



Workshop Description: This workshop includes activities designed to increase staff knowledge regarding problem-solving. Activities will include examples of techniques staff can use to help youth develop and strengthen their problem-solving skills.

This workshop guide will ask participants to examine and improve their own individual problem-solving skills in order to better understand the process of generating alternative solutions in the face of negative emotional responses. Participants will develop these skills with the understanding that it will help them empathize with and teach new skills to youth more effectively.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 90 to 100 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

Materials:

- Copies of the Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Chart*
- Writing utensils for each participant
- A hat or place to collect strips of paper
- Handout: *What Would You Do? Scenarios* printed and cut out
- Copies of Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Plan*
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to Emotion Regulation Strategy – Problem-Solving. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Emotion Regulation,*
2. *Development of Executive Functioning,*
3. *Understanding Peer Relationships*
4. *Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,*
5. *Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,*
6. *Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,*
7. *Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,*
8. *Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and*
9. *Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.*



Knowledge: Understanding Emotion Coaching and Problem-Solving

How an individual reacts in a given situation has roots in how they were raised, their family, and the relationships between them and their family and others around them. Many people have figured out ways to manage times when they are sad or very mad, and they have likely had to figure out ways to control joy and happiness so they don't disturb others or make someone jealous. Youth are no different from adults in that they have also figured out ways to manage their emotions. Sometimes they use healthy (or adaptive) strategies like counting to 10, and sometimes they use unhealthy (or maladaptive) strategies like eating when they are sad. Research has linked positive development with more use of healthy and less use of unhealthy strategies.⁷⁵

Emotion coaching is where one individual helps another to understand and manage their own emotions through several key strategies. Emotion coaching is an important tool youth program staff can use to guide youth toward healthy coping strategies and away from unhealthy ones.

- Adaptive/Healthy Coping Strategies
 - Cognitive Reappraisal
 - Problem-Solving
 - Acceptance
- Maladaptive/Unhealthy Coping Strategies
 - Avoidance
 - Suppression
 - Rumination

Identifying negative emotions is as important as offering solutions, which is why *acceptance* and *cognitive reappraisal*, or changing thinking, are included along with *problem-solving*, or finding ways to manage specific emotions.

Helping youth understand and manage their own emotions through emotion coaching can help them identify their feelings and find solutions to emotionally challenging situations. Youth who learn how to manage their emotions in healthy ways are more likely to participate in youth program activities. Program staff can use emotion coaching to help youth identify emotions and generate solutions to help youth work through challenging emotional situations.

Youth program staff need to practice awareness of their own emotions before they can be truly adept at providing emotion coaching to youth in the program. This self-awareness helps staff be more in tune with youth's emotions and connect with them.

Problem-solving or being able to find or create new or alternative solutions to issues is a skill we each need to practice. It is a skill that has great use when working on situations that cause negative emotions.⁷⁵ Using problem-solving skills helps individuals refocus their attention on positive and potential solutions and has been associated with increased life satisfaction.⁸⁶ Refocusing also helps to divert attention away from the negative emotions that can compound causing further emotional distress and have been associated with depressive and anxious symptoms.⁸⁷

When youth program staff develop activities that require youth to generate alternative ideas or solutions to problems they encounter in the program or in their everyday lives, they are helping guide youth's emotional growth and development. Teaching youth problem-solving skills not only models a



proactive and positive behavior but also gives youth a tool to use when approaching situations in the future.

Objectives:

- Understand the definition of problem-solving as it relates to emotion regulation
- Identify and practice problem-solving techniques
- Understand ways to support, promote, and teach problem-solving with youth

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe problem-solving and how it supports positive youth development.
 - What to say: “Today we are going to talk about problem-solving, or providing alternatives and solutions to situations that produce negative emotional responses, and how it can be used to support positive youth development. Problem-solving might sound self-explanatory (solving problems), but it’s easier said than done. In this workshop, we are going to go over some ways to generate and offer solutions and alternatives to youth. We will also look at ways to support youth in their development of problem-solving skills, including using what we know about emotion coaching (identifying emotions and generating solutions or alternatives) as a foundation for that development.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: “To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of problem-solving as it relates to emotion regulation and emotion coaching and where the gaps in your knowledge are.”

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the staff to share what they know about problem-solving as it relates to emotion regulation. You may need to assist them using the background information provided for you to jumpstart the conversation. Record these responses on a large sheet of paper or white board so staff can see.
- Ask the staff if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to problem-solving as it relates to emotion regulation and coaching or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Define Problem-Solving* (10 minutes)

- Describe the *Define Problem-Solving* activity:
 - What to say: “Today we are talking about problem-solving, which is not simply a way to find a solution to an issue. It is a mental process we can use to modify our emotional experience while also analyzing a problem.”
- Lead the *Define Problem-Solving* activity:
 - Ask the group what they think the steps to problem-solving include. Write their responses on a white board or large sheet of paper so everyone can see.
 - Facilitate a discussion to ensure each of the following six steps are covered.



