

Module Five: Problem-Solving Maintenance Factors

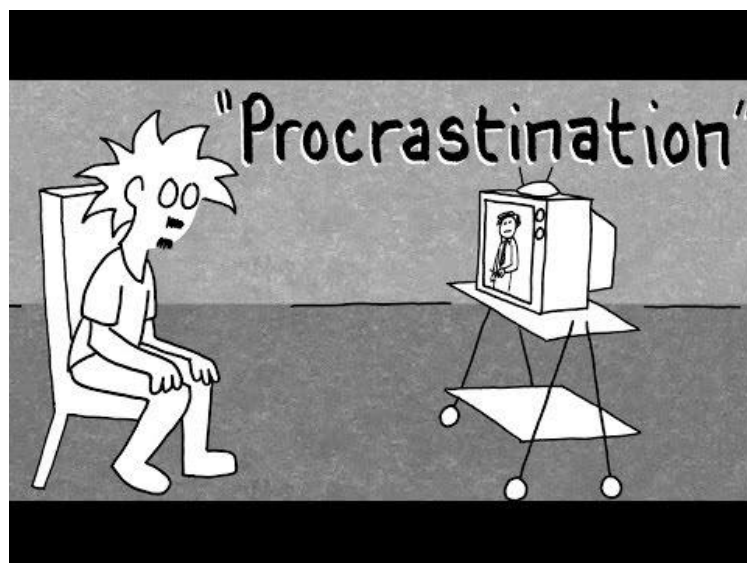
This module will cover:

- Procrastination and avoidance – what they look like, why they occur, and how they get reinforced in people experiencing perfectionism.
- A recap of other problem behaviours that keep perfectionism going.
- How to use problem-solving to address behaviours that maintain perfectionism.

Procrastination and avoidance

We have already mentioned procrastination a few times in this program. As a reminder, when we are talking about **procrastination**, we are referring to delaying or putting off something you've committed to do, even though doing so has negative consequences. It is a type of emotion regulation strategy – that is, people do it because it helps them to feel in control of their emotions, or more able to cope with them.

The following short video shows you what procrastination can look like. Clicking on the thumbnail will open the video in your browser, but if you can't access it that way, you can also reach it from this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P785j15Tzk>

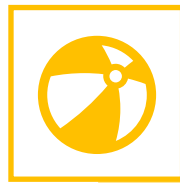


Here are some examples of common procrastination behaviours:



This is still productive...

- Cleaning
- Tidying
- Cooking
- Doing lower-priority tasks
- Doing lots of "preparation" (e.g., making to-do lists)



This is more fun!

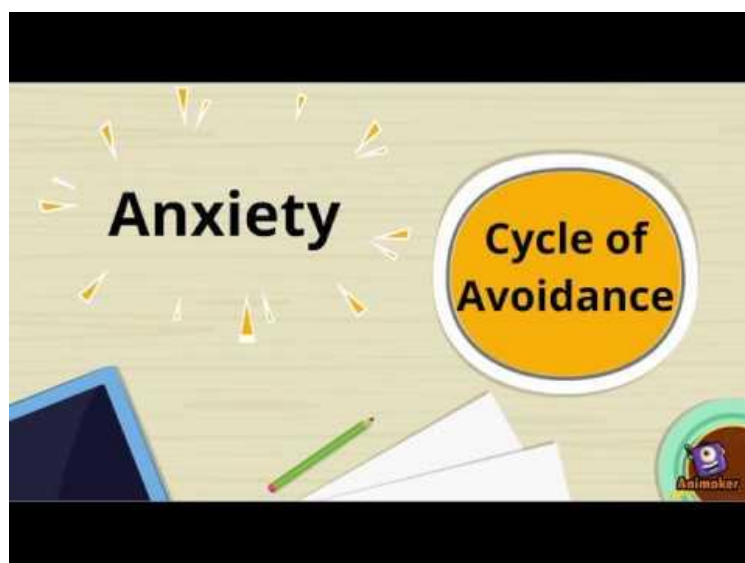
- Eating
- Watching TV or movies
- Going on social media
- Playing video games
- Socialising
- Practising sports

