

# PAUL'S SEVEN STEPS TO PROBLEM SOLVING

From the workbook  
*Unhelpful things you do*

## 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):



I am drinking too much and getting angry quickly. I have been shouting at Helen, at first I feel like I am letting off steam but feel guilty and really down after it has happened. The first thing I want to work on is losing my temper. To break this down further I know that Helen sharing what she has done in the day with me, makes me irritable. I want to try and listen to Helen without pushing her away or getting angry.

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



I could pay someone else to listen to her  
 I could go to another room when I start to feel angry  
 I could suggest we plan a regular time to talk about each other's day  
 We could go on a walk each day and chat as we walk  
 We could plan half day each week when we could catch up  
 I could ask Helen to write me a letter of what she's done each day for me to catch up in my own time

## 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)
I could pay someone else to listen to her.	It would be no effort for me.	I can't afford it. It would really annoy Helen. It would also say to her I'm not interested. I really want our relationship to work. I actually want to hear about her.
I could go to another room when I start to feel angry.	It would mean I could avoid upsetting Helen by losing my temper.	She might follow me—we'd end up arguing.
I could suggest we plan a regular time to talk about each other's day.	It would be great if we had a time like that. She would feel happier and we'd actually spend some time chatting rather than arguing with each other.	It would require some effort. I feel so down I'm not sure how long I could listen for. I might get criticized if I forgot anything she said.
We could go for a walk each day and chat as we walk.	I know getting out and chatting can really give me a boost. Sometimes doing something can really help me start talking as well.	It's winter at the moment and it's been cold and rainy.
We could plan a half day each week when we could catch up.	That could allow us to get the catch-up over all in one go—that might be efficient.	Having a relationship isn't supposed to be about being efficient. If things are going to work out we need to start being interested in what we're doing each day—not just being able to say that we've talked once a week.
I could ask Helen to write me a letter of what she's done each day for me to catch up in my own time.	She could write down everything she wants me to know.	It's a stupid idea. Why would she do that? We're supposed to be partners, not pen-pals.

**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:

Based on step 3 I am going to suggest that Helen and I plan a regular time to talk about each other's day.

**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:

**What are you going to do?** I need to talk with Helen about how I'm feeling. I want to say:

That I don't like having all these arguments. That I've been working on this by trying to drink less alcohol and trying to get some better sleep and that has really helped.

That I've noticed that one thing I still find difficult is some longer conversations. I need to tell her that when we chat if I look like I'm drifting off it's because of the depression—not because I'm not interested in her.

I'm finding it difficult to keep focused on anything. So I'm going to suggest to her that I really want to hear from her about what's happening in her life, but can we plan some regular times when we can both sit down together and not feel pressured? Also can we plan to just chat for say five to ten minutes and not longer?

And finally that I'd really appreciate it if we could agree that if either of us is just too tired that we can put off the chat for some time later and just be with each other—maybe watching TV or something that feels easy.

**When are you going to do it?** I need to pick a time to prepare—that's just now—and also a time when we can chat when neither of us are busy. I tend to feel better and more confident towards the end of the day, so why don't we plan to discuss this after dinner tonight once we've done the dishes and relaxed for a bit. I'll say there's something important (and good) we need to talk about so she doesn't get scared I'm about to say something terrible.

**What problems and difficulties could arise?** Just thinking what might block things—there's quite a lot to say and I might forget some of it.

**How could you overcome them?** I'll keep these notes with me—and practice saying it beforehand. I'll just have to apologize if I look at the notes but I'll explain it's because I want to get things right. Another thing that could cause problems is if either of us feels really tired or on edge. If so I'll put it off for a day and do it the next evening.

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



Write your own backup plan here:

If my plan doesn't work I will use the other solution to go into another room when I start to get angry. Helen might follow me leading to an argument, so I will let her know that if I walk away that I just need time away from the conversation for a bit to improve how I react.

**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:

After dinner I made Helen a cup of tea and switched off the TV. I used my notes to say what I had planned to Helen. She listened and was relieved to have the conversation with me as she has been worried about me. We agreed that we will give each other the option to talk less or put off chats if they feel tired or down, without seeing it as rejection. I felt a lot better after we had the conversation and so far so good.

## 2 DID YOU TRY TO DO IT?

### If yes:

What went well?

**- It was a good solution and we both felt better for having the conversation.**

What didn't go so well?

**Nothing really.**

What have you learned from what happened?

**Plans can work well. Writing down what I needed to say and approaching it at the right time was really useful.**

How are you going to apply what you have learned?

**Keep communicating with Helen.**

### 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**