Problem solving guide

Some students may need support to learn effective problem solving skills. Difficulties with problem solving can often be a reason for frustration or outbursts. Often, the challenging part of problem solving is making decisions after coming up with and choosing options for a situation that needs resolving.

The following decision making process can assist students to think of and evaluate options to a problem or situation. Encourage and support students to come up with two options, write the pros and cons of each and then implement the one they think is best. It is important for students to have only a few options to choose from. This is especially important when learning these skills, as too many choices may be overwhelming and impact their ability to make a decision. By writing down the pros and cons of the options, they will be able to evaluate their choices, guiding them to find the best one.

The level of support you give students will depend on their age or abilities. Some students will need lots of support. The main focus for these students is thinking of options for them to try in response to the problem they face. Help them identify their problem, then focus on supporting them to think of options. Encourage them where possible to independently identify the problem and think of options – try to offer support only when they get stuck. They may also begin to write down pros and cons, although they don't need to write many.

Other students may work through the problem solving steps more independently, however monitor their progress and offer your support when needed. Encourage and support them to focus on considering the pros and cons of their options, so they can evaluate and reflect on their choices.

Steps for problem solving

1. Clearly define the problem.
2. Think of two options for resolving the problem.
3. Write a pros and cons list for each option. Both short and long term consequences of choosing an option can be explored if the students are able to understand these concepts.
4. What strengths (for example, character traits, talents, peers or adults who provide encouragement and support, previous experiences or strategies you've successfully used in the past) might help you solve this problem?
5. Based on your strengths, and on the assessment of the pros and cons list, choose an option and carry it out.
6. Evaluate how successful the option was in addressing the problem. If it wasn't helpful or only addressed some of the problem then the process can be restarted.

What's the problem?

What's one option?

What's another option?

Pros

Pros

Cons

Cons

What strengths can I use to help me solve this problem? _____

_____

_____

I would choose option ____ **because:** _____

_____

_____

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