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# Fact sheet: Tips for problem solving

How to make a plan and act on it

## Why solve problems?

Problem solving helps break complex problems into smaller, manageable steps. This makes it easier to decide how to create a plan of action and what to do first.

This process can be stressful. If that happens to you, bring your mind to the present using the S.T.O.P. strategy (<https://canemerg-urgencecan.com/practice-s-t-o-p/>):

- S — Stop and take a moment to pause.
- T — Take a few deep breaths (<https://canemerg-urgencecan.com/boxed-breathing/>) or calm yourself with a grounding exercise (<https://canemerg-urgencecan.com/grounding-stones/>).
- O — Observe what's happening around and inside of you.
- P — Proceed mindfully. Ask yourself, "What can I do right now to help solve this problem?"

## Define the problem

Indecision often happens when you don't fully understand the situation. This is why it's important to clearly define the problem when it occurs.

- Break big problems into smaller parts. Be specific.
- Focus on solving one part of the issue at a time.
- Decide ownership! We often take on other people's problems, so it's important to ask ourselves: Is the bad thing happening to me, or is this someone else's concern?

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## Set a goal

Once you understand the problem, decide what you want to happen. Setting a clear goal will help you figure out what steps you need to take to resolve your situation.

Try to use the S.M.A.R.T. method:

- S — Specific: What exactly will you do?
- M — Measurable: How will you know when you are done?
- A — Achievable: Can you really do this given your time and resources?
- R — Relevant: Is this plan aligned with your bigger goals?
- T — Timed: When will you finish?

## Brainstorm ideas

Think of as many ways as possible to meet your goal. Don't worry if an idea is good or bad or realistic or not — for now, just list everything that comes to mind.

If this is difficult, think about trusted people in your life and imagine how they would go about this.

## Choose the best approach

Work through your brainstormed ideas. For each one, ask yourself:

- What are the pluses and minuses for this option?
- How much time will this take?
- What might happen if I do this?

When you're done, review your answers and pick the idea that seems most helpful.

## Put your plan into action

Write down your selected steps to success. You are ready. Start working to solve your problem!

### Resources

- Skills for Psychological Recovery: Field Operations Guide  
([https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/special-resource/spr\\_complete\\_english.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/special-resource/spr_complete_english.pdf))
- Problem Solving Worksheet  
([https://www.ptsd.va.gov/disaster\\_events/for\\_providers/spr/docs/SPR32\\_ProblemSolving.pdf](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/disaster_events/for_providers/spr/docs/SPR32_ProblemSolving.pdf))