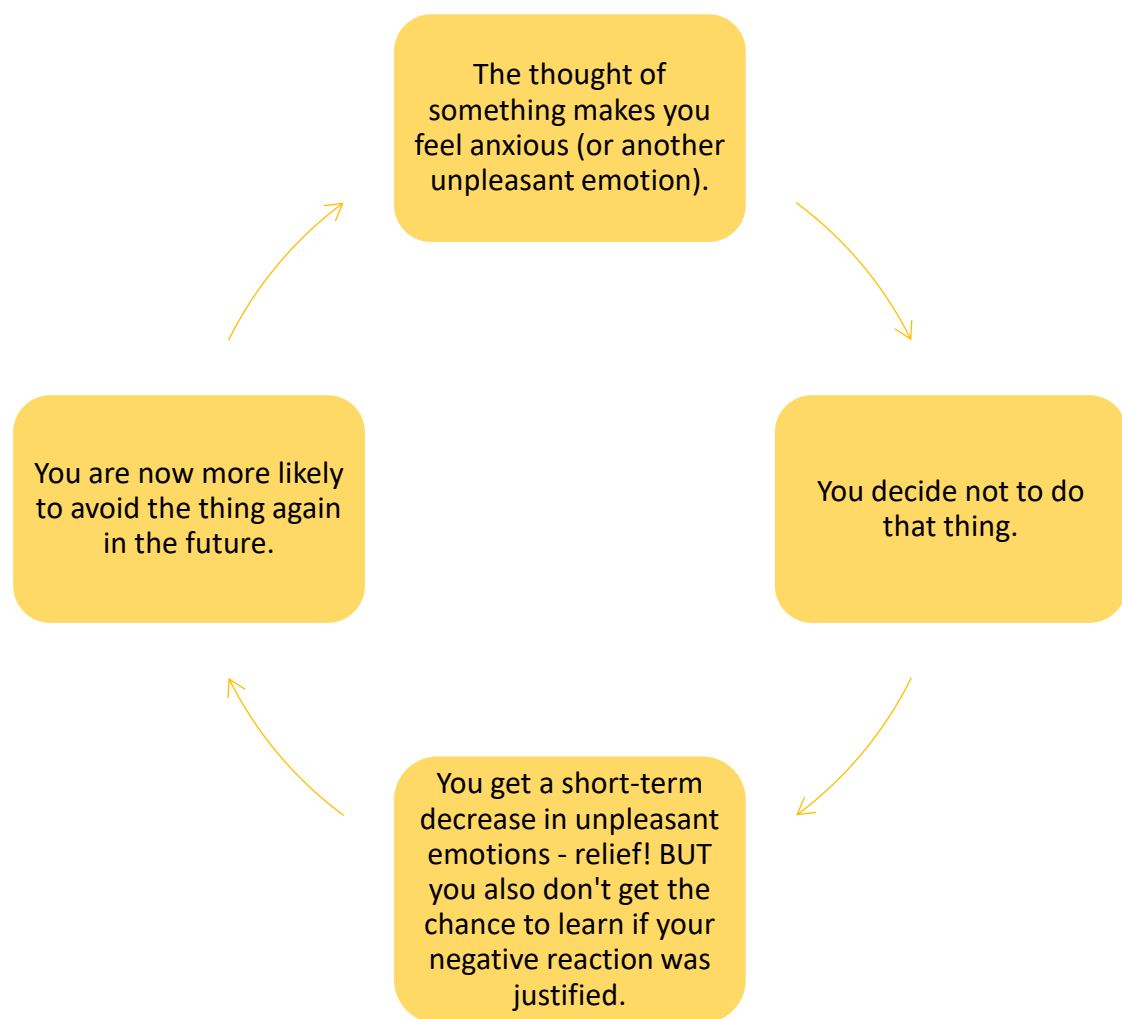
Procrastination is a type of avoidance. **Avoidance** is not doing something because the thought of doing it triggers an unpleasant emotion. It is especially common in people experiencing anxiety. Examples of avoidance behaviours you might see in your child are quitting a hobby, pretending to be sick to get out of an event, leaving an event early, not doing their schoolwork, or not wanting to spend time with a particular friend.

