

1. HOW TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

We start this section with the topic of problem solving because that's what you are facing! Your child's substance use, as well as the ensuing problems with communication, behavior, friend choices, school performance, and emotional development (you name it!). We will discuss all of these issues, but as we start this process we want you to have a general strategy for approaching ANY problem.

CRAFT (among other behavioral approaches) sets out seven steps for solving problems.* This approach will take you beyond painful avoidance strategies and unreliable quick fixes to help you work through problems thoroughly and systematically. As you practice with these steps, try to apply (and give yourself credit for) what you already do well, and take the time you need to learn what would be useful that you don't already know.

1

Define the problem as narrowly as you can.

Often what people take as "the problem" is actually many smaller problems lumped together. No wonder they feel overwhelmed. When you describe a problem, be on the lookout for multiple problems embedded within your description, and tease them apart. The idea is to tackle one relatively discrete problem at a time. Solutions are more manageable with a series of smaller problems and you'll feel more accomplished and optimistic as you get through each one.

2

Brainstorm possible solutions.

In this step, your task is to write down as many solutions as you can think of, to foster a sense of possibility and give yourself some choice. Brainstorming is an open, free-for-all process of allowing every idea in the door as they come, to be sorted and refined later. Your inner critic will tend to dismiss ideas out of habit or fear; but some of these could be viable options if you gave them a chance. List without judging. Try not to rule out anything before you've written down every conceivable solution to your problem.

3

Eliminate unwanted ideas.

Now that you have an exhaustive list of potential solutions, you can examine them more closely and cross out any that are unappealing. Eliminate options that you can't actually imagine ever doing, have too many downsides, or seem unrealistic. If you end up crossing off every idea, then return to step 2 and brainstorm again.

4

Select one potential solution or goal.

Pick one solution that seems doable to you, that you can see yourself trying this week. Hint: a doable goal is put in brief, simple, and positive terms (what you will do, not what you won't do or haven't been doing), is specific and measurable, reasonable and achievable, in your control, and involves skills you already have or are learning. (For a detailed discussion of goal setting, see Chapter 8 of our book, *Beyond Addiction*.)

5

Identify possible obstacles.

Next, identify potential obstacles that could get in the way of completing your task. By anticipating problems you can plan strategies for dealing with them. This can include specific, predictable obstacles as well as a more general awareness that unforeseen challenges may arise, which can lend you some emotional resilience in dealing with them.

6

Address each obstacle.

Design specific strategies to cope with each obstacle. Not just, "I'm sure I can deal with it," but exactly how you will get past it and move forward.

7

See how things go.

After you've carried out your plan, evaluate the process... How did it go? Look at what went well and what was more challenging in the implementation. Did your strategies for dealing with obstacles work well? Did obstacles come up that you hadn't predicted? Is there anything you would do differently next time? This is how you figure out what works and what doesn't work for you.

* Adapted from pp.187-190 in: Smith, J., & Myers, R. (2004). *Motivating substance abusers to enter treatment: working with family members*. New York: Guilford Press.