



PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TRAINING FOR EVERYDAY LIVING



USER'S MANUAL



**PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TRAINING
FOR EVERYDAY LIVING**

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INTRODUCTION

By naturally using problem solving in everyday life, you "Stop and Think" before acting, make well-reasoned choices, and then evaluate the outcome of those decisions. As you become better able to handle conflicts, make informed decisions, effectively manage your time, and solve family and work problems using these techniques, you will become less stressed, more relaxed and calm, and feel more in control. You also will be able to spend more time and energy supporting your child during medical treatment. It's a win-win situation!

PROGRAM GOALS

Our program is designed to:

- Help you learn new ways to solve problems, resolve conflicts, and make effective decisions
- Teach you how to control the controllable
- Teach you the thinking/feeling connection
- Help you feel better during an extremely difficult time



The Problem-Solving Process Learning Optimism: Bright IDEAS

Learning Optimism means believing that having to face challenges or solve problems is something we all can and have done many times throughout life. Sometimes the life situations we are facing are major, sometimes they are minor, and sometimes they are minor but what is happening around us causes even small decisions to seem hard, perhaps overwhelming. Coping with serious illness is only one of many examples of a life situation in which conflicts, challenges, and decisions are common. Helping you overcome such challenges is the goal of the **Bright IDEAS** program. The program is designed to help you "**STOP and THINK**", and say to yourself, "I can do this!" when faced with what could be an overwhelming situation. **Learning Optimism (the "Bright" in Bright IDEAS)** is viewing tough situations as **challenges to overcome and opportunities to succeed**. Having a positive attitude will allow you to develop strategies that will help you stay **hopeful and optimistic**.

How much any of us believes we can solve a problem affects how much stress we feel. When we feel that problems have piled up, and are more than we can cope with, we often feel "stressed out," depressed, anxious, pessimistic, hopeless, and headachy. But knowing that you can cope with everyday challenges will put you on the right track toward staying positive during the ups and downs of medical treatment. Remember: you **can do** this!

Through the five-step problem-solving formula (**IDEAS: Identify the Problem, Define Your Options, Evaluate Your Options and Choose the Best, Act, and See If It Worked**) and the attached Worksheets, you will be able to get a handle on the specific challenges you have to deal with on a daily basis and find ways in which you can solve them.

Remember, when solving problems, there may be many possible solutions. You will need to find a solution that fits *you* – your personality, your resources, your support system from family and friends. In fact, as you learn **Bright IDEAS** be sure to share the five simple steps of problem-solving with your family and friends.



THE PROBLEM-SOLVING STEPS

We will go over the five major steps in the problem-solving process using our specific Worksheets to show you how to use them to solve different problems or challenges or difficulties meeting goals that arise during everyday life.

At this point, look at Worksheet 1. This worksheet and those that follow in this manual are expanded versions of each of the worksheets you will find in the **Br!ght IDEAS** booklet, which is pocket sized so you can keep it with you as a reminder of how to think about the challenges you will face. On Worksheet 1, make a list of some common conflicts, concerns, and challenges you are experiencing. Write down the ones that are your biggest concerns right now. Circle the one that you want to start working on first.



Worksheet 1 CHALLENGES/GOALS

Challenge/Goal 1:

Challenge/Goal 2:

Challenge/Goal 3:

Challenge/Goal 4:

Challenge/Goal 5:

Challenge/Goal 6:



Step 1: Identify the Challenge

Now that you have chosen the overall challenge or goal you want to start working on, the next step is to clearly **Identify** the details of the challenge. Put into words as carefully and precisely as you can, exactly what the specific problem is that you are facing. Be a detective – ask yourself the **what, where, when, who, why, and how** of the challenge. Be a scientist – list all the elements of the challenge.

Once you have clearly **Identified** what the issue is, you can then take the next step. Close your eyes and try to imagine yourself actually in the situation. Analyze your thoughts, feelings, and actions so you can answer the questions accurately and in detail. By writing down your answers, you will gain more insight into those parts of the problem that are most difficult for you to handle.

Now, write down your answers in Worksheet 2 to help you **Identify** all you need to know to move on.



Worksheet 2 - IDENTIFY

What is the specific situation?

Where does it occur?

When does it occur?

Who else is involved?

Why does it occur?

How do you respond and feel when it occurs?

How optimistic are you about resolving this situation? (Please circle a number)

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very
optimistic						optimistic

Why did you choose this challenge/goal?

Step 2: Define Your Options

Many people stop themselves from solving problems by saying they have no alternatives. First, fold over the right side of Worksheet 3 so that the column titled “Evaluate Possible Solutions” is covered.

Now develop a list of 3, 4, 5 or even more potential solutions to the challenge you have identified and then write them down in the left hand column. Be creative. **Brainstorm.** Stretch yourself. By coming up with a lot of different solutions, you increase the chance of finding your best solution. Remember, don’t look at the Evaluate Possible Solutions column yet; just generate as many possible solutions as you can.

The greatest barrier to developing new and effective solutions is **habit**. Don’t get stuck in the same old rut of trying to solve a problem in the same old way. It’s familiar, it’s easy to do, but it can also be ineffective. Remember: **There are alternatives** even to difficult challenges.

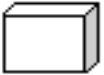


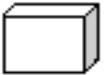

Step 3: Evaluate Your Options

It’s time to choose your best solution(s). Base your decision on your answers to such questions as: (1) Can I follow through on the decision to try this alternative? (2) What are the chances that it really will solve the problem? (3) What are the barriers to overcome? Now use the middle column of Worksheet 3 to write down some possible pros (benefits) and cons (risks) for each solution.

When deciding which solution to try first, cross out those alternatives that have too many negative consequences or that you know are impossible

Next, select 2 or 3 possible solutions, and rank them in the right hand column of Worksheet 3, with #1 being what you think is your best choice. After you have ranked your top choices and selected #1 to act on, be prepared to carry out choice #2, or even #3 if #1 and #2 don’t work as well as you hoped. You can also combine elements of two or more solutions when you actually write out your Action Plan (Worksheet 4).



Worksheet 3		
DEFINE & EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS		
Define Possible Solutions	Evaluate Possible Solutions	Choose Best (Rank Choices) #1, #2, #3
Solution #1:	Pros: Cons:	
Solution #2:	Pros: Cons:	
Solution #3:	Pros: Cons:	
Solution #4:	Pros: Cons:	
Solution #5:	Pros: Cons:	

Use the back of this page for more solutions!



Step 4: Act Out Your Choice

After you have made your choices, mentally create a detailed Action Plan on specifically how you are going to implement your solution. Next, in your imagination, carry out the detailed Action Plan you have created. This is called a mental rehearsal. Think about ways to make the plan easier for you to carry out and change your plan if necessary. Now, write down your Action Plan on Worksheet 4. Next is the most crucial step: Do it, for real.

Step 5: See If It Worked

See if it worked. Decide if your plan gives you a satisfactory result. If you are not satisfied with the result, then troubleshoot the reasons why. You may have to modify your plan or even try out your next choice. If solution #2 is not satisfactory either, try solution #3 or go back to earlier problem-solving steps and make certain that you defined the problem correctly, and then try brainstorming again.

Use the bottom of Worksheet 4 to write out exactly what you did do (because it may be different from what you planned) and **assess** the results. This step tells you where your plan worked or didn't work. It's also important to remember that factors other than what you are doing may be having an impact on the results of your Action Plan. You may or may not have anticipated these factors, so be prepared next time to problem solve on the spot if necessary.



Worksheet 4

ACT & SEE IF IT WORKED

Action Plan:

- What will you do?
- How will you do it?
- When will you do it?
- Who else is involved?

See if it worked:

Action Actually Tried:

How satisfied are you with the result? (Please circle a number)

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

Alternative solution if you're not satisfied with the result:



REMEMBER

*Stop and think **before** acting on your first impulse!*



Quick Check “Techniques”

When you feel totally stifled by your efforts to solve your problems, try the following "quick check" techniques, which help put your immediate challenges in perspective:

- "Stop and Think"
- Take a deep breath and calm down
- Say to yourself, “I can handle this”
- What is the problem?
- What are some solutions?
- What's my first choice?
- Okay, let's try it out
- How am I doing?
- Is this okay, or do I need to try my next choice?
- All right, this is going okay
- Nice job! You handled this well. You can do this!

If the desired result is not achieved after troubleshooting through all the problem-solving steps, then decide whether you need **additional information** or **assistance from a knowledgeable source** such as a friend or professional. When a problem situation appears unsolvable, try to identify which **parts** of the situation *may be solvable*. Starting with one of those parts might make solving the whole problem possible.

Automatic Thoughts and Feelings “What You Think Is How You’ll Feel”

Automatic thoughts are thoughts that pop into our heads automatically throughout the day. Being aware of these automatic thoughts will help you become a better problem solver.

To help identify your automatic thoughts, **Stop and Think** the next time you have a strong feeling such as depression, anxiety, anger, or other reaction to a problem, conflict, or decision. Ask yourself, “What am I thinking?” Use Worksheet E to help you identify the Thinking/Feeling Connection.

Remember: Automatic thoughts are what go through your mind just before you feel a certain way. Your goal is to turn negative automatic thoughts into positive automatic thoughts. As you look at your list of negative automatic thoughts, imagine what you would say to yourself instead because you are confident that you can successfully solve your problems.



THE THINKING/FEELING CONNECTION

*How you **think** about something affects how you **feel***



WORKSHEET E

IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Conflict, or Decision	Your Automatic Thoughts	Your Feelings



LEARNING TO BE OPTIMISTIC

- Look for the positive
- Hope for the best
- Believe you can overcome this difficult challenge
- Be upbeat despite how hard this is, and boost your mood
- Being optimistic is contagious - it will boost the mood of people around you, too!

LEARNING SKILLED PERSISTENCE

- Be persistent! Solving problems takes hanging in there
- But, being persistent is only the half of the solution. You also need to have the **Br!ght IDEAS** skills you just learned to successfully solve problems, meet challenges, and make good decisions

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