

Problem Solving Practice



Now it's your turn Step 1: Choose one problem

Look back at the list of problems discussed already in the teaching session. Choose **one** problem that you will tackle first from that list- or from a client you are working with or have worked with in the past. Alternatively choose a problem you are currently facing in your own life. Choosing just one problem area to start with is particularly important if you are working on many problems in the list. It isn't possible to overcome all these problems at once, so you need to decide which **one** area to focus on.

My target area: Write down the one problem area you want to work on first.

KEY POINT - Remember that this should be a practical or relationship problem.

Breaking it down into small steps

The important thing is to use a **step-by step** approach where no step seems too large. And the first step needs to be something that gets you moving in the right direction. For many problems, you may need to break down your target into many smaller steps that you can tackle one at a time.

Example: Julia's step-by-step approach

Julia decides to break down the task - getting the new uniform - into some smaller steps. This is because she doesn't have enough money to just go out and buy it. She therefore decides that as a first step she will **try to buy a second-hand uniform.**

Now decide whether you need to **break your target into smaller steps.**

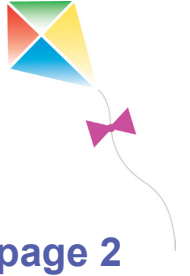
Q. Is this a clear, focused problem I can tackle?

Yes No

Q. Do you need to break it down into smaller, more achievable targets?

Yes No

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If you answered 'No', then please go straight to Step 2. If you answered 'Yes', think about your problem again. What smaller steps could help you move forwards? If you need to, write down your first target here again:

Step 2: Think up as many solutions as possible to achieve your first target

When you feel overwhelmed by practical problems, often it's hard to see a way out. It can seem hard to even start tackling the problem.

One way around this is to step back from the problem and see if any other solutions are possible. This approach is called **brainstorming**. The more solutions that you can think of, the more likely it is that a good one will emerge.

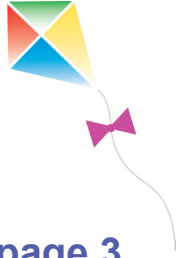
KEY POINT - You can even include ridiculous ideas at first as you are just trying to get yourself to start thinking more flexibly!

The purpose of brainstorming is to try to come up with as many ideas as possible. And then it will be easier for you to identify the solution that should overcome your problem.

The following questions will help you come up with possible ideas:

- What advice would you give a friend who was trying to make the same changes? Sometimes it's easier to think of solutions for others than for ourselves.
- What ridiculous solutions can you include as well as more sensible ones?
- What helpful ideas would others (e.g. family, friends or colleagues) suggest?
- What have you tried in the past that was helpful before?

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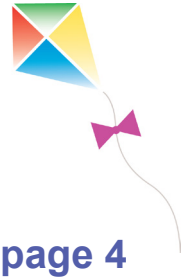
Example: Julia's problem - possible solutions

(Including ridiculous ideas at first)

- Ignore the problem completely - he can make do with what he has.
- I could steal some clothes from someone's washing line.
- I could see if the uniform is available second-hand on the internet.
- I can look in the local paper/free sheet and see if there's anything available.
- I could ask round my friends and relatives and see if they have one/any ideas.
- I could put a 'Wanted' card up at the newsagent.

Now write down as many possible solutions (including ridiculous ideas at first) for your own problem:

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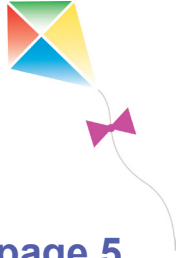


