SESSION 6
Solving problems in relationships
This session will provide students with an understanding of the steps of problem solving. It will offer them the opportunity to practise using these steps with some problem scenarios and to role play their chosen responses. It will also introduce the notion that positive “can do” thinking is required before the steps of problem solving can be used.

Feeling confident about one’s ability to deal with problems (positive problem orientation) and understanding the skills necessary to solve problems plays an important role in maintaining positive mental health and well-being. As well as having specific strategies and skills to help them solve problems, resilient people also have a belief in their ability to problem solve. Having a positive problem orientation and good problem solving skills has been found to act as a protective factor against developing a mental health problem such as depression.

In this session students:

- Apply a structured problem-solving model to resolve interpersonal issues.
- Develop the capacity to take the perspective of other people.
- Develop a positive approach to solving problems (problem orientation).

- Review of Session 5 and Home activity
- Activity 1 and Video Clip 6.1 – The steps of problem solving
- Activity 2 – Problem solving role play
- Video Clip 6.2 – Positive problem orientation
- Summary (Video Clip 6.2)
- Home activity
SESSION PLAN – Solving problems in relationships

REVIEW PREVIOUS SESSION
Using the Session 5 in review sheet (Resource 6.1 and page 41 student book) revise the last session.

Include a discussion of the home activity.

ACTIVITY 1 – The steps of problem solving

1. Introduction – Briefly explain that this session is about problem solving which will be discussed further in the video.


VIDEO CLIP 6.1 [7 MINS 30 SEC]
START: [22 MINS] ON THE VIDEO COUNTER

THE STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING
The video clip will introduce the idea of problem solving in day-to-day life. It will outline the steps of problem solving giving an example of each step. Script is Resource 6.2.

The video will also show two scenarios (CHOOSE ONE) of young people being pressured to do something they are not completely comfortable with. The first scenario shows a boy (Sam) being offered a lift home with someone who had been drinking. The second shows a girl (Bec) being asked to deceive another student.

3. Refer students to page 43 of their books.

Steps of problem solving
1. What is the problem?
2. What are the options/possible solutions?
3. What are the consequences of each?
4. Make a decision.
5. Do and review
4. **Work** as a class using the steps of problem solving to resolve the problem shown in the video.

5. **Write** responses on the board (and have students note them in their books) for the following:
   - Define the problem.
   - Brainstorm as many options as possible (it might be useful to remind students about the rules of brainstorming) as well as the possible consequences of each (consequences for self and others and not just short-term, but also long-term).
   - Decide on a final solution as a class.

6. **Discuss** what Sam from scenario 1 or Bec from scenario 2 on the video might think and feel about the suggested solution.

**Key points:**
- **Problems can be addressed using a simple problem solving model:**
  - What is the problem
  - What are the options/possible solutions?
  - What are the consequences of each?
  - Make a decision
  - Do and review
- **Solutions that we choose will have different consequences for ourselves and others.**

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

1. **Suggest** to students that there are different responses that you will make in different situations or that different people may make different responses in the same situation. Three common response types are passive, aggressive, and assertive.

2. **Discuss** with students:
   - **Passive (or non-assertive) is** …
     Being afraid to stand up for yourself, for your rights and your opinions. Passive people often want to avoid conflict and try to keep their feelings and beliefs to themselves.
   - **Aggressive is** …
     Stating what you think, feel, want or believe in a way that denies the other person respect. Aggressive people do not take into account the other person’s feelings and rights, and the interaction is often very threatening.
• **Assertive is ...**

Standing up for your rights and opinions without violating the rights of other people. When you are assertive, you consider other people's feelings, beliefs and opinions. Acting assertively also means that the interaction is not negative or threatening.

**What verbal and non-verbal behaviours do we use for each type of response?**

- Passive – little eye contact, shy, unsure of themselves
- Aggressive – inappropriate tone of voice, posture and eye contact in a threatening manner
- Assertive – direct eye contact, appropriate tone of voice, and confident manner

**The advantages/disadvantages of the different types of responses**

- Passive - avoids conflict but might not get needs met
- Aggressive - might get what you want but always in conflict and often hurt other people
- Assertive - generally favourable results for self and others but may not always be appropriate.

**Whether the assertive response is always the best response?**

- Possible dangerous situations

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**ACTIVITY 2 – Problem solving role play**

1. **Hand out** scenarios (Resource 6.3) to groups.

2. **Refer** students to page 45 of their books and ask them to:

   - Read the problem individually and write their first thoughts about the problem in their books.
   - In their groups discuss their problem scenario and use the steps of problem solving to come up with a solution.
   - Discuss in their groups what the person with the problem might be thinking and feeling about the solution and if their solution (response) is likely to be effective.
   - In pairs, role play the problem and the proposed solution with the third student acting as observer to note the “problem solver’s” and the partner’s actions and reactions, including what was said, voice tone, facial expression and non-verbal gestures.

