



# Problem Solving

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Problem Solving is an evidence based intervention for the treatment of low mood or anxiety.

This workbook can be used either alone or with the support of your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

## How to use this workbook.

Problem Solving has six steps. It is important to work through one step at a time, only move on to the next step of Problem Solving once you are comfortable with using the previous step.

It is key to follow all six steps of Problem Solving in sequence.

It can take some time for an intervention to become effective and to show improvement. It is important to allow enough time for the intervention to be effective.

## Evidence of Effectiveness;

[http://www.europsy-journal.com/article/S0924-9338\(06\)00188-X/abstract](http://www.europsy-journal.com/article/S0924-9338(06)00188-X/abstract)

## Helpful Resources;

How to Solve Daily Life Problems, Complete Home Toolkit [www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)

Problem Solving [cedar.exeter.ac.uk](http://cedar.exeter.ac.uk)

An Introduction to Coping with Anxiety, by Brosan and Hogan [www.overcoming.co.uk](http://www.overcoming.co.uk)

Solving Life's Problems, by Arthur Nezu, Christine Nezu, and Thomas D'Zurilla  
[www.springerpub.com](http://www.springerpub.com)

[www.talkplus.org.uk](http://www.talkplus.org.uk)

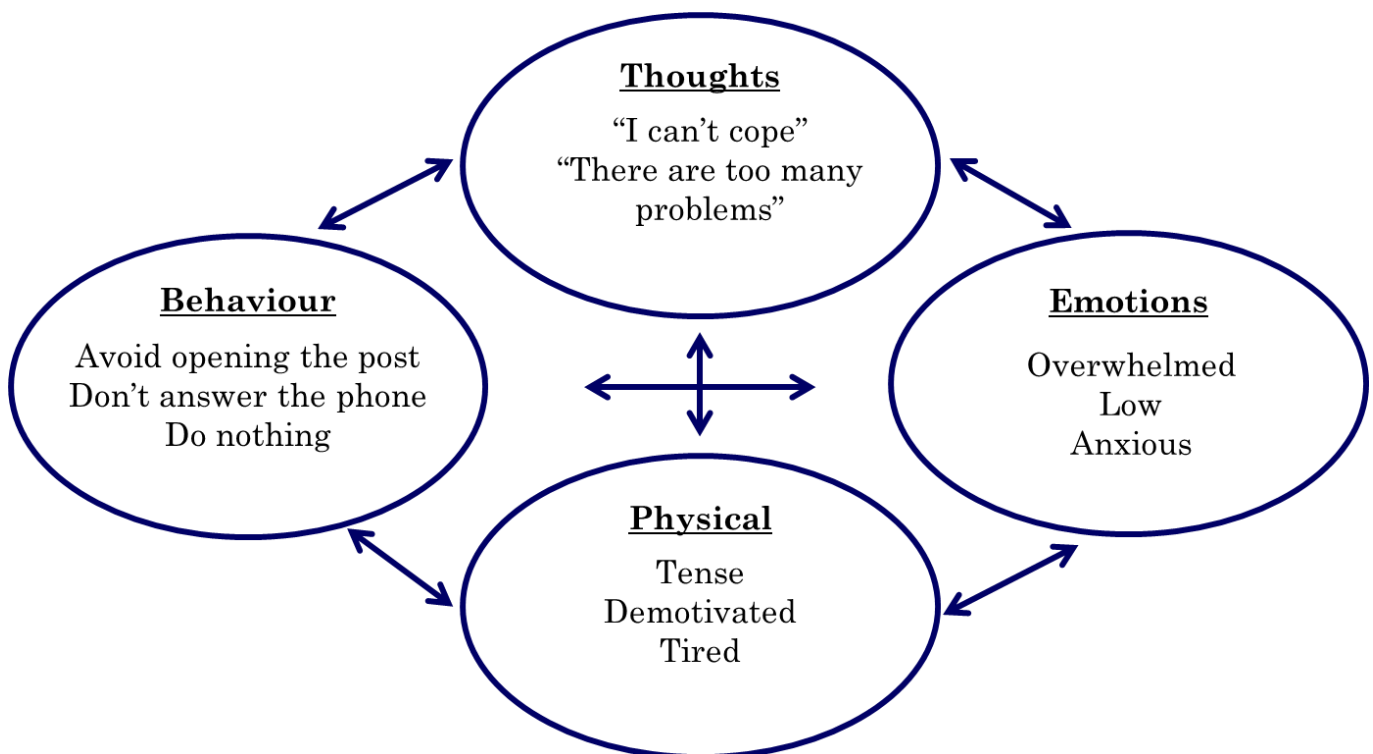
# Problem Solving



## Tackling Practical Problems

**Problem Solving is an evidence based treatment used to tackle practical problems in low mood or anxiety. It works by tackling one problem at a time and developing a specific action. We do this by developing as many solutions as possible and evaluating each solution before choosing one to implement.**

When we feel low or anxious it can become very difficult to tackle practical problems, or to even decide which problem needs to be addressed. For example, if we have not paid our bills we may avoid opening the post, stop answering the phone and distract ourselves by engaging in other activities. Initially avoiding tackling the problem can seem beneficial as it reduces our anxiety or low mood to begin with, however the longer we leave our problems unresolved the more difficult it can become to solve them.



