PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving skills are helpful for dealing with and finding solutions to everyday problems – whether large or small. We can have problems but not always know how to address them.

Problem solving makes it more manageable and is an alternative to catastrophizing or procrastinating over a situation. It is a skill which can be learned and practiced.

A problem can arise if a person has an aim but doesn't know how to solve it. If you are a worrier you may be more likely to underestimate your ability to deal with a problem, and instead focus on the worst possible outcome and avoid tackling the problem. Those who are anxious are more likely to feel overwhelmed by a problem. If you notice this happening it is helpful to use structured problem solving.

wellbeing
services south glasgow

> "One step at a time. You'll get there."

DISTRESSING EMOTION LEADS TO AVOIDANCE LEADS TO YOU BEING UNABLE TO PROBLEM SOLVE

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Finding solutions will help you feel better about a situation. It is helpful to learn to investigate a variety of solutions as we can sometimes become stuck and have rigid patterns of thinking which get in the way. If depressed it may feel like you have tried everything. This is due to paying attention to negative thoughts and can result in changes to your behaviour. When either low or anxious this can cause negative styles of thinking which can get in the way of problem solving and result in the cycle below.

HOPE

Problem solving also gives us hope, it challenges our thoughts, realising that it isn't a helpless situation. It also encourages us to find alternative solutions. It helps to identify what the problem is and then to pinpoint what you want to work on and how to do it. You can also think about what a friend or colleague would do in the same situation or seek the help of others when generating ideas.

A problem can arise if a person has an aim but doesn't know how to solve it. If you are a worrier you may be more likely to underestimate your ability to deal with a problem, and instead focus on the worst possible outcome and avoid tackling the problem. Those who are anxious are more likely to feel overwhelmed by a problem. If you notice this happening it is helpful to use structured problem solving.

PROBLEM SOLVING

When an event happens, what you think will affect what you feel and what you do.

Situation

Thoughts

Feelings

Behavior

Outcome

Describe the situation:

_____
_____
_____
_____

What were your thoughts?

_____
_____
_____

How did you feel?:

_____
_____
_____

What were your behaviors (how did you react?):

_____
_____
_____

What was the outcome?

_____
_____
_____

> "One step at a time. You'll get there."

wellbeing
services south glasgow

STEPS TO PROBLEM SOLVING

Firstly, define the problem and consider what it is you want to change. Think about what would happen if you don't or if you do solve the problem.
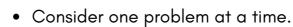
Brainstorm a list of possible solutions. Think what the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) for each solution are.

Pick the **solution** that you are most confident in.

Plan – consider barriers and how you might overcome them.

Finally, put your plan into **action**.

Evaluate – how did it go? Learn from it, whether you had a positive or negative result.

- Consider one problem at a time.
- List all solutions however ridiculous they may seem!
- Use your imagination!
- Seek help from others if necessary.
- When considering if you can or cannot do something about the situation, you can still look at solutions to manage the feelings you are experiencing in relation to the problem.

It is also helpful to consider if goals or solutions are **'SMART'**
Use **SMART** questions when identifying your goal.
(See our separate resource on goal setting).

EXAMPLE

An example could be being anxious about a piece of work you have not handed in yet, to either college or to your boss.

The longer you leave it, the more anxious you become.

By going through the steps shown you would identify what might happen if you don't address the problem such as missing a deadline.

You would then brainstorm solutions such as asking for an extension or extra time or asking for help if you are struggling.

You should end up less stressed about it by discussing with others or seeking help.

You could then set out a plan including setting time aside to work on it.

You would then review afterwards what helped, in order to learn from it and to help you manage a situation like this in future.

Good luck and remember you can learn from each time you use problem solving, as we don't always get it right as there can be a range of different solutions to a situation and not only one.