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**Note:** You might want to use the problem scenario involving Sam, Daniel and his brother Brian on the video clip 6.1 as an example of when a passive response such as making an excuse and not getting in the car might be the best thing to do.
• Review how effective the solution was in the role play.
• Discuss whether the person in the scenario might need help from others for this problem and who they could go to for this help.
• Decide what type of response their solution is (passive, aggressive, or assertive). They may wish to refer to the FYI sheet on page 44.

3. Ask observers to report back to the class on the problem, the solution and the likely success of the response.

Note: Where possible swap roles and practise different ways of playing out the same solution.
If time is available, each group could be given another problem to solve and role play.

4. Play the video – Clip 6.2.

VIDEOCLIP 6.2 [2 MINS 30 SEC]
START: [29 MINS 45 SEC] ON THE VIDEO COUNTER

POSITIVE PROBLEM ORIENTATION - THINKING RIGHT

The video clip will introduce the concept of a positive problem orientation. Taking steps to solve a problem will only occur if the person has a positive problem orientation - that is, they interpret the problem in a realistic manner, they react in a “can do” way, have helpful thoughts, and believe they have the ability to attempt a solution.

Script is Resource 6.2.

The presenter then provides a brief summary of problem solving.

SUMMARY

Provided by the video presenter in Video Clip 6.2
HOME ACTIVITY

1. **Refer** students to page 48 of the student book or hand out home activity sheet.

2. **Instructions:**
   - Students should select a problem they have currently (it might be something simple).
   - Work through the steps of problem solving to reach a solution to this problem.
   - Decide on whether there is anyone who can help them with their problem (if they need it).
   - Comment on how they might think differently about the problem.
   - Complete a short problem solving quiz (page 49 of student book) on their own problem solving approach (problem orientation).
Session Five: In Review

Thoughts

Think ⊗ Feel ⊗ Do

Event ➔ Thought ➔ Feeling ➔ Action

When an event happens to us, it is our thoughts and interpretations of that event, and not the event itself, that leads us to feel certain emotions and act in particular ways.

Different people can have very different reactions to the same event or situation because they THINK differently about it.

We can’t control many events that happen to us, but we can change what we feel and do by changing what we think.

You can train yourself to stop and listen to your thoughts.

If we think negatively and unhelpfully about things that happen to us or about ourselves, then we will feel bad and we may react in ways that are not helpful.

Then you can try to come up with alternative more helpful thoughts.
The steps of problem solving

BEN, looking at his keys locked inside his car:

“Problems. Everyone’s got ’em. Today we’re going to look at problems and how to deal with them. You might think ‘everything’s cool at the moment, I don’t have any problems right now.’ That’s great! But I bet you don’t realise you do deal with problems every day – often without noticing. Thinking about what to eat for lunch or what to buy someone for a birthday present are day-to-day problems that we have to solve.

Problems come in all sizes: world-size problems, like war and global warming; local, social problems like unemployment and crime; and then there are personal problems we all experience, like disagreements with friends and family, boyfriend and girlfriend issues, the stress of exams or locking the keys in the car.

The thing about dealing with a problem is that it’s really good to think about the issue in a structured way so you can make a well thought out decision. And you’ll see it’s pretty easy – because there are a few simple steps to take.

Step 1: ask, what exactly is the problem?

JESS, talking to an interviewer.

“Well... all my friends started smoking because they – they think it’s cool. But they sort of want me to smoke as well. I don’t really want to. I tried and I didn’t like it... but I feel really different and left out if I don’t smoke with them.”

BEN

“So. That’s a problem. The next step is to make a list of as many possible solutions to the problem as you can think of – even if they’re a bit ‘out there.’

So step 2: ask, what are my options?”

JESS

“Well... I could just go along with them and smoke. I could lie and tell them I’m allergic to tobacco? I could not be friends with them any more. Or I could just tell them I just really don’t like smoking.”

BEN

“Well, now you have to think through what would happen if you tried out each of your options. Think about the effect each choice would have on you and on other people, right away, and also in the future.

In other words, step 3: ask, what are the possible consequences?

JESS

“Well – if I smoke with them I won’t... I won’t be happy with myself, and I’ll feel sick. If I leave the group, I won’t have to smoke... but I won’t have any friends, hey? If I tell them I don’t like it, then at least they’ll know how I’ll feel... they might accept it but they might think I’m a dag and not want to hang around with me.”

BEN

“After weighing up all the possible solutions and their consequences, you have to choose the solution that you think will work best.

