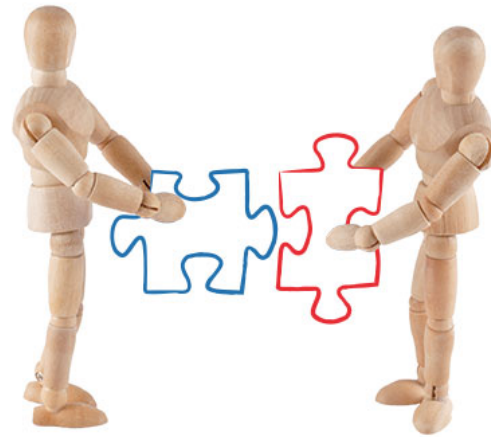


Module 14: Problem Solving

Objectives

This module aims to help you explore and gain an understanding of the following:

- The benefits of problem solving and how it can be applied to a range of different types of problems
- Ways to avoid acting on impulse



Problem Solving

Problem solving - the process of working through the details of a problem to reach a solution, is a skill which promotes good decision making and encourages confidence and emotional wellbeing.

Problem solving skills are necessary to resolve conflicts that arise in our everyday lives whether big or small. Having the ability to deal with problems promotes self-esteem and self-confidence.

Starting Point

Identify your current level of confidence (1 = no confidence; 2 = some confidence; 3 = very confident).

<i>The advantages of the problem solving approach and how to apply it</i>	1	2	3
<i>Ways to avoid acting on impulse</i>	1	2	3

If you have scored yourself as 1 or 2, this module will be particularly useful for you. If you have scored yourself as very confident, there still may be some resources below that you will find useful. Complete Exercise 1 before moving on to the next module.

Here are three ways in which individuals tend to deal with problems:

The Avoidant Approach

This is similar to the 'Head in the Sand' way of experiencing anger and involves a failure to acknowledge the problem. It is characterised by procrastination (putting things off), passivity, inactivity (doing nothing, hoping the problem will go away) and making excuses for not acting (I can't do anything about it). Individuals who adopt this approach may blame other people or situations for the problem and the problem tends to remain unresolved.

The Emotional Approach

Individuals who adopt this approach tend to act impulsively or carelessly and may become angry or upset. They are unlikely to consider different solutions and the consequences and make hasty decisions which may compound the problem.

The Problem Solving Approach

This involves a more systematic approach to problems, which includes defining the problem, selecting a possible solution, implementing it and evaluating whether the solution is the right one. Below is a list of things to consider when using this approach to problems.

Step 1 - Define the problem (what exactly is it)

Be specific, for example if you are not happy at work, think about what exactly is causing the problem, is it the hours, the commute, the type of work.

Step 2 - Stop and think- don't act without thinking things through

Take time to go through all the steps before you make a decision.

Step 3 - Seek information from reliable sources

Don't guess at the outcome or rely on the opinion of others.

Step 4 - Generate a number of solutions

The more solutions you come up with the more options you have! Even if they seem unrealistic it's worth considering all the options.

Step 5 - Think of the pros and cons of each solution (costs and gains)

In the [Problem of Immediate Gratification section](#) we introduced you to a table of costs and gains. This can be used when evaluating any decision. If the costs outweigh the gains then it can be really obvious that it is not a good decision. You also need to ask yourself if you are choosing a short term 'fix' (for example alcohol, drugs, sex), again re-visit the [Problem of Immediate Gratification section](#) if you need to understand why you might do this.

Step 6 - Choose the best solution

Hopefully this is clear having completed the costs and gains above, if not then speak to a trusted friend/family member to get a different view. If you can make a good case to them about the course of action you want to take then you are probably making a well-considered decision. It is unlikely they will support you using a short term 'fix' to feel better when it doesn't address the problem!

Step 7 - Plan how you will apply the solution

Benjamin Franklin said that "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Step 8 - Carry out the solution

Put your plan into action!

Step 9 - Evaluate how well it worked

If we don't evaluate what we did and how well it worked we can end up repeating the same mistakes or thinking we have solved a problem when we haven't. It might be that you haven't identified the right problem in the first place; for example if you didn't like your work colleagues you might have change where you work but the type of work is still the same so while you have different colleagues you actually realise it is the type of work you do that needs to change.

Exercise 1 - What approach do I use?

PROBLEM DIARY

Complete the problem diary over the next 7 days. Reflect on your initial responses to the problem and how you dealt with it.

Describe the problem- what happened?	My thoughts about the problem?	My feelings about the problem?	What did I do?	Which approach is this? Avoidant, Emotional, or Problem Solving?	What was the outcome? How did I feel afterwards?

Now ask yourself:

- Which approach did you use most – avoidant, emotional or problem solving?
- Which was most effective?

Sometimes things can get in the way of solving problems. We can think of these as obstacles that we need to overcome.

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Complete the problem diary over the next 7 days.

Describe the problem- what happened?	My thoughts about the problem?	My feelings about the problem?	What did I do?	Which approach is this? Avoidant, Emotional, or Problem Solving?	What was the outcome? How did I feel afterwards?

