

JULIA'S SEVEN STEPS TO PROBLEM SOLVING

From the workbook
Practical problem solving

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND CLEARLY DEFINE WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO WORK ON.

Write down one difficult situation, relationship or practical issue you are facing here, break it into smaller steps if you need to (remember these are problems outside you):



Ben needs a new band uniform but I don't have enough money, I need to buy or borrow the uniform. To break it down smaller I will aim to buy a second hand uniform.

STEP 2: THINK UP AS MANY SOLUTIONS AS POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE YOUR FIRST TARGET (including ridiculous ideas at first):



Ignore the problem completely—he can make do with what he has.
I could steal a uniform.
I could see if the uniform is available second-hand on the internet.
I can look on Craigslist and see if there's anything available.
I could ask my friends and relatives and see if they have any ideas.
I could place an ad in the classifieds section of the newspaper.

STEP 3: LOOK AT THE PROS AND CONS OF EACH POSSIBLE SOLUTION



Write your own list of ideas below, and the pros and cons of each suggestion.

MY SUGGESTIONS FROM STEP 2	PROS (ADVANTAGES)	CONS (DISADVANTAGES)
Ignore the problem completely—he can make do with what he has	Easier in the short term and I don't have to think about it. He can manage without it for the start of the school year	Well, Ben's growing and won't fit the clothes he has now—and there is a strict dress code—we'll need to get the uniform soon
I could steal a uniform	Well it might work, but ...	I don't want to do that—it's wrong. It's one of my ridiculous brainstorm ideas. Even if I did think like that, I wouldn't do it. I would be breaking the law and face even bigger problems
I could see if the uniform is available second-hand on the internet	That's a good idea—people often advertise lots of stuff at a good price	There might not be one for sale there. What's the chance of finding our local school's uniform there?
I can look on Craigslist and see if there's anything available	That's another good idea—they have lots of listings with local stuff for sale and may include band uniforms!	I'd need to spend time looking through the listings and then follow up
I could ask my friends and relatives and see if they have any ideas	Lots of them have had children. One of them may have a uniform they want to get rid of	I'd have to spend time getting in touch with them all
I could place an ad in the classifieds section of the newspaper	Well, I've seen other people do this. It must work sometimes	I'd feel a bit nervous contacting the newspaper about this

STEP 4: NOW CHOOSE ONE OF THE SOLUTIONS. In making your decision bear in mind the best way of tackling the problem is to plan steady, slow changes.



MY SOLUTION Write down your preferred option here:

I'll ask my friends and relatives. Many of the other suggestions might also work, but this seems like a reasonable first step.

Check your solution: Now see if you can answer 'yes' to the questions below.

Is my planned solution:

- Useful for helping me move forward? Yes No
- Clear, so that I will know when I have done it? Yes No
- Something I value, or need to do? Yes No
- Realistic, practical and achievable? Yes No

If you answered 'yes' to all four questions, your chosen step is a good choice to start with.

If you answered 'no,' then think again and choose another option from your list.

STEP 5: PLAN THE STEPS NEEDED TO CARRY OUT YOUR CHOSEN SOLUTION. You need to have a clear plan that lays out exactly what you are going to do and when you are going to do it.



Now, write down your plan:

I think the first person I'll ask is Jamila. She knows everyone and is really confident, so she'll feel able to ask around. And I'll also ask my other friend Andrea. She works next door to the thrift shop and she could keep a look out for me. I will phone them now while Ben is out playing soccer. I don't think this plan will be blocked or or prevented by anything – unless someone pops by without warning. If so, I'll remember to phone later.

It is good to have a backup solution in case major difficulties arise with your first choice plan.



Write your own backup plan here:

My backup plan: If none of my friends can help me within a few days, I can always go back to my brainstorm at step 2 and place an ad in the classifieds section of the newspaper.

STEP 6: CARRY OUT YOUR PLAN. Now carry out your plan during the next week. Good luck!

STEP 7: REVIEW THE OUTCOME. Whatever happens, now is the time to review the plan and learn from what happened. Review what happens with the content of the *Review Sheet* (which follows on the next page).



OK, HOW DID IT GO?

1

WHAT DID YOU PLAN TO DO? Write it here:

I called Jamila and Andrea and they agreed to help. I thought they might not get back to me for a while but Andrea called after a few days. Andrea was chatting to the person who helps at the local thrift shop who said they had a lot of school clothes in there. As soon as Ben got home we went to the shop. We managed to get almost all the clothes he needed except the shoes.

2

DID YOU TRY TO DO IT?

If yes:

What went well?

- It was a good solution

What didn't go so well?

Nothing really.

What have you learned from what happened?

Plans can work well. Friends can be a great resource. It was the right time of year to be looking.

How are you going to apply what you have learned?

Next year I could look in the thrift store at this time of year and find things for Ben. It might not work at other times of the year though.

If no, what stopped you?

Internal things (forgot, not enough time, put it off, didn't think I could do it, couldn't see the point, etc.)

External things (other people, work or home issues, etc.)

How could you have planned to deal with these things?

USE THE PLAN, DO, REVIEW APPROACH TO HELP YOU MOVE FORWARDS