The maintenance cycle of procrastination and avoidance

The following video explains how avoidance (which includes procrastination) can become a maintaining cycle. Clicking on the thumbnail will open the video in your browser, but if you can't access it that way, you can also reach it from this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e27Bv9IMC0w>





In the case of procrastination or avoidance of tasks that need to be done, there are a couple more things that happen:

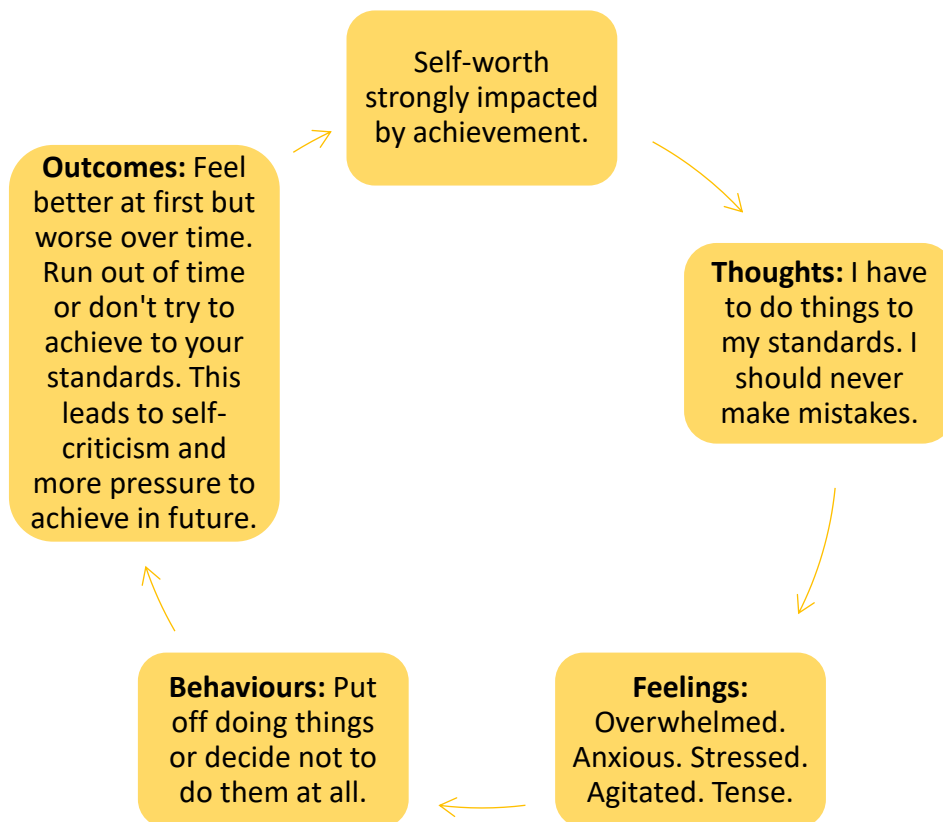
1 It can reduce unpleasant emotions in the short-term BUT these emotions increase in the long-term because of the frustration and anxiety associated with not getting the task done.

2 If you choose to do pleasant activities as part of procrastination or avoidance, this is likely to produce pleasant emotions at first. However, once again, the increase in pleasant feelings is short-lived because the task that was procrastinated or avoided remains undone.



Key point: avoidance and procrastination mean short-term gain for long-term pain.

There is also a feedback loop between procrastination, avoidance, and perfectionism, which we saw in one of the maintenance models from Module 2:



Note: A common trap people fall into with procrastination is “waiting for motivation” or “waiting to be in the right headspace” to do the task. This comes from the idea that action comes from motivation. Often, it’s the other way around: we get motivation from doing things! It can be helpful to find a way to get a “quick win” to increase motivation.



Does your child procrastinate? Have a look at the list on the following page and tick off any areas where you notice your child procrastinates. Try to come up with a reason why you think they might procrastinate in that area – here are some example reasons:

- They aren’t sure if they would be able to do it well enough.
- They’re worried that they would fail at it.
- They think it would take too long.
- It feels overwhelming to get started on it.
- They might want the excuse of having “not had enough time” if they don’t do as well as they would like.
- It just doesn’t sound fun to them.

Area	Example	Tick box	Why do they procrastinate?
Social	<i>Put off phoning a friend</i>		
Cleanliness, neatness	<i>Delay cleaning their room</i>		
Appearance	<i>Delay brushing their hair</i>		
Academic	<i>Put off doing their homework</i>		
Hobbies	<i>Postpone music practice</i>		
Other (enter):			

Other behaviours that maintain perfectionism

Before we explain problem-solving, we want to recap some of the other behaviour-based maintaining factors for perfectionism, which can also be targeted with problem-solving:

- Repeated checking.
- Repeating tasks.
- Making very detailed lists.
- Tunnel vision on meeting standards in 1-2 areas to the deficit of other areas of life:
 - Not doing things for enjoyment.
 - Having very narrow interests.
 - Missing out on other things due to trying to meet standards.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a versatile strategy that can be used to address all the behaviours we have discussed in this module, as well as other problems in life. It involves six steps:

1

Identify the problem: Try to describe it in an objective and specific way.

