



PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TRAINING

FOR EVERYDAY LIVING



*User's Manual
For Young Adults*



Bright IDEAS[®]

PROBLEM-SOLVING
SKILLS
TRAINING
FOR
EVERYDAY
LIVING
YOUNG ADULTS

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INTRODUCTION

By naturally using problem solving in everyday life, you "Stop and Think" before acting, make well-reasoned choices, and then evaluate the outcome of those choices. Handling conflicts better, making informed decisions, effectively managing your time, and solving personal, family, and work challenges reduces stress and helps you feel more in control. Cancer can get in the way of reaching your goals in many different areas, like education, career, independent living, and relationships with friends and family. Bright IDEAS teaches strategies to help you overcome challenges and achieve your goals.

PROGRAM GOALS

Our program is designed to:





APPROACHING A CHALLENGE: WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T CHANGE

When approaching challenges and possible solutions, it's helpful to keep in mind what you can change and what you can't. **Changeable aspects** of a situation are things that you can control and act on. For example, if you don't know a lot about your diagnosis, there are many things you can do to learn about it – ask your doctors and nurses questions, find credible online resources, or read information provided by your medical team.

Unchangeable aspects are out of your control. For example, you can't control which side effects you might experience from treatment, but you **CAN** control your response to them. You can tell your doctor about new symptoms and work with your team to try supportive interventions like exercise or diet changes to minimize side effects.

When you face a situation that is unchangeable but affects the way you feel, you can focus on things you can do to improve your mood despite the situation.

For example, you can try changing the way you look at the situation or focusing on ways to cope with it by talking with supportive family or friends, doing activities that make you happy, or finding meaning in what you're going through.

LEARNING OPTIMISM: BRIGHT IDEAS

Learning optimism means believing that facing challenges or solving problems is something we all can and have done many times. Sometimes the life situations we're facing are major, sometimes they're minor, and sometimes they're minor but what is happening around us causes even small decisions to seem hard, perhaps overwhelming. Coping with illness is only one of many life situations in which conflicts, challenges, and decisions are common. Helping you overcome such challenges is the goal of **BrIGHT IDEAS**.



The program is designed to help you "STOP and THINK", and say to yourself, "I can do this!" when faced with what could be an overwhelming situation. **Learning Optimism (the "Bright" in BrIGHT IDEAS)** is viewing tough situations as challenges to overcome and opportunities to succeed. Having a positive attitude will help you develop strategies to stay **hopeful and optimistic**.

Believing you can solve a problem reduces stress. When we think that problems have piled up and are more than we can cope with, we feel stressed out, pessimistic, or hopeless. But knowing that you can cope with everyday challenges will put you on the right track toward staying positive during the ups and downs of medical treatment. Remember: **you can do this!**

By learning the five-steps of **BrIGHT IDEAS** (**I**dentify the challenge/goal, **D**efine your options, **E**valuate your options and choose the best, **A**ct, and **S**ee if it worked) and using the attached Worksheets, you'll be able to get a handle on the specific challenges you're facing and find ways to overcome them.

Remember, when overcoming challenges, there may be many possible solutions. You'll need to find a solution that fits you – your personality, your resources, and your support system. In fact, many people find it helpful to teach **BrIGHT IDEAS** to family and friends. Then, they'll understand the strategies you're using and can become better problem solvers themselves.

GETTING STARTED: SELECT YOUR CHALLENGE/GOAL

Before we get started, use Worksheet 1 to make a list of some challenges, conflicts, concerns, or goals you would like to work on now or within the next few weeks – they may or may not be related to your cancer. Write down the ones that are your biggest concerns right now. Circle the one that you want to start working on first.



Worksheet 1 CHALLENGES/GOALS

Challenge/Goal 1:

Challenge/Goal 2:

Challenge/Goal 3:

Challenge/Goal 4:

Challenge/Goal 5:

Challenge/Goal 6:

THE BR!IGHT IDEAS STEPS

Step 1: Identify the Challenge

Now that you have chosen the first challenge or goal you want to work on, the next step is to clearly **Identify** the details of the challenge. Close your eyes and try to imagine yourself actually in the situation. Analyze your thoughts, feelings, and actions so you can answer the questions accurately and in detail.

