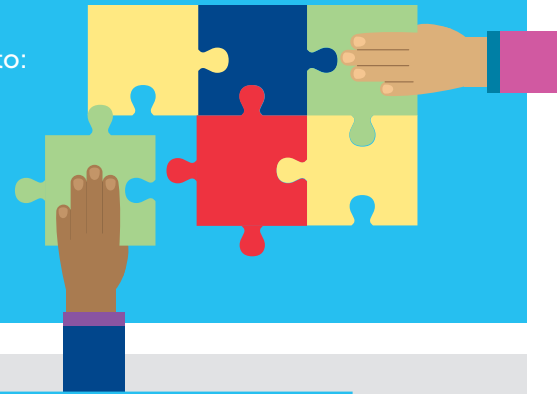




## WHAT IS PROBLEM SOLVING?

- ▶ Children dealing with low mood and depression may be in particular need of targeted strategies to deal with daily challenges and concerns. Everyone can benefit from solving problems in their lives; these skills can help you and the rest of your family as well!
- ▶ Your child may be frustrated that they are having a hard time dealing with problems. This can further increase their low mood and low motivation. You may be frustrated that they are not taking your advice or making good choices, creating conflict between the two of you.
- ▶ These worksheets teach a simple plan for solving problems. You will learn to:
  1. Name the problem
  2. Identify 3 possible solutions
  3. Name one good thing and one bad thing about each solution
  4. Pick one to try
  5. Evaluate how things went after you implement the solution



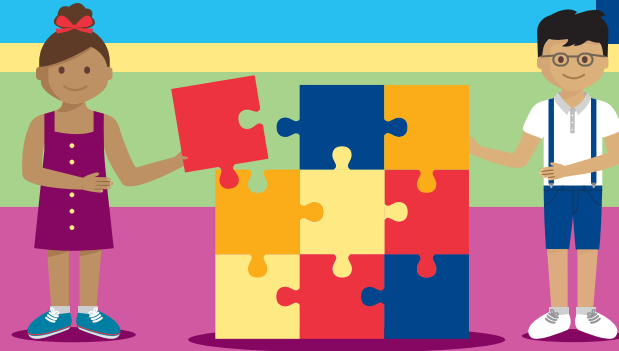
## HERE'S HOW TO MAKE A PROBLEM SOLVING PLAN AT HOME

You can introduce the plan by saying, "Everyone can use help solving problems. When people are sad, they sometimes need strategies that make it easier to deal with challenges. Here's the Problem Solving Plan we are going to start using." Introduce the 5 parts of the plan to your child by going through them together and reading the explanations below:

- 1 What's the problem?** "You may be feeling overwhelmed and not know exactly how to describe the issue you need to handle. Clearly stating the problem helps us both focus on what we need to do to solve it."
- 2 What are 3 possible solutions?** "I want you to think of 3 possible solutions so you have some good options, but not so many that you are overwhelmed with choices. Let's not worry about how good or bad they are yet. We will evaluate them together in the next part."
- 3 What's one good thing and one bad thing about each?** "This part means you will name one positive possibility and one negative possibility that could occur with each solution. This will help you consider the benefits and challenges of each choice."
- 4 Pick one!** This is your chance to take charge as you pick which solution you want to try out first.
- 5 How did it go?** "After you follow through with a solution, we will evaluate it. This will help us both learn what the best options for different problems are and we can refer back to these tested solutions as needed. If the first solution isn't successful in solving the problem, we can try a different one or start a completely new solution brainstorming session."

The next section puts the **Problem Solving Plan** into a chart. Go over the example together and then have your child try to solve the practice problems. Come up with solutions for our example problems and then try it for one of your own.

# CHILD WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



**Example 1:** "I am so sad and tired all time that I am not paying attention in math class. Now I don't understand today's homework."

What's the Problem? "I don't understand the homework."

		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1	Don't do the homework.	I can play videogames tonight because I'll have less to do	I'll get a zero.
Soution 2	Text my friend for help.	She is good at math and can help me.	She might not respond.
Solution 3	Talk to my teacher tomorrow and ask for extra help.	My teacher will explain what I missed.	She might still give me a zero for today's homework.
My Choice	Text my friend for help.		
How'd it go?	My friend texted me back. She called and helped me. I understood and did the homework.		

