



PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS

Parent's Manual



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!

The Problem-Solving Process

Learning Optimism: *Bright IDEAS*

Learning Optimism means believing that having to face problems during your child's medical treatment is normal, and that you can solve these problems after learning these techniques. Conflicts, problems, and decisions are a daily part of medical treatment; they are common to all families going through this experience. Overcoming these problems is what we will help you learn to do. Whenever you are feeling overwhelmed by all the problems you are facing, remember to **"STOP and THINK"**, and say to yourself, "I can do this!" **Learning Optimism** is the first thing you need to do in order to begin to effectively, solve your problems.

To solve problems, you need to see the problems you are facing as **challenges to overcome and opportunities to succeed**. Having a positive attitude will allow you to develop strategies that will help you and your child 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 problems will put you on the right track toward helping your child stay 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 problems 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 and your family. In fact, be sure to share the problem-solving steps with your family.

Disagreements, misunderstandings, and frustrations are a normal part of a family living through cancer treatment. The key is knowing how to resolve these disagreements and conflicts. That is what this program will help you do. You will learn new ways of dealing with everyday problems that will help you cope better with the major decisions about your child's and family's health that really need your full attention.

The Problem-Solving Steps

We will go over the five major steps in the problem-solving process briefly first, and then show you how to use them to solve different problems during your child's illness and medical treatment.

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 **Bright IDEAS** booklet. As you review Worksheet 1, take a few minutes to make a list of some common conflicts, concerns, and problems you have with your child's illness and medical treatment. Write down the ones that are your biggest concerns right now. Circle the one that you want to start working on first.



Worksheet 1
PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED

Description of Problem

Problem #1

Problem #2

Problem #3

Problem #4

Problem #5



Step 1: **Identify** the Problem

Now that you have chosen the overall problem you want to start working on, the next step is to clearly **Identify** the details of the problem. 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 problem. Be a scientist—list all the elements of the problem.

Once you have clearly **Identified** what the problem 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.








Step 2: **Define** Your Options

Many people stop themselves from solving problems by saying they have no alternatives. Develop a list of the three or four potential solutions to the problem you have identified and then write them down on Worksheet 3. Be creative. **Brainstorm**. Stretch yourself. Remember: New ways of solving old problems are always worth thinking about.

Look at each alternative solution. Write down as many alternative solutions as you can and keep them for future reference just in case your first choice doesn't give you the result you want. **By coming up with a lot of different solutions, you increase the chance of finding your best solution.** Don't look at the Evaluate Potential Barriers column yet, just generate as many possible solutions as you can. We will help you get started by suggesting some alternative solutions to the problems you will most likely encounter based on the experiences of other parents whose children have received medical treatment for childhood cancer. In time, you will meet other parents like yourself and learn other possible solutions from them. You and your family will also learn how to work together to find even more solutions.

The greatest barrier to developing new and effective alternative solutions is **habit**. It is easy to 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** to even the most difficult problems.

Worksheet 3		
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND POTENTIAL BARRIERS		
Define Possible Solutions	Evaluate Potential Barriers	Choose Best (Rank Choices) #1, #2, #3
Solution #1:	Likelihood of Achieving: Time/Effort Commitment: Short-/Long-term Costs: Short-/Long-term Benefits:	
Solution #2:	Likelihood of Achieving: Time/Effort Commitment: Short-/Long-term Costs: Short-/Long-term Benefits:	
Solution #3:	Likelihood of Achieving: Time/Effort Commitment: Short-/Long-term Costs: Short-/Long-term Benefits:	
Solution #4:	Likelihood of Achieving: Time/Effort Commitment: Short-/Long-term Costs: Short-/Long-term Benefits:	
Solution #5:	Likelihood of Achieving: Time/Effort Commitment: Short-/Long-term Costs: Short-/Long-term Benefits:	



Step 3: **E**valuate Your Options

It's time to choose your best solution. Base your decision on your answers to such questions as: (1) Can I really follow through on the decision to try this alternative? (2) What are the chances that it really will solve the problem? (3) Are there any insurmountable barriers to overcome? Remember to use the middle column of Worksheet 3 to list some possible barriers for each potential solution.

When deciding which solution you will try first, look at each choice on your list. Screen each one based on the following:

1. Eliminate right away any alternatives that have too many risks or negative consequences.
2. Select two or three possible solutions, and then rank them on Worksheet 3, with number one being your best choice. As you are deciding, consider the amount of time and effort that you will need to carry out a particular solution. 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 out as well as you hoped.

Step 4: **A**ct Out Your Choice

After you have made your first choice, mentally create a detailed action plan on specifically how you are going to implement your choice. Write down your action plan on Worksheet 4. Then, try it out. Actually carry out the detailed action plan you have created and mentally rehearsed.



Step 5: **See** If It Worked

See if it worked. Decide if your plan gives you a satisfactory result. If you are not completely 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 Worksheet 4 to write out and **assess** the results. This step tells you where you have gone right or wrong. 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 to problem solve on the spot if necessary.



Worksheet 4 ACTION AND RESULTS CHART

Action Plan:

Action Tried:

See if it worked:

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

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

Alternative solution chosen, if not satisfied with the result:



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

1. "Stop and Think."
2. Take a deep breath and calm down.
3. Say to yourself, I can handle this.
4. What is the problem?
5. What are some solutions?
6. What's my first choice?
7. Okay, let's try it out.
8. How am I doing?
9. Is this okay, or do I need to try my next choice?
10. All right, this is going okay.
11. 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.

We will take you step-by-step through the strategies for solving each of the common problem situations often faced by families during the medical treatment for childhood cancer



Automatic Thoughts and Feelings or “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 5 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 meet the challenges of your child’s illness and treatment successfully.



Worksheet 5
IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Conflict or Decision	Your Feelings	Your Automatic Thoughts



The Bright IDEAS System for Problem Solving



Identify the problem
Define your options
Evaluate your options
Act
See if it worked



Parent Problem Solving Program Goals

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



Learning to be Optimistic

- Look for the positive.
- Hope for the best.
- Believe you can overcome this difficult challenge.
- Be upbeat in spite of how hard this is, and boost your mood.
- Being optimistic is contagious—it will boost your child's mood too!



Learn Skilled Persistence

- Be persistent! Solving problems takes hanging in there.
- Learn new skills if necessary. It's not enough to be persistent. You also need to have the skills to solve a problem.



REMEMBER

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



The Thinking/Feeling Connection



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