Be a detective – ask yourself the **what, where, when, who, why, and how** of the challenge.

Put into words, as carefully and precisely as you can, exactly what the specific problem is that you're facing. Now, write down your answers on Worksheet 2 on page 10 to help you **Identify** all you need to know to move on. By writing down your answers, you will gain more insight into those parts of the problem that are most difficult for you to handle.



Pro Tip: Some people feel nervous about writing out their responses. But we have found that most people feel relieved when they do. It makes what to focus on clearer, more concrete, and less overwhelming. Try it for yourself!

THE THINKING - FEELING CONNECTION

Part of the Identify step is how you think and feel in the situation. Why? Because how you **think** about something affects how you **feel**. Often, we see our feeling as a response to a situation or something someone else did. It's not really what happened or what someone else did that directly makes us feel a certain way, but rather how we think about it that really influences how we feel. For example, if a friend walked past you without acknowledging you, you might feel worried or sad if you thought "I must have done something to make her mad!" On the other hand, you might feel concerned if you thought "She looked like something was really bothering her - she didn't even see me." What if you thought "We're both in a rush so she must not have seen me." It's easy to see how different interpretations of a situation might lead you to feel different emotions.



How you think about your challenges and goals also affects how you approach them. If you think you can't overcome the challenges you face, you'll feel more stressed about them. A big part of Bright IDEAS is learning to believe that you CAN handle challenges and work towards your goals.

“If you think you can do a thing or you think you can't do a thing, you're right.”

-Henry Ford



Worksheet 2

IDENTIFY

What is the specific situation?

Where does it occur?

When does it occur?

Who else is involved?

Why does it occur?

How do you think and feel when it occurs?

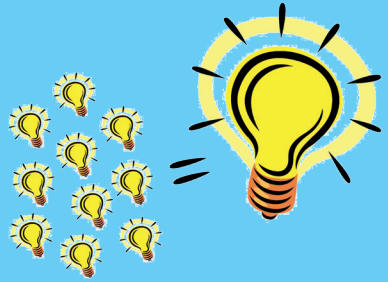
How optimistic are you about resolving this situation? (Please circle a number)

Not at all optimistic 1 2 3 4 5 Very optimistic

Why did you choose this challenge/goal?

Step 2: Define Your Options

Many people stop themselves from solving problems by thinking there's only one way to solve a problem or meet a goal. But, almost always, there are two or three or more possible solutions. For the next step, use Worksheet 3 on page 12. First, fold over or



cover up the right side of Worksheet 3 so you can't see the "Evaluate Possible Solutions" column. Now **Define** your options by **brainstorming**. Come up with three or more possible solutions to your challenge – be creative! If you catch yourself listing the problems with the solution ("I could do that, but...") stop! This is the time for brainstorming only. Evaluating your options comes next – *not now!*

The greatest barrier to developing new and effective solutions is **habit**. Don't get stuck in the same old rut of trying to solve a problem in the same old way. It's familiar, it's easy to do, but it can also be ineffective. Remember: **There are alternatives** even to difficult challenges. By coming up with a lot of different solutions, you increase the chance of finding your best solution.

Step 3: Evaluate Your Options

Now it's time to **Evaluate** your options and choose the best for you. Use the middle column of Worksheet 3 to write down some possible pros (benefits) and cons (risks) for each solution. For each possible solution, answer:

- (1) Can I actually follow through with this alternative?
- (2) What are the chances that it will work?
- (3) What barriers might make this hard to do?

When deciding which solution to try, cross out any solutions that have too many negative consequences or that you know are impossible.



Next, choose two or three possible solutions, and rank them in the right hand column of Worksheet 3, with #1 being what you think is your best choice. Having a few options is helpful in case your first choice doesn't work. You can also combine two or more solutions when you write out your Action Plan (Worksheet 4).