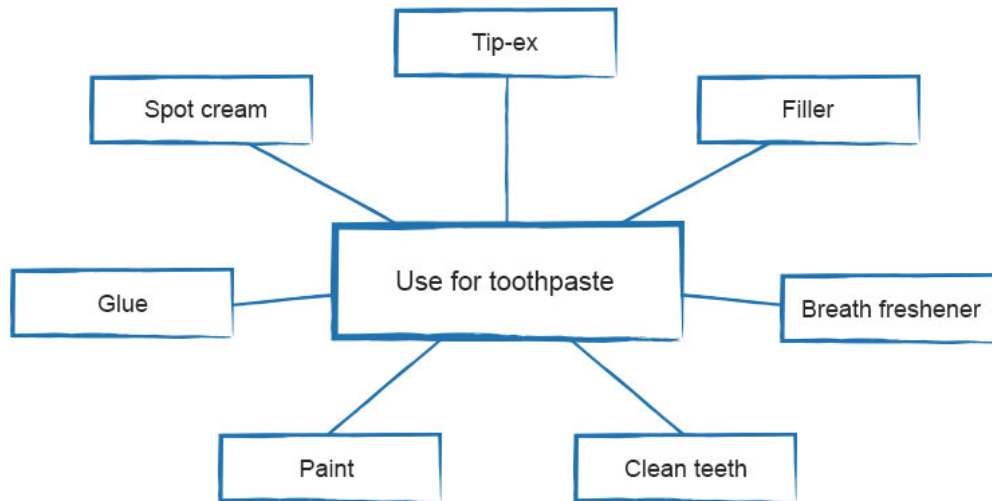
Reflect on your initial responses to the problem and how you dealt with it. Ask yourself:

- Which approach did you use most – avoidant, emotional or problem solving?
- Which was most effective?

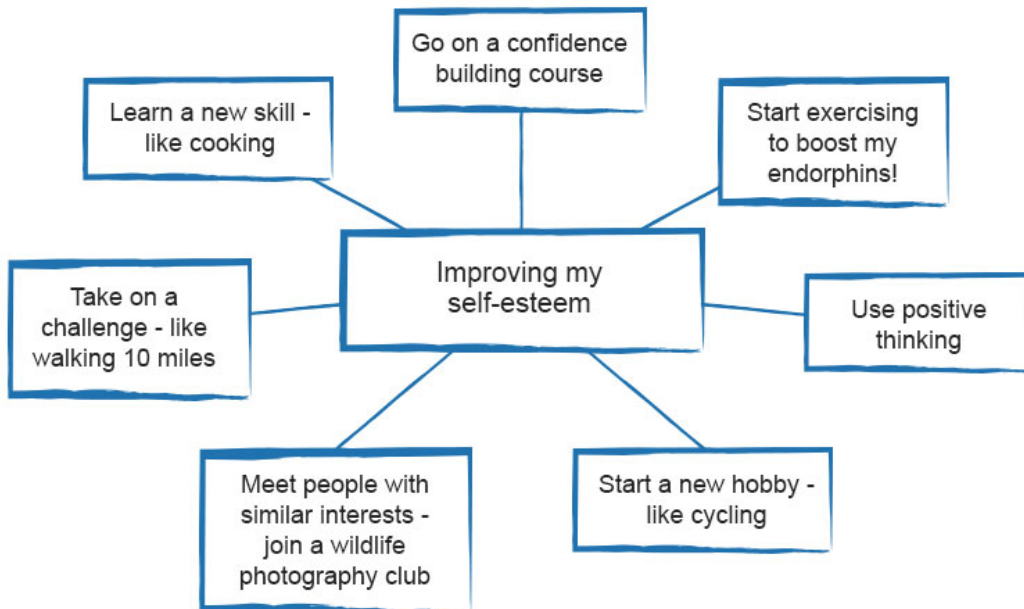
Module 14: Problem Solving

Overcoming obstacles

Sometimes overcoming obstacles involves thinking outside the box (or from a new perspective!). An easy way of practising this skill is to do a simple brainstorm, this is where you put down all your ideas relating to something without criticising or finding obstacles for them. For example:



Then you can look back and review those that might work and those that aren't very good - some of the ideas above may not be very practical but you may have also found a new and useful way of using toothpaste! The same exercise can be used when you are looking at bigger problems:



Again review and pick the best option for you, you may have to try a few before you find one that works but that's why it's great to have thought of so many ideas.

Now, try a brainstorm with one of your own obstacles and see how you get on – see if the approach helps you come up with new and different ways of dealing with your problem.

Ways to avoid acting on impulse

Good problem solving involves the ability to stop and think and consider consequences. Here is a list of approaches that can assist in this and reduce the chance of you acting impulsively.

- Don't allow other people to pressure you into making a decision
 - Don't panic when faced with a difficult decision- few good decisions are made in haste
 - Sleep on it **BUT** don't put off important issues for so long that you leave it to the last minute and then don't have time to consider them
 - Check the facts- seek other people's views but don't rely on opinions
 - Write things down, make lists, notes
 - Never sign anything without reading it and read everything at least twice
 - Don't be afraid to say if you are unsure, to clarify your understanding
 - Don't make decisions after taking drink or drugs
 - Count to ten before responding
 - Ask yourself how you will feel about the situation/decision next week or next year
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Module 14: Problem Solving

Reflection

Having completed this module, identify your current level of confidence in the following areas (1 = no confidence; 2 = some confidence; 3 = very confident).

<i>The advantages of the problem solving approach and how to apply it</i>	1	2	3
<i>Ways to avoid acting on impulse</i>	1	2	3

Now, consider the following questions:

- How do you intend to apply problem solving to your current life?
- How can problem solving help me to manage my emotions and behaviour?
- What is the link between avoidant and emotional responses to problems and the potential for offending behaviour?

If you want to discuss anything covered in this module, have struggled with working through the self-help material or just want the opportunity to work through the self-help site with a practitioner to guide you then please [call the Stop It Now! Helpline](#) for confidential support from our trained staff.