1. Identify and Understand the Problem – Not as simple as it sounds, identifying the wrong problem or source of a problem may render the following steps useless. In this step you must do more than name the problem. This is about listing out what you know about the problem too.
 2. Identify Potential Solutions – This step is about brainstorming ideas. Get them down on paper. No idea is a bad idea. Especially when working with youth, sometimes even the ideas that are not feasible are important in helping youth to feel efficacy and mattering.
 3. Identify Pros and Cons for Each Solution – Eventually you will need to make a decision about a solution to try. This step helps with figuring out which solution is most feasible.
 4. Choose and Implement a Solution – This is the planning step. When you start thinking about the steps you’ll need to take to implement the solution, you may go back to Step 3 as some solutions will suddenly become unfeasible. In Step 4, you also start to organize the steps you’ll need to take to reach the solution. If the problem or solution are big, you may want to consider smaller plans to keep it manageable and to give youth a sense of accomplishment as they work on a bigger problem.
 5. Implement the Plan – In Step 5, you start doing the tasks you identified in Step 4. If this is a youth’s plan, then the adult may serve as a mentor or coach to help ensure progress.
 6. Evaluate Results – Checking in periodically during Step 5 is important. Schedule and plan conversations to see whether or not the solutions and strategies are working. Adults should help youth understand how they can monitor their own progress. Youth program staff can play a role in helping youth to monitor their progress on some problems. Evaluating results is related to monitoring progress.
- Once you have adequately described problem-solving, facilitate a discussion with the group about some ways problem-solving can be used in real-life or in the youth program. Document these suggestions on a white board or large piece of paper for all to see.
 - Examples may include making corrections to a paper when a professor passes back grades and offers to regrade revisions, practicing an extra 30 minutes for a sport when a game doesn’t go the way you want it to.

Activity: Problem-Solving Chart (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Problem-Solving Chart* activity:
 - What to say: “We are going to do an activity together that will ask you to identify problems as well as potential solutions. The goal of this activity is to give you an opportunity to practice basic problem-solving skills so you can teach the same skills to youth and help them develop their own problem-solving abilities.”
- Lead the *Problem-Solving Chart* activity:
 - Prior to the start of the activity, you should have printed enough copies of the *Worksheet: Problem-Solving Chart* for each group to have one copy.
 - Divide the staff participants into smaller groups of three to four and provide each group with a writing utensil.



- Ask the groups to use their knowledge of problem-solving to complete the Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Chart*. They should select one of the problems generated during the previous activity.
- Emphasize that recognition or identification of the issue or problem is Step 1, just as it is in emotion coaching, and generating solutions, or Step 2, is also part of emotion coaching.
- Once all the groups have had a chance to complete their charts, discuss among all staff in order to identify common issues and solutions and brainstorm any additional solutions or consequences that small groups may have missed.
- Once you have discussed and reflected on the completed charts, ask staff to consider how a simple chart such as the one used in this activity could be used in emotion coaching with youth.
- Transition into the next activity by asking staff to think about how problem-solving works in the real world. Remind them that many times the problems are not known beforehand and that a framework for developing solutions in one situation isn't always transferrable to the next; to develop problem-solving skills, youth must be able adapt to changing circumstances.

Activity: *What Would You Do?* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *What Would You Do?* activity:
 - What to say: "Now that you are familiar with the basics of problem-solving, we are going to do an activity that will challenge your ability to adapt to changing circumstances."
- Lead the *What Would You Do?* activity:
 - Before this activity, you should have printed and cut out the scenarios from the Handout: *What Would You Do? Scenarios*.
 - Ask the group to sit in a circle. If the group is particularly large, you can divide in two and have the groups play simultaneously.
 - Start playing some music and pass around a hat with the scenario slips inside.
 - Stop the music. Whoever is holding the hat should draw a slip, describe the scenario, and offer at least one positive and one negative solution before opening up the discussion to the group.
 - Once the group has come up with three or four more solutions, remove the slip from the game and restart the music. While positive, creative solutions should be encouraged, if staff have a hard time coming up with solutions, remind them that they don't need to be the optimal or best solution, only a possible solution. For example, one solution to the bat scenario is to leave it on the ground and continue your walk. Some may have a moral objection while others may see it as nature taking its course. Regardless of the consequences, it is a solution.
 - Keep going like this until every scenario has been chosen from the hat.
 - Ask the staff to discuss the scenarios and any other real-life examples they may have thought of while playing the game. Encourage them to talk about the process of coming up with solutions to problems of which they didn't have prior knowledge. Circle back to emotion coaching; remind staff of the steps of identifying a problem and generating solutions.



- Ask staff to discuss how this game could be adapted as an activity for youth, giving scenarios appropriate for the level of youth in the program. One example, to kick start this discussion, could be the following: “You are using the computer when someone asks you if they can use it. They promise they will be quick, but after 10 minutes, they are still using it. All the other computers are occupied.”
- Finally, guide staff in a discussion of any consequences they’d like to address for the solutions generated in the activity. As the previous activity teaches, thinking about consequences is an important part of using problem-solving as a positive and healthy coping mechanism, and it should be taught as a kind of third step to youth when staff think they are ready to stop relying on staff-generated solutions.