Worksheet 3

DEFINE & EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Define Possible Solutions	Evaluate Possible Solutions	Choose Best (Rank Choices) #1, #2, #3
Solution#1	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#2	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#3	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#4	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#5	Pros: Cons:	

Step 4: Act Out Your Choice



After you have made your choice, think about what specifically you will do, how you will do it, when you will do it, and who else will be involved. Then try to mentally visualize exactly what you will do – this is called “mental rehearsal.” Imagining what you will do helps you work out the details and figure out any barriers that might come up so you can prepare to overcome them. Now, write down your Action Plan on Worksheet 4.

Finally, the most crucial step: **Act! Do it!** For real.

Step 5: See If It Worked

First, use the bottom of Worksheet 4 to write out exactly what you did do (because it may be different from what you planned) and now evaluate the results.



If you're happy with the results, congratulations!!! You've successfully met a challenge. Now, on to the next challenge!



If you're not happy with the result, figure out why. Compare what you planned to do with what you actually did.

- ◆ Did something happen that changed your plan?
- ◆ Do you need to try again or should you try a different solution?

In some cases, you might find the solution worked okay but the problem was actually different from what you thought. Good detective work! Go back to Step 1 and rewrite what you need to change in the rest of the steps. Stick with it and you'll figure it out!

Stick
with it!

A yellow sticky note with the text "Stick with it!" written in black, bold, handwritten-style font. The text is underlined with two horizontal lines.



Worksheet 4

ACT AND SEE IF IT WORKED

Action

- ◆ What will you do?
- ◆ How will you do it?
- ◆ When will you do it?
- ◆ Who else is involved?
- ◆ What barriers might you face? How will you overcome them?

See if it worked:

Action Actually Tried:

How satisfied are you with the result? (Please circle a number)

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

Alternative solution if you're not satisfied with the result:

“QUICK CHECK” TECHNIQUES

When you feel totally stuck or overwhelmed, try the following “quick check” techniques, to help put your challenges in perspective:

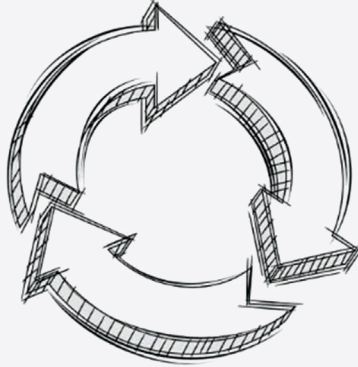
- ◆ “Stop and Think” before acting on your first impulse
- ◆ Take a deep breath and calm down
- ◆ Say to yourself, “I can handle this”
- ◆ What is the problem?
- ◆ What are some solutions?
- ◆ What’s my first choice?
- ◆ Okay, let’s try it out
- ◆ How am I doing?
- ◆ How would I tell a friend to handle this?
- ◆ Is this okay, or do I need to try my next choice?
- ◆ All right, this is going okay
- ◆ Nice job! You handled this well. You can do this!



If you don’t get the result you want even after troubleshooting through all the **Bright IDEAS** steps, then decide whether you need **additional information** or **assistance from a knowledgeable source** such as a friend or professional. When a problem situation appears unsolvable, try to identify which **parts** of the situation *may be solvable*. Starting with one of those parts might make solving the whole problem possible.

THINKING TRAPS: IDENTIFYING AND CHALLENGING NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

Feeling stuck in a bad mood and negative cycle of thinking? Break out of it by becoming aware of negative automatic thoughts and challenging them.



Automatic thoughts are thoughts that pop into your head without you purposely trying to focus on them. They are usually negative and make you feel bad. When accurate, our thinking leads us to have appropriate emotional responses. Unfortunately, many times our thinking is not accurate and can lead us astray.

To help identify your automatic thoughts, **Stop and Think** the next time you have a strong feeling such as sadness, anxiety, anger, or other reaction to a challenge, conflict, or decision. Ask yourself, “What am I thinking?” Use Worksheet 5 to help you identify the Thinking/Feeling Connection. Then look at your automatic thought – is it *really true*??? Often our negative automatic thoughts are distorted or untrue. Your goal is to turn these negative automatic thoughts into realistic thoughts. Use the last column to re-write the negative thoughts into something more balanced and rationale.

How does that make you feel?





Worksheet 5
IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Challenge, Concern, or Goal	Your Feelings	Your Automatic Thoughts	What's a more realistic thought?

