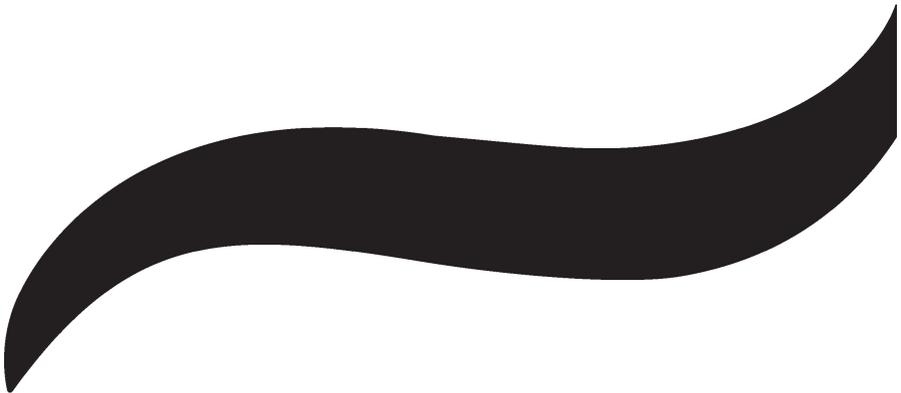


# How to solve problems:

A simple DIY technique  
Information for clients



# PROBLEM SOLVING

We all have problems in our day-to-day lives. At times these can cause anxiety, stress and distress. So what can be done? There is a way to help you solve your problems successfully. This is quite simply called ‘problem solving’.

There are five steps to problem solving.

## STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR PROBLEMS

Before you can solve a problem, you have to know what it is. What are the problems facing you at the moment? Some of them are probably quite large ‘I have an eviction notice that comes up next week’ while others are smaller ‘I’m going to need lettuce if I want to make that salad tonight’. Others are somewhere in between ‘There’s a pile of mail and paperwork on my desk that I haven’t looked at in over a month’.

Make a list of your problems on the next page. Here are some tips:

- ❖ Don’t spend too much time thinking about each problem. Just list each one and **move on**
- ❖ You don’t need to describe the problem completely
- ❖ Don’t worry whether or not you think the problems can be solved
- ❖ Remember that you don’t have to come up with the solution, just the problem
- ❖ You don’t have to finish your list in one sitting
- ❖ You don’t have to fill all the spaces

Sometimes writing down all our problems can be quite scary. Try not to let the list you make worry you. Remind yourself that this is the **first** step towards solving your problems. Sometimes people find that when they start writing out their problem list it is not as long as they thought it would be.

## LIST OF PROBLEMS

- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....

### STEP 2: PICK A PROBLEM

Now select **one** problem from the list you have made. It should be a problem that you really want to solve, and one that you can see may be possible to solve. Later on you can get to the ones that may seem more difficult. Which problem would you like to work on first?

For example, a chosen problem could be: “I have friends coming for dinner and I have no food”. This is a bit vague; it is helpful to state your problem as clearly as possible. This problem could be described more accurately as “I have friends coming for dinner and only have pasta and tinned fruit in the cupboard”. Try writing the problem you have chosen as clearly as possible in the box below.

My problem is:

**Now answer the following questions:**

Have you solved similar problems in the past? If so, how did you do it? What strengths or skills did you use?

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.....

Are there any people who may be able to support you in your efforts to solve this problem? Ideally, these should not be people who will solve the problem for you, but people who can help you solve it yourself. Who are they?

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.....

Next, think of the things you could do that might help.

- ❖ Try using brainstorming: write down as many actions as you can think of
- ❖ Don't worry whether the actions will solve the problem completely
- ❖ Don't worry if some of them seem silly. You are trying to get as many possible actions as you can. Then you will look at each one

List of possible actions:

- ❖ Get a takeaway
- ❖ Take my friends out to dinner
- ❖ Go to the shops now and serve them dinner a bit later
- ❖ Ask them to bring something for dinner
- ❖ Phone them and rearrange
- ❖ Say the dog ate the dinner
- ❖ Don't answer the door when they come and pretend I have forgotten altogether

## Possible actions to help solve your problem

- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....
- ❖ .....

## STEP 3: CHOOSE ONE OF YOUR SOLUTIONS

Now choose what seems to be the best action. There are no fixed rules for how to make this choice. The only rule is that you must choose one of the actions so that you can begin. Think about the good points and bad points for each, and then pick one. It should be an action that takes you at least part way towards solving your problem. Remember, if you try one action and find that it doesn't work, you can try another.

Which action do you choose?

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## STEP 4: MAKE AN ACTION PLAN

There aren't very many problems that you will solve completely with just one action. There might be many actions that will take you part of the way towards a solution. If you have a financial problem, for example, then your first action could be to gather the papers together so that you can look at them. Just gathering the paper won't solve the problem, but it will take you closer to a solution than you were before. The important thing is to get started on a solution.

Your plan of action should follow four rules that can be abbreviated as **M.A.S.T.** In other words:

- ❖ **Manageable.** Even if you don't feel any better next week than you did last week (even if you feel a little worse), you could carry out your plan anyway. It's better to accomplish a goal that is small than to fail a big one. Here's a bad example: *for my first time out, run a marathon*. A better example: *walk for ten minutes*.
- ❖ **Action-oriented.** Make a plan for what you **will do**, not how you will think or feel while you are doing it. You have some control over what you do, but you have less control over your emotions and thoughts. A bad example: *spend a pleasant hour with my children*. A better example: *spend one hour with my children*.
- ❖ **Specific.** What you need to do should be very clear. A bad example: *spend time with a friend*. A better example: *spend one hour with my friend Liz*.
- ❖ **Time-limited.** Your plan should take only a short time to carry out. Don't plan to change your lifestyle forever. A bad example: *keep finances in order for the rest of my life*. A better example: *spend 20 minutes looking for income tax receipts*.

