BASIC COPING SKILLS: Taking Action using a Problem-Solving Strategy

When people are faced with problems, they may begin to feel overwhelmed or experience worry about the future. They may feel stuck and not know where to begin in addressing the problem. These amount to stress and anxiety.

Problem-solving is a basic coping strategy. Problem-solving is also a structured approach to addressing a problem and can lead you to the best solution to a problem. When done correctly, it can help someone experience a greater sense of control and predictability with regard to a problem. As a result, stress and anxiety can be reduced. There are five steps to problem-solving.

Steps for Effective Problem-Solving

1. **Identify the Problem:** The first step in solving a problem is to recognize what the problem is. This might sound like common sense; however, this is a very important step. Try to describe the problem as objectively as possible, as opposed to focusing on the potential consequences or implications of the problem. This can give you a better sense of what you are specifically dealing with.
2. **Define and Analyze the Problem:** In this step, you will want to figure out what caused the problem, what the problem looks like at this moment, and the urgency of addressing the problem. In this step, you want to also learn as much as you can about the problem. Be flexible in your approach. Do research on the problem. Look at the problem from a different perspective. Evaluate all of the different ways in which the problem could impact you.
3. **General Potential Solutions:** here you want to brainstorm and come up with as many solutions as you possibly can for the problem. Be creative and don't concern yourself at this point with how feasible the solutions may be. You want a number of different options to choose from. This process of generating solutions can help you look at the problem from multiple perspectives. Keep in mind that it may be impossible to address all areas of a problem. When this is the case, break the problem down and try to generate solutions for parts of the problem (as opposed to the problem as a whole). It may be necessary to seek out help with this part of solving a problem.
4. **Decision-Making:** In this step, you want to evaluate the solutions you can up with in step 3. Weigh the short and long term pros and cons of each solution. In addition, in this step, you want to start to evaluate how feasible each solution is. That is, how easily can you implement the solution to the problem?
5. **Implement a Solution and Evaluate its Success:** In this final step, you want to choose a solution and implement it. Take action. In choosing a solution, you want to weigh the pros and cons of each potential solution, and it is generally a good idea to start out with a solution that is associated with low risk and that is compatible with your priorities and future goals. Once you have implemented a solution, evaluate how it was and was not successful. If the solution did not completely address the problem, you can then move back through some of the different stages to address other areas of the problem.

By taking the above steps, you may be able to reduce your level of stress and maximize your effort in addressing problems in your life. As with any coping strategy, it is best to practice this skill first with a very basics or non-threatening problem. This was you can get comfortable with the steps before you use them with more complex problems.

Sources

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