2

Come up with possible solutions:

- a. Brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem.
- b. Keep listing any idea you can think of, without judging it as good/bad.
- c. Underline two to three solutions that seem the best or the most feasible.

3

Decide on a solution:

- Consider the pros and cons of the top two or three solutions, based on how feasible they are and how likely they are to solve the problem.
- Choose the solution that seems best, based on the balance of pros and cons.

4

Plan the chosen solution:

- Make a list of action steps that need to be done to enact the solution.
- Include details of who does the step, what they do, and when they do it.

5

Carry out the solution.

6

Evaluate the result: What was the effect of carrying out the solution?

Here's an example of what this could look like:

Step 1: Identify the problem

I need to practise the guitar piece that I'll be playing at the concert this weekend. I want to play it through ten times to make sure that I know it. But, when I try to start, I get distracted and end up playing video games instead.

Step 2: Come up with possible solutions

- Don't go to the concert.
- Ask someone to practise with me.
- Practise playing the song three times, and reward myself with 10 minutes of gaming afterwards (have to set a timer to make sure I don't go over 10 minutes).
- Hide my gaming console until I've practised.
- Play games tonight but take tomorrow off school to practise the guitar.
- Commit to practising playing the song once, and see how I feel afterwards.

Step 3: Decide on a solution

It would be great if I could play the song three times and then have a break, but even the thought of practising it three times makes me feel stressed and like I don't want to do it. If I at least commit to practising it once, then that's one more practise run than I might have done otherwise!

Step 4: Plan the chosen solution

- I get my guitar and sheet music from my room (at 4pm).
- I go into the living room, away from the gaming console in my bedroom.
- I practise playing the song once.
- I ask one of my parents for a high five straight after I finish playing it one time.
- I decide after the high five whether to play it again.

Step 5: Carry out the solution**Step 6: Evaluate the result**

Once I started playing, I actually enjoyed it and stopped thinking about video games. It was fun to go and get high fives after each time I played the song – it started to feel more like a game and less like a chore! I ended up practising playing it five times and I feel ready to play it at the concert.



What problem are you facing right now that you could use problem-solving for? It doesn't have to be anything big! It could be something as little as deciding what to wear to a social event this week or planning when to go grocery shopping. The important thing is to practise the steps, so you know how to help your child through this process for homework. Have a go at problem-solving using the handout '*Problem Solved!*', which you will also complete with your child for homework.

That concludes the fifth module! We highlight here some key messages:

Key points from Module 5

- Procrastination and avoidance can be self-reinforcing due to them temporarily relieving unpleasant feelings, in some cases giving a short-term increase in pleasant feelings, and because they prevent having experiences that contradict the fears that drive procrastination and avoidance.
- Any emotional benefits of procrastination and avoidance are short-lived and serve to maintain anxiety/unpleasant emotions in the long-term.
- Repeated checking, repeating tasks, detailed list-making, and tunnel vision on 1-2 areas of life likewise maintain perfectionism. Like procrastination and avoidance, these behaviours can be targeted through problem-solving.
- Problem-solving is a versatile strategy that can be used to address the maintaining behaviours for perfectionism that we discussed in this module as well as to help work through other problems.



How do these key points relate to your child? Write any reflections you have here. The reflection could include things you learned or things you already knew but have a greater understanding or appreciation of.



Module Five Homework Exercises

This module's homework has three parts.

First: If appropriate to your child, teach them about procrastination and avoidance behaviours using the information sheet titled '*I'll Do It Later...*', which they can read with you.

Second: Help your child to learn about problem-solving, using the following handouts:

1. The information sheet titled '*What's the Problem?*', which your child can read with you to learn about how to do problem-solving.
2. The worksheet titled '*Adam's Problem*', which your child can complete with you to practise problem-solving for a situation being faced by a fictional peer (you might like to complete this worksheet too, so you and your child can talk about your answers together!).
 - Kindly be aware that two variations of the '*Adam's Problem*' worksheet are available. The first version includes examples and language designed for children who lean toward the younger end of the 7–12-year-old age range. We encourage you to exercise your judgment in selecting the version that best suits your child's needs.