In other words, step 4: make a decision.”

JESS

“Okay. I thought about it. I really didn’t want to smoke, and I didn’t want to lose my friends, so I decided to talk to them and tell them how I felt. I was pretty nervous. But it wasn’t as bad as I thought. They paid out a bit on me at first, but they don’t pressure me any more ... and I still go out with them.”

BEN

“And that’s the last step: do and review.

Now, every problem is different, and there’s never a guarantee that things will always turn out right. But at least if you follow these five steps, you’ll have given it your best shot – and we all learn from what we do, even when we make mistakes. But, the more you practise these five steps, the better you will become at solving all different kinds of problems, big and small. Now, we’re going to show you a bit of a problem that is happening...

[Video of Sam or Bec’s dilemma shown here]

Problem, hey? Time for you to problem solve! Remember the five steps: ask, what is the problem? what are my options? what are the consequences? make a decision. Then, do and review. In the meantime, I’ve thought about my problem with my keys and I’m going to ring the auto club. See ya soon.”
Positive problem orientation — thinking right

"How'd you go? It's easier when you attack a problem logically with simple steps - and it's good to practise using those steps on a problem that's not yours! See, these steps won't work if you're not thinking right. You guys already know that if your self-talk is negative and unhelpful, you won't feel good about yourself - and you'll make poorer decisions. I don't need to tell you that changing your thoughts to positive, helpful ones can make you feel better and really change your interactions with other people. I mean, I felt like an idiot locking my keys in the car, but telling myself how stupid I was didn't help me solve the problem. And you telling yourself 'This is too hard' or 'I'm useless' means you might not even try to solve the problem. And problems left alone can just get bigger and harder. You have tools now - those five steps for problem solving - and if you tell yourself 'I'll just stay calm' and 'I can do this', you might just surprise yourself.

Positive self-talk and steps to problem solving are all news you can use. But you have to be realistic, hey? Everyone fronts up problems that you just can't solve. Maybe something gets broken. Maybe you find an opportunity has passed by. Maybe someone you love dies. Some things you can't change. But you can change the way you think about the situation, and help yourself cope better. And remember, when it does all get too hard, there is always someone to turn to.

Talk to someone you can trust, or if you're worried about being embarrassed or about people knowing your problem, there are confidential telephone and internet helplines. And sometimes, just sharing a problem with someone else can make you feel better. So, if you have a problem, first get your head right, then try to solve it with the five steps, but if it's too hard, talk to someone.

Remember, everyone has problems. It's how you deal with them that counts."
Gone skating
Jake is baby-sitting the neighbour’s kid Benny who is ten. He has done it a few times before and the money is pretty handy. Not long after Benny’s parents leave, there’s a knock at the door and Jake’s best friend Ackers walks in with his cousin Phil. Ackers has brought Phil around specially to meet Jake, promising him that he’d get Jake to go down to the skate park and they could exchange some moves. Phil is a competition skater, like Jake. Ackers is putting pressure on Jake and reckons that Jake could bring Benny along. “What’s the harm?”, says Ackers, “We can all look out for him – Benny’s gonna love it – and we’ll be back before it’s dark anyway”. Benny’s eyes light up.…

High expectations
Selma lives with her Mum and two little brothers. Her life is pretty busy: athletics on Friday nights and Wednesdays after school, guitar lessons on Thursday night, working at Maccas on Saturdays, junior president of the SRC, not to mention school work! Plus her Mum depends on her a lot to help out with her brothers. Lately it’s been getting a bit much and Selma’s getting just so tired, and it doesn’t help that everyone is expecting her to play a big part in the school musical. Last year it was massive - a big success all round and Selma was the lead. The lead is hers again this year if she wants it. All her friends are in it - singing, dancing, playing in the band, or doing back stage. They are all excited because the whole group will be involved. Everybody’s talking like she’s definitely in it. She is feeling so pressured this year she is not sure that she wants to be in it. But how can she disappoint everyone…?

The party
Ruby’s parents are away over Saturday night (her Dad’s best mate’s 40th birthday party), so rather than Ruby going off to Nanas (who hasn’t been well lately), they all agreed that it would be cool if her best friend Niki could come and stay over with her. It’s all sorted, with mobile phone contact and they would be back by midday the next day anyway. About 6 o’clock the “mobile party” arrives: Sally and her boyfriend Dave; Misha and her boyfriend Mo; and friends of his, Paul and Jamie. They have some UDLs and some Jack Daniels. This is not what Ruby planned. In fact she had deliberately kept quiet about her parents going away - Misha’s fun in small doses, but she has a well-earned reputation for drinking and going stupid, plus Ruby doesn’t know the other boys…