

Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB4



Problem-Solving Strategies

What are problem-solving strategies?

Problem-solving strategies are ways that people figure out how to solve problems as they occur. Many caregivers find it helpful to use a problem-solving process called COPE.

C is for Creativity – think of lots of ways to solve problems. Brainstorm for ideas.

O is for Optimism – Have a positive attitude toward solving problems, carrying out the problem-solving steps, and involving others. Think, “I can do this!”

P is for Planning – plan to address problems as they arise. Don’t wait for them to get worse.

E is for Expert information – Ask the doctor or other professionals (nurse, physical, speech, or occupational therapist, social worker, or others) for advice in solving problems. Look for written information, books, websites, or organizations like the American Stroke Association (1-888-4-STROKE or 1-888-478-7653, www.strokeassociation.org) for information.

With COPE in mind, try these steps when you have a problem: Use the worksheet at the end of this tip sheet.

1. Think about the problem

- a. **Identify and define the problem.** You are probably reading this tip sheet because of a problem that has not been addressed completely by one of the other tip sheets. This is a skill that you need help with or more information about.

What was the checklist item for the skill that you are working on?

CNCC Item # _____

- b. **The more specific you can describe your problem, the better.** Write the problem down and give an example of when the problem occurred. Can you be more specific about the problem or the skill that you need help with?
 - c. **Describe how the problem makes you feel.** Write a sentence like, “When _____ (list problem) happens, I feel _____ (list emotion or feeling).” Feelings are important and should be recognized. List them. Then, put the list aside so you can think clearly about the problem without the emotions for a moment. Negative emotions can keep you from solving problems.
 - d. **List possible causes of the problem.** What do you think triggers the problem? What happens before the problem? What do you think causes the problem? Is the problem beyond your control? Do you need to clarify the problem? This part is important to help you think of solutions.
2. **Write down all possible solutions for the problem.** Go over your list of causes of the problem to come up with possible solutions. This is like “brainstorming.” Write down all of your ideas, even if they seem like they might not work. Go over your list of causes again to see if you can think of more solutions. Be creative.
3. **Select the best solution on the list. Try it out.** Looking at your solution list, put them in order from best to worst. Looking at the best solutions, list the pros and cons of each. Think about the following:
- a. How likely is it the solution will work?
 - b. How will the solution make me feel?
 - c. How much time and effort will it take?
 - d. How will the solution affect the survivor, family, friends, or others?

Once you have picked the best solution, think about:

What activities will be part of the solution?

Who will carry out the activities?

When or how often will the activities be carried out?

Once you have thought through all of this, ask yourself, is this still the best solution? If so, then try it out! If not, pick another solution. Think about it, then try it out.

4. Evaluate the solution. Did it work? Think about the following:

- a. How did the solution work?
- b. How did the solution make you feel?
- c. How much time and effort did it take?
- d. How did it affect others?



If the plan worked, congratulations! Move on to your next problem or skill. If it did not, you may need to revisit the steps again or to try to pick another solution. Don't be afraid to ask for help from friends, family, doctors, or other professionals in solving your problems. No one can solve all of their own problems alone.

How can I as a caregiver use problem-solving strategies?

Keep the list of steps in a notebook with some extra paper. Sit down to think and work through the steps each time you have a problem. After a while, you will no longer need the list of steps. You will begin to use the process by memory. You might also be able to teach the survivor how to use problem-solving strategies. This may help them to become more independent.

When do I need to contact a professional?

Anytime you have a question, or you cannot solve a problem that is troubling. You may need information about possible solutions that a professional can provide.

Where can I find more information about problem-solving strategies? Check with a reference person at your local library for books or materials on problem-solving.

Consult a psychologist or counselor for problem-solving strategies.

Step 3. Select the best solution on the list. Try it out.		
Write realistic solutions in order from best to worst.	What is your best solution? How likely will the solution work? How will the solution make me feel? How much time and effort will it take? How will the solution affect the survivor? How will the solution affect others?	Is this the best solution? What activities will be part of the solution? Who will carry out the activities? When or how often will the activities be carried out? Try the solution out!
Step 4. Evaluate the solution. Did it work?		
How did the solution work? How did the solution make you feel? How much time and effort did it take? How did it affect the survivor? How did it affect others? If the plan worked, use it whenever the problem occurs. If not, revisit your worksheet for more possible solutions. Get expert information! Ask friends, family, doctors, or other professionals for help.		

Step 3. Select the best solution on the list. Try it out.		
Write realistic solutions in order from best to worst.	What is your best solution? How likely will the solution work? How will the solution make me feel? How much time and effort will it take? How will the solution affect the survivor? How will the solution affect others?	Is this the best solution? What activities will be part of the solution? Who will carry out the activities? When or how often will the activities be carried out? Try the solution out!
Step 4. Evaluate the solution. Did it work?		
How did the solution work? How did the solution make you feel? How much time and effort did it take? How did it affect the survivor? How did it affect others? If the plan worked, use it whenever the problem occurs. If not, revisit your worksheet for more possible solutions. Get expert information! Ask friends, family, doctors, or other professionals for help.		