that will increase the odds of finding a solution?

When you first learn the structured problem solving method try to avoid problems that are very difficult, emotional or long-standing. Instead, deal with easier issues until you get used to the method. Regular practice is important until the steps are well learned.

This approach is best suited for problems that are difficult, serious, or overwhelming. Therefore, structured problem solving is best used when you have the time to concentrate on it. Do not try it while watching television or cooking the dinner, otherwise you may become distracted.

Read on for a step-by-step approach to problem solving.

# ***PROBLEM SOLVING: A Step by Step Approach***

Solving problems is a skill, which can be learned. You probably had that skill before you became depressed or anxious. So let's refresh your memory. We will take it step by step.

## ***Step 1***

### ***Define the Problem***

Although the problem may seem obvious, it is important to spend time trying to be specific about it. The more carefully we define the problem the more likely we are to come up with some possible solutions. If you set out with a vague problem, you can only expect to find a vague solution to it. After you have defined the problem you may wish to show it to family and friends to see what they think. Because you are feeling depressed or anxious, make sure you pick a problem which is reasonably easy to start with. Once you can handle an easy problem successfully, you will find that your confidence and motivation will increase. Once that happens you are ready to tackle more difficult problems.

## ***Step 2***

### ***Brainstorm***

Try and think of all possible solutions. At this stage don't worry about choosing a solution. Instead let your imagination run wild. Write down every possible solution, even if you think it is silly or not what you would like to do. Sometimes by opening your mind to all alternatives, you think of a new way of dealing with the problem, which you may not have thought of if you stuck to your usual way of thinking. Don't be afraid to ask family and friends to contribute ideas. They may think of something extra.



## ***Step 3***

### ***Focus on the best solutions***



Now look carefully at all your alternatives. Choose two or three ideas and examine them more closely. On a piece of paper write down all the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. Again, why not ask someone you trust to help?

## ***Step 4***

### ***Choose a solution***

Once you have worked out the advantages and disadvantages of 2 or 3 of your best ideas, choose one. At this stage remind yourself that "having a go" is the aim of the exercise. The solution you choose doesn't have to be perfect. You will have plenty of opportunity to fine tune it or even get rid of it and try another idea. All you are doing at this stage is trying to get a foot in the door. Before you move on to the next step, have a quick look back at your problem definition and make sure this solution still fits the problem.

## **Step 5**

### ***Make a plan***

The next step is to organize a plan of action for carrying out your chosen solution. In making the plan, ask yourself these questions. What do you need to make this idea work? Is anyone else involved? Are you likely to come up against any problems in trying this idea out? How will you get around them? How long should you have a go for before you can decide whether you are getting somewhere? How will you decide whether things are improving?

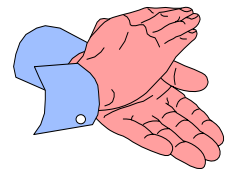
Now set a time for a review to see how things are going.

## **Step 6**

### ***Review***

In this step the first thing you do is congratulate yourself for giving it a go. It doesn't matter how things turned out; the important thing is that instead of worrying you are now working towards a solution.

Once you have congratulated yourself, sit down and check to see how things have been going. Is the problem as big now as it was when you started? Did your solution make any difference? It's OK if the problem hasn't gone away altogether. You just want to know if you should fine-tune your current solution or throw it out all together.



Again ask your family and friends whether they see any improvements.

## **Step 7**

### ***Continue or change plan***

Decide whether you are going to continue with the solution you have been trying, fine tune it or choose something altogether. Set a new review date and continue. If you have decided to try something completely new, then go back to step 4 and work your way through to step 7.

If your problem is solved then make sure you celebrate your win. Now you are ready for the next problem. This could become a good habit. Go for it!



# PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

## Step 1 Define the problem

What is the problem? Try and be specific.

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## Step 2 Brainstorm



List all possible solutions.  
Don't worry at this stage how realistic they are. Just use your imagination.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 3 Focus on the best solutions



Choose two or three ideas and work out the advantages and disadvantages of each.

<i>Idea</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		

**Step 4**

**Choose a solution**

Choose the best or most practical solution.

I'm going to have a go at:

.....

**Step 5**

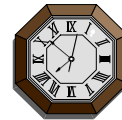
**Make a plan**

List what you will need to make this work. Work out what obstacles might get in the way and who else might be involved.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Decide when you will review the plan.

My review date is: \_\_\_\_\_



**Step 6**

**Review**

Congratulate yourself for trying!



How did you go? Work out if the problem is as big as it was before. Did the solution make any difference? Do you need more time or to make small changes to what you are trying? Do you need to try something else?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 7**

**Continue or change plan**

Decide whether to continue with your plan or try something new.

My new plan is: .....

***If your problem is solved then make sure you celebrate!***