Third: Throughout the coming week, look for an opportunity to apply problem-solving to a situation in your child's life – no matter how small the problem may be. Use the worksheet you used during the module – the one titled '*Problem Solved!*' – to help your child go through the steps of problem-solving for a situation of their own.

Important Note: It is not necessary to complete the module and homework exercises in one sitting. Dependent on your child's needs, you may want to work through the module and exercises in blocks throughout the week.



Problem Solved!

What's the problem you need to solve? Write it in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the user to write their problem.



What ideas do you have for fixing the problem?

- Write down every idea you can think of.
- Don't worry if the ideas sound silly – just write them all!
- Once you've written down all your ideas, draw a line under two or three ideas that seem like the best ones.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing down ideas.



Which idea will you pick? Write about the good parts and bad parts about your best two or three ideas. Is one idea more likely to work? Draw a line under it in the box below. Give this one idea a try and see how it goes.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing a response to the prompt above.



How will you use the idea? Make a list of steps in the box below.
Include:

- Who will do each step
- What they will do
- When they will do it

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing a list of steps.



Now, it's time to go and do your plan – use the steps above to do it!

After you've done your plan – did your idea work? Write what happened in the box below.

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I'll Do It Later...

Have you ever needed to do something but thought “I’ll do it later...”?

Sometimes, we put things off when we don’t feel like doing them. Other times, we try not to do them at all!

Putting things off

There are lots of reasons why someone might decide to do an important thing later, instead of right now:

- They’re worried about whether they can do the thing well.
- They’re scared they might muck it up.
- They think it will take too long to do.
- The idea of starting makes them feel stressed.
- They would rather do something else.



When people put things off, they do something else instead, like:



- Cleaning up.
 - Eating.
 - Watching TV or movies.
 - Going on social media.
 - Reading a book.
 - Playing video games.
 - Making lists of things to do.
 - Working on something else that's less important.
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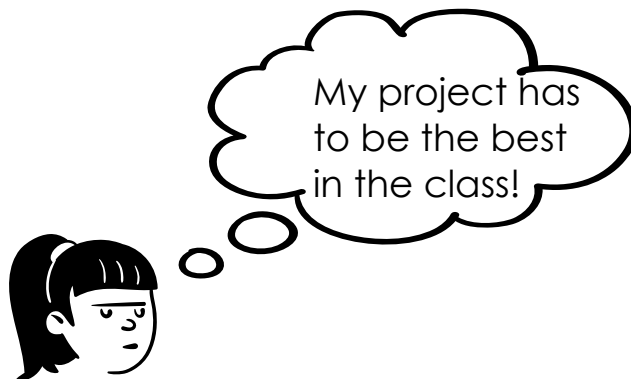
When we put things off, we are planning to do them later. Maybe we are thinking that right now isn't the "right time" to do the thing.

But, sometimes, we never feel ready to do the thing! Then we end up doing it in a rush. Or maybe we don't ever do it...

Avoiding things

When we decide not to do something important at all, we are **avoiding** doing that thing. Often, we avoid something because when we **think** about doing it, we **feel** something that we don't like to feel. We can use **think, feel, do** to help us understand this!

Lucy has a science project due at school next week. She **thinks**...



This thought makes Lucy **feel** worried – what if hers isn't the best project?

Because of that feeling, what Lucy **does** is watch videos on YouTube instead of working on her project.

What's the big problem?

Maybe you're wondering "what's the big deal?".

When Lucy decided to watch YouTube videos instead of working on her project, it did make her feel less anxious at first, and she had fun.

But those nice feelings didn't last...

Now, it's the day that the science project is due. Lucy has spent all week watching YouTube videos after school. She hasn't started her project.

What Lucy thinks now is...



This thought makes Lucy feel **very** worried and sad. And, at school that day, she has to tell her teacher that she hasn't done the project.

Do you see the problem now?

Putting things off or avoiding them might make us feel **a little better** at first. But later, we feel **a lot worse** because we don't get things done!

