

Problem Solving

Often we operate on "auto pilot", reacting in habitual ways to difficult situations. However, these habitual responses are not always helpful and can in themselves create more stress, as we saw earlier.

Problem solving is a skill that can be used to come up with new solutions and can be used any time you are unsure about how to handle a situation.

The steps below are designed to help you to work out your ideas and come up with a plan to help you achieve your goal. With practice, these steps tend to become more automatic and the process will seem easier.

Step 1: Define the problem:

Be as specific as possible:

- What has usually happened?
My partner goes to the pub after work, leaves me at home with the children and comes home intoxicated and late for dinner.
- When does it usually happen?
Most week-nights.
- Who is involved?
Me, my partner and the children.
- What time and day will it happen?
Probably tomorrow night.
- What are your usual thoughts and feelings in this situation?
Feelings: Anger, resentment, feelings of being used and abandoned

Thoughts: "Why am I continuing in this relationship?", "This is a bad role model for our children" "I have no life", "Who is he with?"

Step 2: List all the things you could do:

Brainstorm! Be as creative as possible. Write down everything that could be a possible solution. Don't throw out any ideas yet. Don't worry about whether it will work at this stage just let yourself think of every possible solution.

- *Leave*
- *Stop cooking dinner for him*

- *Keep complaining and hope he will change*
- *Take the kids and go out for pizza once a week on our own*
- *Wait until he is sober and talk to him about the effect of the situation on me and the kids*
- *Wait until he is sober and suggest counselling*
- *Give him an ultimatum that unless the behaviour stops I will leave*
- *Negotiate that he goes out only once a week and the other nights comes home straight from work.*

Step 3: Evaluate each strategy:

Give each possible strategy a rating by asking the questions below.

- If I did this, how likely is it to work?
 - How prepared am I to give it a try?
 - What are its good points?
 - What are the possible risks?
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- *Leave: 5/10 I'm not ready to leave yet and I don't have anywhere to go.*
 - *Stop cooking dinner for him: 7/10 At least I wouldn't feel so used and there would be some consequences for him*
 - *Keep complaining and hope he will change: 0/10 I'm already doing this and it isn't working*
 - *Take the kids and go out for pizza once a week on our own: 5/10 at least we would get out of the house and I wouldn't feel so used.*
 - *Wait until he is sober and talk to him about the effect of the situation on me and the kids: 9/10 It may not work, but if I did this I would feel like I have tried and I would feel like I had behaved honourably.*
 - *Wait until he is sober and suggest counselling: 8/10*
 - *Give him an ultimatum that unless the behaviour stops I will leave: 5/10 It may work but it's risky and I'm not really ready to leave yet.*
 - *Negotiate that he goes out only once a week and the other nights comes home straight from work: 9/10 perhaps this could be a good way to negotiate.*

Step 4: Pick the ones that you think are best, and make a plan

- Decide which ideas are likely to work best for you.

- Circle those you will try the next time this situation occurs. This then forms the basis of your plan.

My plan is to wait until he is sober. Talk to him about the effect of his behaviour on me and the kids (using the "recipe for assertiveness") and negotiate that he goes out only once a week. On that night I will take the kids out for pizza.

Step 5: Rehearse your plan

Practice your plan – either in your head, or in real life. Practice can greatly improve your chances of succeeding.

Step 6: Use them when the situation occurs

Try it out in real life!

Step 7: Evaluate the strategy after you have used it

- Did you stick to your plan?
- How well did it work?
- Could it be improved?

I tried it out but he was tired and stressed after a long week and we ended up arguing. I will pick another time and try it again, on a Sunday when he is more relaxed. If it doesn't work then I will give him an ultimatum and start to make some plans to leave.



The Problem Solving Worksheet



1. Define the problem:

When does it usually happen / when is it likely to happen?

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Who is involved / is likely to be involved?

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What has usually happened / is likely to happen?

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What are your usual thoughts and feelings about this situation?

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2. List all the things you could do:

Brainstorm! Be as creative as possible. Write down everything that could be a possible strategy.

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3. Evaluate each strategy:

Give each of the strategies above a rating out of 10 by asking the questions below:

- How likely is it to work?
- How prepared am I to give it a try?
- What are its good points?
- What are the possible risks?

4. Make a plan:

- Decide which strategies are likely to have the best results for you.
- Circle them. This then forms the basis of your plan.
- Write your plan below:

