

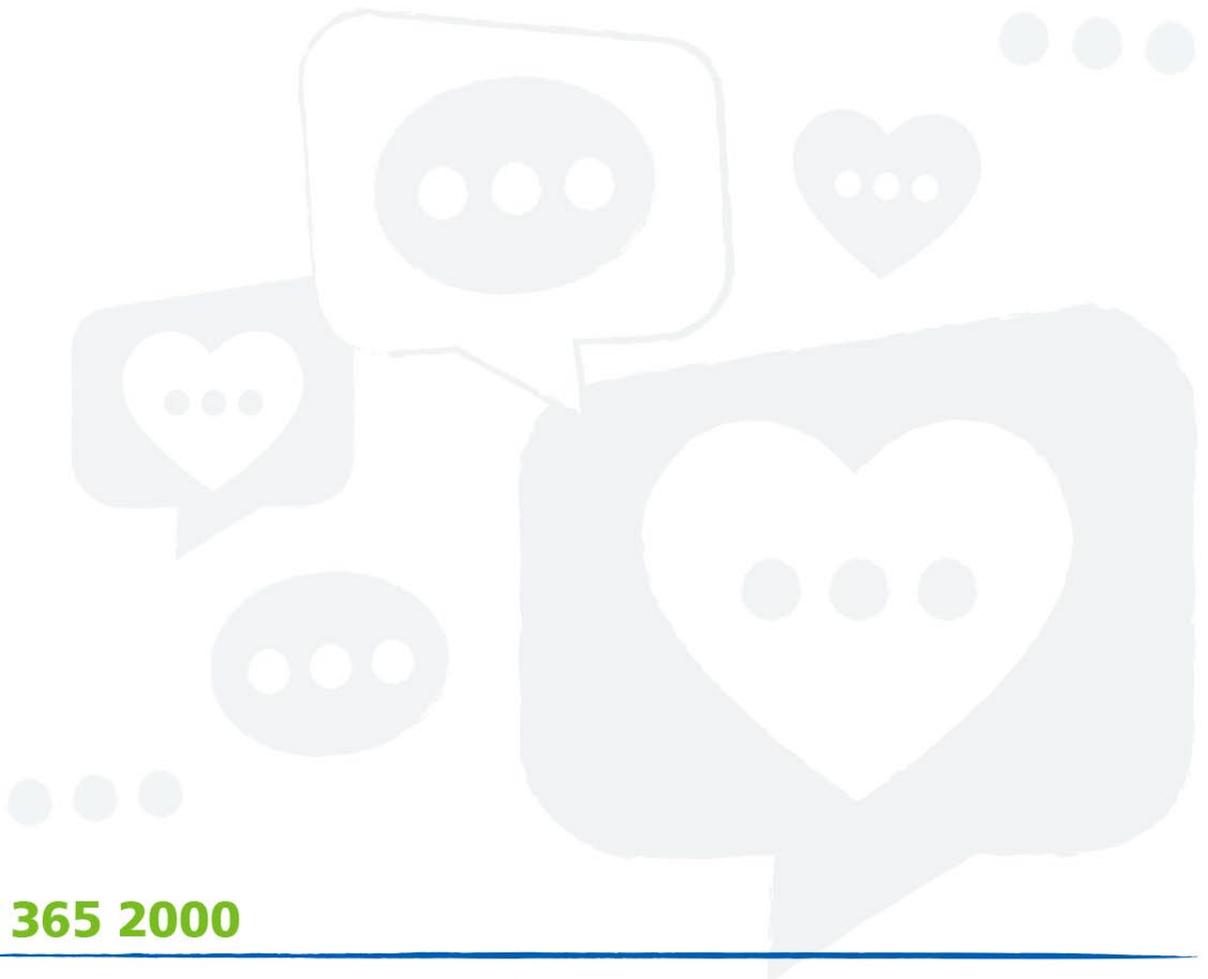


Talking Therapies  
**Workbook...**

**Workbook 8**

# Problem solving

A self-help guide



 **0300 365 2000**

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As you work through the booklet, feel free to make notes on the pages and use the “Notes” page near the back.

# What can problem solving do for me?

## Problem solving

**Problems and obstacles appear constantly in our lives and we all have different problem solving abilities.**

Some people are better at solving problems in certain areas of their lives than others. Some problems or obstacles that come up can be more difficult to solve than others. Meanwhile, others may leave us feeling overwhelmed and helpless.

**The ability to problem solve effectively has the following benefits:**

- Improves **how we manage and control our feelings**
- Enhances **ability to cope** with a variety of stressful situations
- Helps **protect against common emotional problems** such as stress, worry, depression and anxiety
- Can **help us to feel more optimistic** and hopeful
- Develops **flexibility in the way we think** about problems and our ability to implement solutions.

## Tabletop metaphor

**Think of a table and imagine the tabletop is you and your existing coping strategies and the table legs are the aspects in your life that you have to support you (e.g. supportive boss, family you can talk to).**

If the tabletop or legs are weak then the table will not be able to support much weight and will break if you put too much pressure on it (stressors). If you can strengthen the tabletop or legs then it will be able to support more weight.

By using effective problem solving, we are strengthening our coping style and ability. This means we will be able to cope when stress is added.

### Reflect

Consider what problem(s) you may be experiencing currently in your life that you may be able to resolve through problem solving.



# When could I use problem solving?

## Finding solutions

**Problem solving can be used any time you have a problem or difficulty and need to come up with a solution.**

It could be used to tackle anything from a life changing decision like which house to buy or which job to take, to what you should do at the weekend.

Low mood, anxiety and stress all have an impact on our ability to problem solve and sometimes the way we are feeling and our emotions make it difficult to make decisions. The problem solving technique described in this workbook provides a useful tool which should help us to work through a problem and come up with a solution objectively.

## Achieving goals

**Problem solving can also help you to achieve goals you set yourself as you can use the techniques to overcome obstacles that may get in your way.**

The steps in this workbook should allow you to work through different options to help you to come to the best possible solution. By committing to a decision, worry and stress should reduce and we should feel more hopeful. We want to be able to think creatively of a variety of ideas, not just a few. For this we use brainstorming which helps to increase our flexibility and creativity. It also helps us concentrate energy on solving the task (“How can I go forward?”) rather than negative emotions and thoughts (“Why does everything go wrong?”).

### Reflect

Consider how you have currently been managing your problems.



# Problem solving

## The six steps

The next few pages of this workbook will guide you through the six steps of problem solving.

**Step 1** – Write down the problem

**Step 2** – Write down as many solutions as you can think of

**Step 3** – Decide which solution is most effective

**Step 4** – Choose a solution

**Step 5** – Create an action plan

**Step 6** – Evaluate



# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 1: Write down the problem

The problem is...

Can this problem be changed? Based on your answer, what is your major goal? Remember to be realistic.

What are some barriers to this goal? (obstacles, conflicting goals, reduced resources, unknown/unfamiliar, complexity, emotional difficulties)



- Be specific, describe who, what, when, where, how and why. The more specific you are about what the problem is, the more likely it is that you will find a workable solution. For example, rather than writing 'financial problems' you might put 'I have £3000 of credit card debts'.
- Use clear language and only facts, not assumptions.
- If the problem is large, break it down into smaller ones and develop a series of "mini goals".

# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 2: Write out as many solutions as you can think of

### Quantity principle – quantity leads to quality

It is more important to get many solutions as this increases your chances of eventually identifying high-quality alternatives. If you wanted to buy a shirt in a specific size and style, then a large shop with more variety is more likely to have the one that suits your preferences. Remember that it's important to write down your list of ideas.

### Deferment principle – do not judge the solutions

Record every idea that comes to mind to increase the number of ideas. If you reject ideas it will limit your creative thinking. If an idea seems silly or unrealistic it can spark another possible idea. Alternatively, two ideas that initially seemed weak could merge to generate a reasonable idea. The only rule is that the ideas should be relevant to the problem. If you notice yourself judging the ideas tell yourself to “stop” and remind yourself that it will cut down creativity.