Step 3: Look at the pros and cons of each possible solution

Example: Julia writes down the pros and cons of her solutions

Suggestion	Pros (advantages)	Cons (disadvantages)
Ignore the problem completely - he can make do with what he has	Easier in the short term and I don't have to think about it. He can manage without it for the start of term\	Well, Ben's growing and won't fit the clothes he now - and there is a strict dress code - we'll need to get the uniform
I could steal the clothes from someone's washing line	Well it might work, but ...	I don't want to do that - it's wrong. It's one of my whacky brainstorm ideas. Even if I did think like that I wouldn't. I'd get fined and have even less money than I have now
I could see if the uniform is available second-hand on the internet	That's a good idea - people often advertise lots of stuff at a good price	There might not be one for sale there. What's the chance of finding our local school's uniform there?
I can look in the local paper/free sheet and see if there's anything available	That's another good idea - they have loads of pages with local stuff for sale and may include school uniform!	I'd need to spend time looking through the pages and then follow it up
I could ask round my friends and relatives and see if they have one/any ideas	Lots of them have had children. One of them may well have a uniform they want to get rid of	I'd have to spend time getting in touch with them all
I could put a 'Wanted' card up at the newsagent	Well, I've seen other people do this. It must work sometimes	I'd feel a bit nervous asking the newsagent if I could put it up. Do you have to pay for that sort of thing?

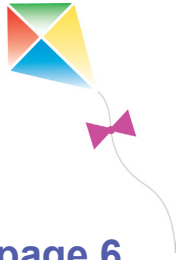
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Write your own list of ideas below, and the pros and cons of each suggestion.

My suggestions from step 2	Pros (advantages)	Cons (disadvantages)

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Step 4: Now choose one of the solutions

In making your decision, bear in mind that the best way of tackling a problem is to plan steady, slow changes.

KEY POINT - The solution you are looking for is something that gets you moving in the right direction. This should be small enough to be possible, but big enough to move you forwards.

Example: Julia's final choice

Julia tries to choose an option that will make a sensible first step in achieving her goal. She knows her chosen solution should be realistic and then it will be likely to succeed. She makes her decision after looking at all the pros and cons she's listed in Step 3.

Julia decides on balance to first **ask her friends and relatives**. Many of the other suggestions might also work, but this suggestion seems a reasonable first step.

Look at your own responses in Step 3 and then choose a solution. Write down your preferred option here:

Now see if you can answer 'Yes' to the first three **Questions for effective change** below.

Will it be useful for changing how you are?

Yes No

Is it a clear task so that you will know when you've done it?

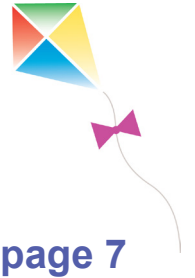
Yes No

Is it something that is realistic, practical and achievable?

Yes No

If you answered 'Yes' to all three questions, your chosen step should help start you off. If you answered 'No', then think again and choose another option from your list.

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Step 5: Plan the steps needed to carry out your chosen solution

You need to have a clear plan that lays out exactly **what** you are going to do and **when** you are going to do it. Write down the steps needed to carry out your plan. This will help you to think what to do and also to predict possible problems that might arise.

Remember that an important part of the planning process is to predict what would block the plan. That way you can think about how you will respond if there were problems to keep your plan on track.

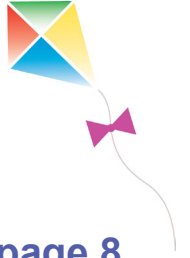
Example: Julia's plan

Who do I know? None of my sisters' children went to the same school. I need to ask my friends. I think the first person I'll ask is Jamila. She knows absolutely everyone and what's what. She's also really confident, so she'll feel able to ask around. And I'll also ask my other friend Andrea. She works next door to a charity shop and she could have a look out for me.

Now, let's think again. Is that a plan that makes clear what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it? - Yes it is. I'll phone them just now while Ben is out playing football. I don't think this plan will be blocked or prevented by anything - unless someone pops by without warning. If so, I'll remember to phone later. If none of my friends can help me within a few days, I can always go back to my brainstorm at step 2, and put up an advert at the newsagent.

Now, write down your plan here:

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What will you do if something happens that may block your plan?
Write down what you could do to unblock your plan:

Now check your plan against the rest of the Questions for effective change.

Q. Is your plan one that:

- Makes clear what you are going to do and when you are going to do it?

Yes No

- Won't be easily blocked or prevented by practical problems?

Yes No

- Will help you to learn useful things even if it doesn't work out perfectly?

Yes No