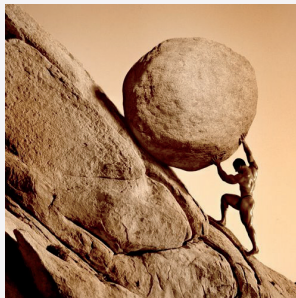
LEARN TO BE OPTIMISTIC



- ◆ Look for the positive
- ◆ Hope for the best
- ◆ Believe you can overcome this difficult challenge
- ◆ Be upbeat despite how hard this is and boost your mood
- ◆ Being optimistic is contagious – it will boost the mood of people around you, too!

LEARNING SKILLED PERSISTENCE

- ◆ Be persistent! Solving problems takes hanging in there.
- ◆ Use your skills!



The **Bright IDEAS** skills you just learned will help you successfully solve problems, meet challenges, and make good decisions. You are ready to take on whatever lies ahead!

APPENDIX: WORKSHEETS



****Extra copies of Worksheets 2-5 included****



Worksheet 1
CHALLENGES/GOALS

Challenge/Goal 1:

Challenge/Goal 2:

Challenge/Goal 3:

Challenge/Goal 4:

Challenge/Goal 5:

Challenge/Goal 6:



Worksheet 2

IDENTIFY

What is the specific situation?

Where does it occur?

When does it occur?

Who else is involved?

Why does it occur?






How do you think and feel when it occurs?

How optimistic are you about resolving this situation? (Please circle a number)

Not at all optimistic 1 2 3 4 5 Very optimistic

Why did you choose this challenge/goal?



Worksheet 3		
DEFINE & EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS		
Define Possible Solutions	Evaluate Possible Solutions	Choose Best (Rank Choices) #1, #2, #3
Solution#1	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#2	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#3	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#4	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#5	Pros: Cons:	



Worksheet 4

ACT AND SEE IF IT WORKED

Action

- ◆ What will you do?
- ◆ How will you do it?
- ◆ When will you do it?
- ◆ Who else is involved?
- ◆ What barriers might you face? How will you overcome them?

See if it worked:

Action Actually Tried:

How satisfied are you with the result? (Please circle a number)

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

Alternative solution if you're not satisfied with the result:



Worksheet 5
IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Challenge, Concern, or Goal	Your Feelings	Your Automatic Thoughts	What's a more realistic thought?



Worksheet 2

IDENTIFY

What is the specific situation?

Where does it occur?

When does it occur?

Who else is involved?

Why does it occur?

How do you think and feel when it occurs?






How optimistic are you about resolving this situation? (Please circle a number)

Not at all optimistic 1 2 3 4 5 Very optimistic

Why did you choose this challenge/goal?





Worksheet 3		
DEFINE & EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS		
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Solution#3	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#4	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#5	Pros: Cons:	



Worksheet 4

ACT AND SEE IF IT WORKED

Action

- ◆ What will you do?
- ◆ How will you do it?
- ◆ When will you do it?
- ◆ Who else is involved?
- ◆ What barriers might you face? How will you overcome them?

See if it worked:

Action Actually Tried:

How satisfied are you with the result? (Please circle a number)

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied






Alternative solution if you're not satisfied with the result:



Worksheet 5
IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Challenge, Concern, or Goal	Your Feelings	Your Automatic Thoughts	What's a more realistic thought?



Worksheet 3		
DEFINE & EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS		
Define Possible Solutions	Evaluate Possible Solutions	Choose Best (Rank Choices) #1, #2, #3
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Solution#2	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#3	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#4	Pros: Cons:	
Solution#5	Pros: Cons:	



Worksheet 4

ACT AND SEE IF IT WORKED

Action

- ◆ What will you do?
- ◆ How will you do it?
- ◆ When will you do it?
- ◆ Who else is involved?
- ◆ What barriers might you face? How will you overcome them?

See if it worked:

Action Actually Tried:

How satisfied are you with the result? (Please circle a number)

Not Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied

Alternative solution if you're not satisfied with the result:



Worksheet 5
IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Problem, Challenge, Concern, or Goal	Your Feelings	Your Automatic Thoughts	What's a more realistic thought?



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