### The Vicious Cycle

Being too busy, avoiding, ignoring or distracting ourselves from solving practical problems can lead to a vicious cycle in which we continue to feel overwhelmed, low or anxious. Anxiety and low mood decrease our natural problem solving abilities, therefore making it even more difficult to tackle our problems. Problem Solving breaks this vicious cycle by gradually tackling one problem at a time in a structured way to make our problems more manageable.



# STEP ONE

## Identifying one problem

It may be that you have more than one problem at a time, therefore the first step of Problem Solving is to choose one problem, perhaps start with the problem that will make the most difference if it wasn't there. It is important that we define the problem as clearly as possible, try to be clear about what aspects of the situation make it a problem.

### Identify one problem

"I have too much work to do so I am completing work at home and missing time with my family"

"I haven't paid my rent arrears and now they say I will be evicted"

"I can't do anything to help my elderly relative"

# STEP TWO

## List all possible solutions

List as many solutions as possible; don't worry about how practical, good or reasonable the solutions are at this stage, try for a list of at least five possible solutions. It can be difficult to come up with solutions when we are feeling overwhelmed therefore it is important that we try to be as creative as possible so you can come up with solutions you may not have thought about previously. It can also be helpful to ask a trusted friend or family member to help you come up with solutions, or even to look online.

### List all possible solutions

1. Only do what I can complete in work hours
2. Talk to my boss about my problem
3. Quit my job
4. Manage time better at work
5. Make my colleagues do some of the work

# STEP THREE

## List the pros and cons of each solution

Read through the list of possible solutions you have made in *Step 2* and choose the top solutions you feel are most likely to succeed. Evaluate each of the remaining solutions in terms of their advantages and disadvantages, or pros and cons. It may be difficult to see which solution might be best, it is good to consider what resources you might need and whether you would require anyone else to be present. A good solution may be one that doesn't require too many resources or the solution that appears most achievable.

Solution	Advantages	Disadvantages
Only do what I can complete in work hours.	Have family time. Will highlight the problem. Increasing pleasurable activities will improve my mood.	Won't get all my work done. My workload will increase day by day. I will get more stressed.
Talk to my boss about my problem.	My boss is in a position to help me. Have family time.	I don't want my boss to know that I can't cope. Might not help.
Manage time better at work.	Have family time.	Not enough time to complete all tasks.

## STEP FOUR

### Select one solution



After reviewing the pros and cons of each solution, select one solution that you feel at the time will have the best chance of a positive outcome. It may be difficult to choose a solution as you are concerned that it will not work, however keep in mind that you have gone through the pros and cons of each. If several solutions seem equally as good then pick the one that requires the least effort.

#### Select one solution

Talk to my boss about my problem

## STEP FIVE

### Make an action plan

Develop an action plan of how you will carry out the solution step by step using the worksheet. Some useful questions to consider while developing the action plan are; What is the first step I need to take? Where will I be? Who will be involved? When will I carry out the plan? As carrying out the plan may be difficult it is important that we are very specific about each step of the plan and to break it down into manageable steps.

#### Make an action plan

Steps	<i>Include what, where, when, and with who</i>
1	Email my boss Monday at 9:30am to request a meeting.
2	List what I am currently finding difficult and any solutions.
3	Arrange and attend the meeting with my boss.
4	Explain to my boss my current difficulties- being specific and clear.
5	Agree a plan with my boss to manage my workload.

## STEP SIX

### Implement the plan & review

Carry out the solution as outlined in the action plan you developed in *Step Five*. Once you have carried out the plan evaluate how effective the solution was. Think about what went well, or what you might do differently in the future. If the solution did not fully fix the problem then consider whether the action plan needs to be revised or return to *Step Four* and choose another solution to use. Learning from an attempt can be invaluable in identifying the best solution.

**To complete Problem Solving use the *Worksheet*.**



# WORKSHEET ONE



**Identify one problem**

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**List all possible solutions**

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<b>Solution</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>

# WORKSHEET TWO



## Select one solution

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## Make an action plan

Steps	<i>Include what, where, when, and with who</i>
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<b>1</b>	
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<b>2</b>	
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<b>3</b>	
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<b>4</b>	
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<b>5</b>	
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<b>6</b>	
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## Review your solution

<i>What went well?</i>	
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<i>What could you do differently</i>	
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