What is the plan, **exactly?**

Action	By When

Carry out your plan by the time you set above. When you have carried out your plan, or when the deadline has passed go to Step five.

## STEP 5: THINK ABOUT HOW IT WENT, THEN MOVE ON

Now, think about how the plan worked out (even if the problem still hasn't been solved). What happened? What went well? What went badly?

.....  
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.....

Use this experience to plan your next step. You have three main options:

- ❖ **Keep going.** Example: spend another *20 minutes finding the papers*
- ❖ **Revise your goal and try again.** Example: *cleaning the garage for three hours was too difficult, so plan to work on it for just one hour instead*
- ❖ **Take a new approach.** Perhaps your first effort has allowed you to find another way of handling the problem. Example: *talking face to face with Aunt Sarah didn't work, so write her a letter instead*

Based on your experience, what is the next step?

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.....  
.....  
.....

Keep working through the five steps. Keep a record of your efforts. Remind yourself of the progress you make.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

### Useful Contacts

For information on mental services, supports, opportunities or self-help information call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133

For further information on mental health and well-being, visit Lanarkshire's Elament website: [www.elament.org.uk](http://www.elament.org.uk)

Remember, should your problems persist or you feel you need help urgently please contact your GP. The following organisations can also prove useful in and out of hours.

- ❖ **Breathing Space** - 0800 83 85 87  
(Mon - Thu, 6pm - 2am; Fri 6pm - Mon 6am)  
[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)
- ❖ **Samaritans** - 116 123 (24hrs) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- ❖ **NHS24** - 111 (Out of hours) [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)
- ❖ **Healthy Working Lives** - 08452 300 323 (Local),  
0800 019 2211 (National),  
[www.healthyworkinglives.com](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com)
- ❖ **Childline** - 0800 11 11 (24hrs) [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- ❖ **NHS Inform** - 0800 22 44 88 [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ **Parentline Scotland** - 0808 800 22 22  
[www.children1st.org.uk/parentline](http://www.children1st.org.uk/parentline)
- ❖ **National Debt Line Scotland** - 0808 808 4000  
[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland)
- ❖ **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** - 0800 027 1234

## WHAT IS WELL CONNECTED?

Well Connected is a new programme in Lanarkshire, sometimes referred to as social prescribing or community referral. It makes it easier for us and people we know to take part in and benefit from activities and services that we know improve our well-being which means how we feel about ourselves and our lives. There are a number of Well Connected areas available to us and we can benefit from more than one:

- ❖ Physical activity and leisure opportunities
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ Employment
- ❖ Arts and culture
- ❖ Benefits, welfare and debt advice
- ❖ Learning opportunities
- ❖ Stress Control Classes in communities
- ❖ Health Walks
- ❖ Mindfulness Classes.

For information on any of the above call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133
- ❖ Visit: [www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx](http://www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx)

## HEALTHY READING

All public libraries have a healthy reading section making it easier to access mental health and well-being leaflets, books, CDs, DVDs and web-based support. All libraries across Lanarkshire have resources to help us get the most from life such as living life to the full, sleeping better and becoming more confident or overcoming and coping with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, dementia and panic. There are also resources for all ages including supporting young people, adults and older people as well as items on positive parenting. Simply pop into your local library.

## GUIDED SUPPORT:

### Stress Control Classes

Stress Control classes will help develop skills and techniques to manage common issues caused by modern day living such as stress, anxiety or low confidence.

The classes are delivered in local community facilities and consist of six sessions lasting 90 minutes each. We will not need to speak about our issues during the class. Just sit back and listen about helpful stress control techniques. Feel free to bring someone along with you for support. To find your nearest class and book a place, call **0300 303 0447**.

### Living Life to the Full - Online Course

Living Life to The Full is a free web-based life skills course that aims to help us tackle and respond to issues/demands which we all meet in our everyday lives. It will explore issues such as understanding why we feel the way we do, problem solving, noticing and challenging unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and anxiety control. You can register for the course at **[www.llttf.com](http://www.llttf.com)** and complete as many or as few modules as you wish.

If you feel you need additional help, the Living Life to The Full course is also available with support from self help coaches (via Action on Depression Scotland). To find out more visit **[www.aod.llttfionline.co.uk](http://www.aod.llttfionline.co.uk)**

### Living Life: Guided Self Help and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - Telephone Support

Living Life is a free telephone support service for people suffering from low mood, mild to moderate depression, symptoms of anxiety or a combination of both. Trained Self-help coaches and therapists will guide us through a range of workbooks over a series of telephone sessions. For more information or to make a telephone appointment, call **0800 328 9655** (Mon–Fri 1–9pm).

**NHS Lanarkshire** - for local services and the latest health news visit [www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk](http://www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk)  
NHS Lanarkshire General  
Enquiry Line: 0300 3030 243

**NHS inform** - The national health information service for Scotland.  
[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)  
Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the NHS Lanarkshire General Enquiry Line on 0300 3030 243 or e-mail [info2@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:info2@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)



[www.patientopinion.org.uk](http://www.patientopinion.org.uk)

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