

Decision-Making/Problem-Solving

When we think about making changes, most of us don't really consider all "sides" in a complete way. Instead, we often do what we "should" do, avoid doing things we don't feel like doing, or just feel confused or overwhelmed and give up thinking about it at all. This often leads to poor decisions. Decision-making/problem-solving skills can help you to really make the best decisions. It will really help you to consider all the options available to you at the time and the potential consequences.

The best way to learn this skill is by using it. So, your task is to think about something you want to change in your life and complete the steps below. It could be anything from starting to exercise to giving up chocolate!

Step 1: Define the problem or the decision to be made. Clearly write down the problem or the decision to be made. For example, "I want to get fit".

Step 2: Consider all the possible options/alternative solutions to achieve this stated goal. In this case, some possible alternatives could include:

I will join the gym.

I will try to walk to school each day.

I will jog up and down in the classroom.

Remember, when you brain-storm solutions, write all the solutions down, no matter how ridiculous they may seem! Try not to judge the options/solutions at this stage.

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Step 3: Write down all the positives (good things) and negatives (not so good things) for making or not making the change.

e.g., I will join the gym:

Positives: That will be fun.
I will be taught how to exercise.

Negatives: It may be really expensive.
How would I get there?

Step 4: Weight the positives and negatives for each of the different alternatives.

Give each positive or negative a score out of ten for how important it may be. A score of 1/10 would mean it was very unimportant and a score of 10/10 would mean it was vital in making the decision. There are no right or wrong answers.

e.g., "That will be fun" - you may give a score of 7, because this is important to you. "It may be really expensive" - you may give a score of 10 because you can't possibly think of where you would get the money from.

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Step 5: Select the best alternative

Consider all the alternatives and the weighted positives and negatives associated with each alternative. Now decide which alternative you choose.

e.g., You may choose the option of "walking to school each day", as you realise you could walk with your friend, have fun on the way and it would cost nothing.

Step 6: Implement the solution

Now that you have chosen the alternative that suits you, the next step involves making a decision about when and how you will implement the decision/solution. It will involve creating a plan. An example is below.

e.g., If a person has decided to get fit and chosen the option of walking to school, they may say: "I am going to start this from tomorrow. First, the night before, I will ring my friends to arrange to meet them at the corner. To ensure I get up in time, I will set an alarm for 7.00am. I will pack my water in my bag the night beforehand. If it rains, my back up plan will be to text my friend to cancel and I will do some indoor exercises such as 5 sit-ups, jogging on the spot for 15 minutes, etc.

Now write down a plan to implement your decision.

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Step 7: Monitor Progress

Set a date when you will review your progress and reassess how well you are managing to implement your solutions or whether the problem is closer to being resolved.

Step 8: Review and learn from your experience

On the date you wrote down, review your progress.

You need to assess how well you stuck to the decision or whether you need to go back to the drawing board and reassess the decision. If it hasn't worked out, don't be hard on yourself. Just start the decision making/problem-solving process again! The only time things won't work, is if you give up trying! Most worthwhile things in life don't happen the first time, so keep trying.