Activity: *Problem-Solving Packet* (30 min)

- Describe the *Problem-Solving Packet* activity:
 - What to say: “Now that we have discussed various components of problem-solving, we are now going to do an activity that will allow us to practice each step of the problem-solving process.”
- Lead the *Problem-Solving Packet* activity:
 - Provide each member with a copy of the *Problem-Solving Packet* and a writing utensil.
 - Ask members to take a scenario from the hat from the previous activity and use that as the problem that they will solve in the packet.
 - Guide them through the steps of the packet, clarifying as needed and giving time for writing and reflection in between each step.
 - Once everyone has completed the packet, discuss the activity as a large group.

Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the staff’s responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?” and “How could you use these strategies with youth?”

Resources:

Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Chart*

Handout: *What Would You Do? Scenarios*

Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Plan*

Sources:

Problem-Solving Chart based on Solution Organizer in this document:

Learning better ways to cope: teaching students with ASD to recognize and manage their emotions.
(n.d.). *University of Albany*. Retrieved from: https://www.albany.edu/autism/files/EmotionRegulation_FullSlides_Color.pdf



Emotion Regulation Workshop Guide

Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving

Joseph, G. E., Strain, P., Yates, T. (n.d.). Social emotional teaching strategies. Retrieved from The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning website:
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/script.pdf>

Vote for your favorite 'WWYD' scenario. (2010). *ABC News*. Retrieved from:
<https://abcnews.go.com/WhatWouldYouDo/viewers-choice-scenario-tv/story?id=12357652>

The Worksheet: *Problem-Solving Packet* is based on
Snyder, L. G., & Snyder, M. J. (2008). Teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills. *The Journal of Research in Business Education*, 50(2), 90.



Instructions: Please fill out the following chart, generating two solutions: one with a positive consequence and one with a negative consequence. Take some time to fill in the Action category with the reasons for choosing to follow through with the positive solution.

What is the problem?

One solution is...

Another solution is...

The consequences of this solution are...

The consequences of this solution are...

Action to take:



Instructions: Cut these scenarios into strips and use them during the *What Would You Do?* and *Problem-Solving Packet* activities.

1. The customer ahead of you at the grocery store has discovered that the store's card reader is down and that they are only accepting cash payment after all their items have been scanned. There are no ATMs nearby, but you have enough money to cover their purchases and yours.
2. A group of girls seems to be harassing a lone girl in the park. They are saying hurtful things about her appearance, interests, and home life. No one in the bullying group has gotten physical, and it doesn't appear as though things will, but they do follow the lone girl whenever she tries to walk away.
3. You and a few friends decide to go on a daytrip through a nearby national park. While hiking, your friend who is navigating says they don't recognize the path you're on anymore and that they must have gotten turned around. In the search through their bag, they come to find they have forgotten their map.
4. During a day at the beach, you hear cries for help and find out that a young boy has been swept out to sea by a riptide. He is still visible, and some people have started to gather around the boy's family. Someone appears to be getting ready to swim after the boy, but you know that the riptide could still be happening and that it would be dangerous to swim against it.
5. You are walking with a friend and find an injured bat on the ground. You don't know anything about its health, but a group of hungry looking birds has begun to accumulate in a nearby tree.
6. You see a man kick his dog at the park, and when another person confronts him about it, he begins yelling at them and gesturing threateningly.
7. You find a hundred dollar bill on the sidewalk. A couple of blocks away you spot a homeless man with a sign asking for money for food. He is sitting in front of a restaurant.
8. A youth comes to you saying that their friend has talked to them about committing suicide. The youth who came to you has asked to remain anonymous. When you broach the topic with the other youth, they ask about the first youth by name. The other youth also denies having any thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



Step 1 – Identify the Problem

Guiding Questions:

- What is the problem you are trying to solve?
- When does this problem happen?
- Does anything lead to this problem?
- What causes the problem?

Step 2 – Identify Possible Solutions

Try to come up with three or four solutions for the problem.

Guiding Questions:

- What has worked in the past?
- Do you know someone else who has addressed this problem?
- Should someone else be part of the solution?
- What part of the problem can you address and how?



Step 3 – Consider the Pros and Cons of Each Possible Solution.

Guiding Questions:

- Is this a short- or long-term solution?
- Are there any possible negative consequences of this solution?
- Who will be affected by this solution?
- How likely am I to follow through with this solution?

Possible Solution	Pros	Cons



Step 4 – Choose and Implement a Solution

Guiding Questions:

- When will you implement your solution?
- What steps will you take to implement your solution?
- Will you need help to implement your solution?
- Is your solution too big? Should it be broken down into smaller segments?

Action 1
Action 2
Action 3
Action 4
Action 5
Action 6
Action 7
Action 8
Action 9



Step 5 - Review It

Guiding Questions:

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What would you change about your solution?
- What advice would you give to someone with the same problem?