

Steps to Problem Solving

Most likely, there will be many challenges or problems you and your family face before, during and after cancer treatment. Having a method for solving these challenges can help reduce the pressure for you. It is like any other skill, the more you practice, the more naturally you will use it when you need it. You can use this method on your own or practice with someone else. Many people like to write things down when they are working through the steps, so a practice worksheet is included to help you.

Steps in problem solving:

1. Outline the problem in your mind
2. Write one clear statement that describes the problem briefly and clearly
3. Notice your feelings and your thoughts about the problem. Think about what is most important to you.
4. Think over all likely solutions/choices/scenarios – “brainstorm”
5. Try to think of how others you know might solve the problem or ask them to brainstorm with you
6. Measure the ‘pros and cons’ of each solution. (Remember, doing nothing is always a solution and a choice)
7. Make a list of the solutions and choices
8. Name the least helpful/workable solution to the most helpful/workable solution
9. Then decide what solution you feel is the best for you and for your situation right now.
10. Make a choice and do it (or make a plan as to what steps you will take to carry out it)
11. Review, check and re-do if needed, as situations change over time.

Steps to problem solving sample worksheet:

Step 1: What is the one problem I need to solve now?

- I am going back to work after my cancer treatment. How will I handle all the questions people will ask me?

Step 2: How do I feel about it?

- I am worried that I will break down - there are some people at work I don't want to talk to about it
- I feel embarrassed that people will want to treat me more carefully than before
- I am worried some people will try to avoid me

Step 3: What are some solutions?

- I can talk with a friend I know who returned to work after cancer treatment. I'll ask her how she handled it
- I can ask a co-worker to let everyone know that if I want to talk about it, I'll bring it up
- I can choose not to go back to work
- I can try to expect questions and think up answers before hand

Step 4: Think what others would do.

- My husband would joke about it
- My mother would say, “It’s none of your business!”
- My friend would become sad and pity herself
- My other friend would make up an email that explains what happened and how others can help support her

Step 5: Make a list of the pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages) of the solutions in Steps 4 and 5

- **Talk with a friend** who I know returned to work after cancer treatment. Ask her how she handled it. She has been through it and can tell me what might happen. It might be hard for her to talk about what she went through again.
- **Expect questions** and think up answers before. I will feel more in control. I will be able to think up some answers ahead of time. They may ask things I did not think of before.
- **Ask a co-worker** to let everyone know that if I want to talk about it, I will bring it up. I will feel safe and safe. After all, that is a lot to expect my friend to do. Also, I need people to reach out to me when I am feeling low and they might think they cannot do that.
- **Not go back to work** - I can gather my strength longer and keep on healing but I feel alone already. There are money stresses for my family when I am not working.
- **Joke about it** - Joking relaxes some people and will help them know I am still me, but some days I will not feel like joking and I will want to talk to someone then too.
- **Write an email** - I can take time to put down what I want to say. There might be fewer questions. Still, I will have to share the news with everyone so that people don’t feel I ignored them or left them out. Some people might not read the email.

Step 6: Rank the solutions from least helpful or pleasing to best choice

6. Not go back to work
5. Joke
4. Expect questions and set up answers before
3. Talk with a friend who went through the same things
2. Ask a co-worker to let everyone know - tell him what to say
1. Write an email

Step 7: Make a choice

- I decided to write an email the week before I return to work. That way, they have time to plan and I have time to think about what I want to tell them. People who feel uncomfortable can chose to read as much of the email as they want.

Step 8: Review, test and make changes, if needed (you are looking for good responses or results)

- I received some supportive emails back even before I returned to work. It made the first day going back a lot simpler.

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