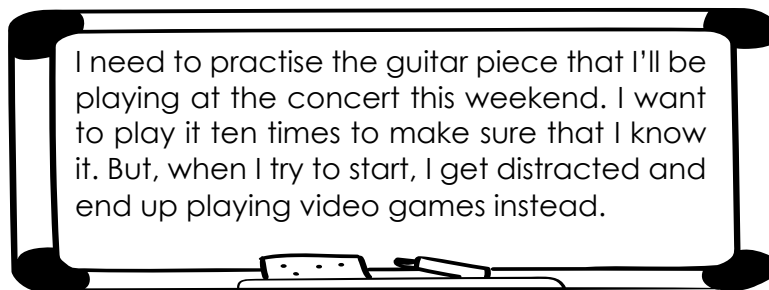
What's the Problem?

We all have problems sometimes. Maybe we want to stop arguing with a friend. Or we're having trouble learning something.

We can use **problem-solving** to help us! There are six steps to problem-solving. Let's learn about them now.

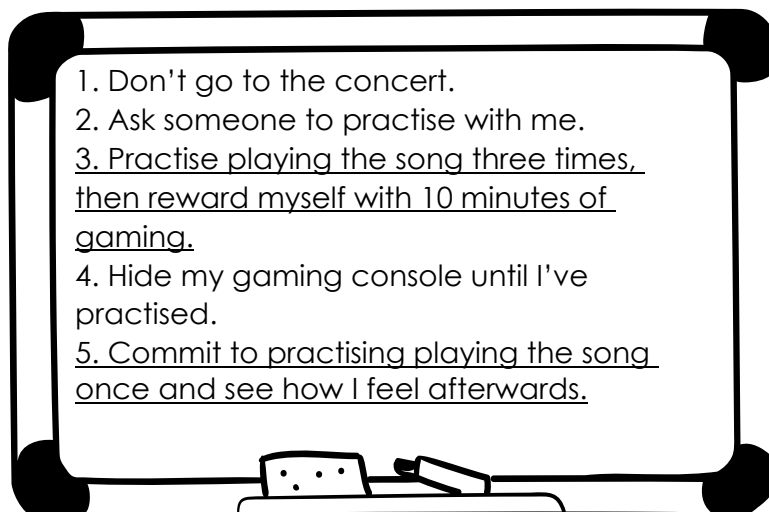
Step 1: Write down the problem

We start by writing the problem down.



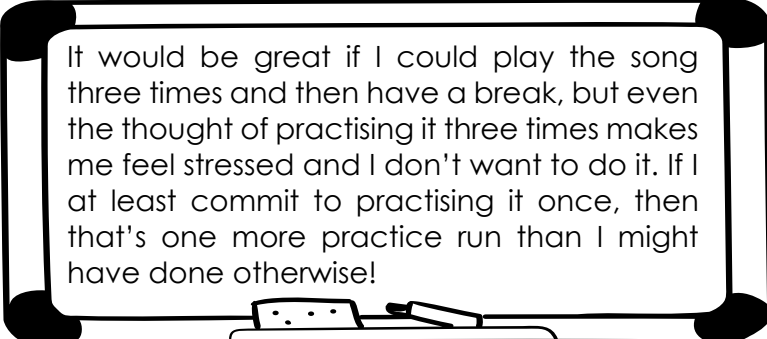
Step 2: Write down ideas that might fix the problem

Next, we think of lots of ideas for how to fix the problem. We write down all our ideas – even if some of them seem silly! Then, we pick two or three ideas that seem like the best ones. We draw a line under those ideas.



Step 3: Pick one idea to try

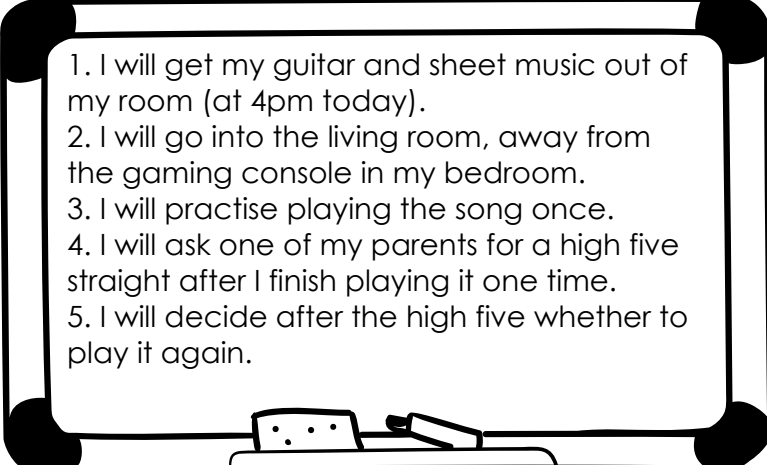
Now, we think about the good parts and bad parts about each idea that we put a line under. Is one idea easier to do? Is one idea more likely to work? When we're done, we pick just one idea to try.



