



The aim of this booklet – *'A Practical Guide About Problem Solving and Setting Goals'* is to assist individuals to focus on their goals increase the likelihood of achieving them.

The objective of the information in this book is to assist individuals to structure and apply problem solving and goal planning techniques more effectively by:

- explaining a technique that uses the six step method of structured problem solving; and
- practicing goal setting techniques.

Other booklets available in *'A Practical Guide'* series include A Practical Guide About:

- PROMOTING WELLBEING;
- STRESS;
- STRESS MANAGEMENT; and
- A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP AND THE ELDERLY.

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE ABOUT:

Problem solving and setting goals



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Copies of this and related booklets in the 'A Practical Guide' series (as well as other resources) are available from the:
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Treatment Protocol. Protocol (2000). Management of Mental Disorders (Third Edition). Sydney: World Health Organisation Collaboration Centre for Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

Nove, T.(1995). A Training Manual on Assertiveness Personal Skills (self-esteem; self-confidence; personal rights, acknowledging and expressing feelings, leading into effective communication skills). Health Promotion Centre, Western Sydney Area Health Service.

Western Sydney Area Health Promotion Centre. (1993). Learn to Unwind. A Workbook on Relaxation and Stress Management Techniques. Western Sydney Area Health Service.

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This publication is intended to provide general information only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional help. You may want to consider consulting your local general practitioner on issues raised in this booklet. There are also a number of telephone numbers, internet and websites on page 9 of this booklet that you may find useful.

Problem solving



Problems, big and small are part of our everyday lives. Poor problem solving can make us anxious and can get in the way of us reaching our goals. Becoming a good problem solver can help us to deal with problems in life.

Problem solving is a skill that anyone can learn and is closely linked to setting and achieving goals. Problems can be caused by others or the world around us. Other problems may only involve ourselves. People react to their problems in different ways.

Such as:

- Getting depressed by their problems;
- Getting anxious and stressed out; and
- 'blocking out' their problems so they don't have to think about them.



We can use the following problem-solving technique to help us with all types of problems big and small.



Structured problem solving

Step 1. Identifying the problem

It is vital to firstly detect the problem and then having a clear idea of what exactly the problem is. For example, you may see the problem as being 'I am anxious'. This is too unclear. I am anxious because... and... is much clearer.

Defining the problem helps to focus our thinking on the issue at hand and minimise the possibility of getting side-tracked onto other issues, it also helps in knowing when the problem has been solved.

Step 2. Generating choices available to you.

Brainstorming is a method which allows you to come up with as many solutions as possible. To 'brainstorm' you will need a pen and paper. Write down all the ways you can think of to resolve the situation. The more solutions you can write down, the more likely you will be able to solve the problem. It is important to simply list every solution suggested and not evaluate or judge any of them at this stage.

Step 3. Evaluating the solutions

This step involves discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. List these down. A way to pick the best option is by asking five questions. Ask:

- how will this make me feel?;
- how will this effect others?;
- how will it make things in the short term?;
- how will it make things in the long term?; and
- how practical or possible is it?

You may find it useful to give each of your options a score. For each option: Score each question as bad=0, alright=1 or good=2.

This will give you a score out of 10 for each option. The option with the highest score would be the best (a perfect option would get 10 out of 10). However remember it may not be the very best solution if it costs too much money, or would take too much time. It sometimes comes down to what is the most practical solution at the time.

Step 4. Choosing a solution

In this step choose the solution or combination of solutions which will solve the problem. Given your evaluation, come up with what is the best thing for you to do right now.

Step 5. Plan to implement your solution

Having a plan in place will increase the likelihood that the problem will be solved. Even if the agreed solution is excellent, the solution will not be any use if it is not put into practice. The option you chose to solve your problem may not always be easy. You may find it helpful to break your solution down into easier steps. Lastly, try your plan and test its effectiveness, monitor its progress. If you find you need to change aspects of the solution, that is fine.

Step 6. Review

Problem solving is a continuing process and problems sometimes may not be resolved after the first attempt. Since not all possible hitches are always considered at the planning stage, ongoing reviews are necessary. Steps may need to be changed or new ones added.

In summary, you may also be thinking that 'this is obvious' or 'I do this already'. The thing you might not do is to write it down. Writing down your problems and solutions helps you to make good decisions about what to do. Learning problem solving takes practice.



Goal setting



The successful resolution of a problem is an important skill to develop as it provides a major boost to our self-esteem and is also closely linked to setting and achieving goals. Goal setting also leads to attempting more in life. To practice goal setting write down your goals to help them into focus and increase your likelihood of achieving them. They are sure to change from time to time, so you may need to re-do this at regular intervals.



When choosing a goal ask your self if it is realistic – not easy as to be unchallenging and not so difficult as to be unattainable. Practice goal setting by asking yourself the following:

SHORT TERM GOALS:

- What three activities do you want to spend *more* time doing or to commence doing?
- What three activities do you want to spend *less* time doing?
- What can you start doing now to achieve these goals?



LONG TERM GOALS:

- List three goals you want in the next three years, in order of years and in order of importance to you
- What factors might make it difficult to achieve these goals?
- How do you plan to overcome these obstacles?
- List the steps you could take to start seeing these goals come about. *Start today!*



Some useful telephone numbers

Local Area Health Service local 24 hour access number (this is listed in the 'White Pages' under 'H' for 'Health')

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.

Tel: 1800 674 200

If you are unable to speak English well, you can phone the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on 131 450 (this is a free service) and ask them to call the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (during business hours) on your behalf.

Transcultural Mental Health Centre

Tel: 02 9840 3800

Some useful internet or websites

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.
www.mentalhealth.asn.au

Multicultural Communication
www.mhcshealth.nsw.gov.au

NSW Health Department
www.health.nsw.gov.au

Diversity Health Institute Clearinghouse
www.dhi.gov.au/clearinghouse

If you are interested in attending a course on any one of the 'A Practical Guide' series topic areas, phone the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) on (02) 9840 3800 and ask to speak with the Senior Mental Health Promotion Officer to register your interest.

If you live in rural and remote areas of NSW you can call the TMHC (free call) on 1800 64 8911 to register your interest.