### Think of strategies and tactics – greater variety for better quality ideas

- **Strategies** – general courses of action you can take
- **Tactics** – specific steps to put a strategy into action

Look over your list, identify the strategies and group the alternative solutions into common themes. If any strategies have few specific tactics, try to generate more. Try to think of more strategies and more new tactics for those strategies.



Even the most ridiculous solutions should be considered. Even if you know you won't choose this option, it helps to get you thinking about your problem creatively.



## Solutions:



**If you get stuck and cannot think of many alternatives try the following to help stimulate creativity:**

- **What would someone else do?** This could be anyone. It could be someone you admire like the Dalai Lama, a character from a television programme, a soldier, a relative or a sports hero, from Simon Cowell to Kermit the Frog: What advice would they give you?
- Use **visualisation**, imagine the problem and see yourself attempting to cope with it and achieving your aim. Think about different ways to reach that aim. When using visualisation, notice the situation and what you are feeling, thinking and doing. Visualisation is a useful technique that can be used to predict obstacles, find solutions and gain hope.
- **Combine** ideas or **modify** them to improve ideas or come up with new ones.
- **Take a break** if you experience a block, go away from the task and come back a couple of hours later.

# Problem solving – the six steps

## Step 3: Decide which solution is most effective

Go back to the solutions list and cross out any that are “obviously” ineffective. Re-write the “top” 3-5 below and note several positive and negative consequences (personal, social, short-term, long-term) for each. Then rate the solution using a scale of 1 (ineffective) to 10 (very effective). As you rate these ideas, can you think of any other alternatives?

Solution	Advantages	Disadvantages	Rating 1-10

# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 4: Choose a solution

Identify the solutions you rated highly (that is those greater than six). If none were rated this high, try to generate a few more and continue the process.

If there are a few ideas rated at least a six ask yourself if you think you can actually carry them out. If “yes”, include these ideas as part of your overall action plan. If not, identify other potentially effective solutions and continue this process.

### Chosen solution



# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 5: Action plan

**What will you do?**

**How will you do it?**

**Do you need anyone else to be involved? Consider how you will arrange this (i.e. what their commitments / schedule is like)**

**When will you carry out your plan?**

# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 5: Action plan continued...

### Any concerns about the plan

### Things to consider

Are there any changes you would like to make to this action plan?

Also note any concerns you might have about carrying it out optimally – Do you think implementing your plan might be a problem in itself? If so, problem solve it!

### Make sure that your solution is SMART:

- **S**pecific – what, when, where, with who?
- **M**easurable – how will you know you have completed this activity?
- **A**chievable – do you have everything you need to achieve this?
- **R**ealistic – is it realistic?
- **T**ime-focused – what time, what day, for how long?

# Problem solving - the six steps

## Step 6: Evaluate

What happened after you carried out your action plan? (Can include various personal, social, short-term, and long-term consequences that occurred if appropriate)

How would you rate your overall satisfaction? Consider effects on others as well as yourself

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not satisfied  
at all

Very  
satisfied

### Reflect

Was the problem resolved to your satisfaction?

**If YES:** reward yourself!

**...and remember to practice, practice, practice!**

**If NO:** go back through the steps and decide what needs to be changed and why the previous solution did not work.

**...did you identify obstacles, generate ideas, make the goal realistic, predict consequences, carry out the plan?**



# Further resources



## Workbooks

**Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI)** – <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties.

**Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS** – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression.

## Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

**WRAP** – Wellness recovery action app

**Mood Tools** – Depression aid

**Fear Tools** – Anxiety kit

**Insight Timer** – Meditation app

## Websites

**Mind** – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

**Mental Health Foundation** – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

**NHS** – <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

# Useful contacts...



## Talking Therapies:

**0300 365 2000**

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday  
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

[talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk)

## Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

**0800 129 9999**

(24 hours, specialist service for  
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

**116 123**

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

**111**

(24 hours, physical and mental  
health concerns)

**In an emergency always call 999**