It would be great if I could play the song three times and then have a break, but even the thought of practising it three times makes me feel stressed and I don't want to do it. If I at least commit to practising it once, then that's one more practice run than I might have done otherwise!

Step 4: Make a plan for how to use the idea you picked

We make a list of steps that need to be done to use the idea we chose. We may think about **who** needs to do things, **what** they will do, and **when** they will do it.

- 
1. I will get my guitar and sheet music out of my room (at 4pm today).
 2. I will go into the living room, away from the gaming console in my bedroom.
 3. I will practise playing the song once.
 4. I will ask one of my parents for a high five straight after I finish playing it one time.
 5. I will decide after the high five whether to play it again.

Step 5: Do the idea we picked, using our plan

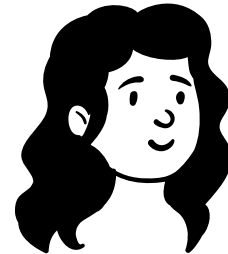
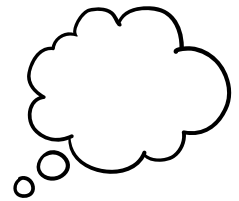
We do what we decided we would do! We use the plan that we made to help us use our idea.



Step 6: Think about the results

After we do what was in the plan, we think about what happened.

- Did the idea work?
- Did we learn anything?
- Would we do anything different next time?



We finish by writing down our thoughts about what happened.



Yay – now you know how to use problem-solving!



Adam's Problem

Do you remember Adam? He's a 8-year-old boy who enjoys building block towers. Now that you've learned about problem-solving, can you help Adam solve a problem?

Adam was asked to build the tallest colorful block tower that he could. Every time Adam tries to stack the blocks high, he thinks, "What if my tower falls down?" This thought makes him feel worried.

Instead of building the tower, Adam starts making a long list of all the steps he thinks he needs to follow to make the perfect tower. He spends a lot of time writing down every step, but even after making the list, he still feels worried about his tower. When he looks at the long list of steps, he becomes even more worried because it seems like there are so many things to remember.



What is the problem Adam needs to solve? Write it in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing the problem Adam needs to solve.

What are your ideas for how Adam could fix his problem? Write them in the box below.

- Write down every idea you can think of
- Don't worry if the ideas sound silly– just write them all!



- Once you've written down all your ideas, draw a line under two or three ideas that seem like the best ones

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing down ideas.



Which idea should Adam pick? Write about the good parts and bad parts about your best two or three ideas. Is one idea more likely to work? Draw a line under it in the box below. This is the idea you will pick for Adam to try to use.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing a response to the prompt above.



How can Adam carry out the idea you picked? Make a list of steps in the box below. You might want to include:

- Who will do each step
- What they will do
- When they will do it

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the user to write a list of steps to carry out the idea.



Adam's Problem



Do you remember Adam? He's a 12-year-old boy who enjoys drawing. Now that you've learned about problem-solving, can you help Adam solve a problem?

Adam has an assignment due for art class this week. He is supposed to draw a picture of someone in his family. Every time Adam tries to draw the picture, he thinks "what if I don't draw it well?", and this makes him feel worried. So, instead of drawing the picture, he writes a long list of all the steps to take to draw the picture. But, even after spending two hours writing the list, he still feels worried about the drawing! And, when he looks at the list, he feels even more worried, because he can see how many steps are left to go.

What is the problem Adam needs to solve? Write it in the box below.



What are your ideas for how Adam could fix his problem? Write them in the box below.

- Write down every idea you can think of
- Don't worry if the ideas sound silly– just write them all!
- Once you've written down all your ideas, draw a line under two or three ideas that seem like the best ones

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Which idea should Adam pick? Write about the good parts and bad parts about your best two or three ideas. Is one idea more likely to work? Draw a line under it in the box below. This is the idea you will pick for Adam to try to use.

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How can Adam carry out the idea you picked? Make a list of steps in the box below. You might want to include:

- Who will do each step
- What they will do
- When they will do it

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for writing a list of steps to carry out an idea.