**Example 2:** "I get mad really easily now. I have been mean to my little brother a lot. This morning I heard him crying and telling mom that he thinks I don't like him."

What's the Problem?

		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

# CHILD WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



**Example 3:** "I've known that we had a history project due for a while but I just couldn't focus on it because of how I'm feeling. Now it's due tomorrow."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

**Example 4:** "My friends have stopped inviting me places because I kept saying no. Now I'm ready to use my Making Time for Fun Skills and I want them to ask me to hang out again."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

# CHILD WORKSHEET: BLANK PROBLEM SOLVING PLANS



What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			
What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			
What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

# PARENT HANDOUT: PROBLEM SOLVING TIPS



Depression Skill 5

## HOW CAN PROBLEM SOLVING HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Children and adolescents who are having a hard time with sadness or depression sometimes struggle to deal with challenges and solve everyday problems.
- ▶ These difficulties with problem solving can occur because they are more sad or irritable, more easily overwhelmed, not feeling motivated, and/or struggling with negative thinking due to depression. They may also try to solve a problem, but give up easily if they aren't successful right away.
- ▶ The problem solving skill described here can provide a concrete way to help your child think through challenges, brainstorm options, notice what works and what doesn't, and keep trying if their first attempt doesn't work. Increasing positive outcomes through successful problem solving can help significantly improve your child's mood and sense of control.
- ▶ In addition, making and following a problem solving plan can reduce frustration for both of you while increasing feelings of independence and mastery for your child. You won't be telling your child what to do, but instead supporting and guiding them in their plans to overcome challenges on their own.

## COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

### **My child doesn't think they have problems that need solving.**

It can be hard for children to notice which challenges or frustrations in their lives can benefit from problem solving skills. You and your child can identify potential problem solving opportunities by reviewing the situations they connected to their low mood and recorded on their How I Feel/Mood Tracker worksheets (review Mood Tracking, Depression Skill 1). Fill in the Problem Solving Plan for past situations that made your child feel sad, frustrated, stressed, or another negative emotion. In addition, if you notice a situation that is applicable to these skills in daily life, you can gently point this out to your child (e.g., "You told me you were sad because you didn't know who to sit with at lunch today. Do you think we can use the Problem Solving Plan to help plan for tomorrow?").

### **My child can't think of any solutions.**

Talk to your child about what might be getting in the way. They may be feeling overwhelmed and stuck. Offer guidance without being demanding (e.g., "What if you tried [insert potential solution here]?"). Very often, once you give a child one example, they are able to get creative with solutions of their own. Remind them that they don't need to think of the "perfect" solution because there is no such thing. They can make mistakes and you will help them. Review the practice examples we provide, both to remind your child of potential options for common concerns as well as the fact that they came up with great solutions for the examples!

### **All the solutions my child comes up with are bad choices.**

If the solutions are not harmful or unsafe, try not to dismiss them right away. Working through the different choices together will improve your child's positive problem solving and ability to distinguish between solutions. Encourage your child to focus on the one good thing and one bad thing step of the plan (step 3). If there is no "good" aspect to a solution or the good thing your child identifies is actually detrimental, gently point this out. Encourage them to pick a choice with a positive outcome at the "pick one" stage (step 4). If they don't have a choice like that, gently suggest that you go back to the brainstorming solutions stage (step 2). Let them know that it's okay to go back to this step to think of additional options, because the goal is to solve the problem in a safe and positive way.

### **When I ask my child to use their problem solving plan, they get upset and sometimes even cry.**

Sometimes children experiencing depression can feel overwhelmed when trying to problem solve. Remind yourself and your child that feeling upset is okay and that their emotions are giving you both a message that they are having a tough time and need support. Some children will benefit from using a relaxation skill to lower their stress levels before trying problem solving. For tips, review Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3). In addition, negative thinking can make problems seem huge and unsolvable. Review strategies from Thinking Traps (Depression Skill 4) to help encourage more realistic thinking. If you and your child are still having a hard time using problem solving skills and this is impacting their depression, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.