

Lifestyle Coach Facilitation Guide: Core

Session 9: Problem Solving

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Background and Preparation

Preparation Checklist

Materials

These are the materials you will use during Session 9.

- Participant handouts for Session 9:
 - Session 9 Overview
 - Step 1: Describe the Problem in Detail
 - Step 2: Brainstorm Your Options
 - Step 3: Pick One Option to Try
 - Step 4: Make a Positive Action Plan
 - Step 5: Try It!
 - Problem Solving Practice
 - To-Do Next Week

- “Food and Activity Trackers” for Session 9

- Lifestyle Coach’s Log

- Balance scale

- Name tags or tents from previous week, if still needed

- Flip chart or chalk board supplies

Before you begin

- Choose a private place to weigh participants.

- If still needed, prepare name tags, or set up the classroom with name tents from the previous week.

- Have your Lifestyle Coach’s Log ready for weigh-ins.

Lifestyle Coach Brief

Learning objectives

At the close of this session, the participants will be able to –

- List and describe five steps to problem solving.
- Apply the five problem solving steps to resolve a problem he or she has with eating less fat and fewer calories or being more active.

Session 9 overview

Session 9 continues the focus on understanding how healthy habits are created and maintained. It provides participants with the tools they need to understand and address the barriers they face as they work toward their goals of healthy eating and regular physical activity. They need steps for solving problems in order to make the changes to their lifestyles permanent.

Session 9 is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Weekly Progress and Review (10 minutes)

Part 2: Five Steps to Problem Solving (40 minutes)

We teach the problem solving steps using as an example “a day in the life of Sarah.” Because of a series of events during her day (including thoughts, feelings, and behaviors), Sarah ends up eating a large portion of cookies. The class will learn and discuss five steps to problem solving: 1) describe the problem in detail, 2) brainstorm options, 3) pick one option to try, 4) make a positive action plan for the chosen option, and 5) try the plan.

Discussion will then turn to any problems participants have related to eating and physical activity. Use one participant’s problem to practice the five steps. Participants are instructed to apply the steps to a problem they are having before the next session.

Part 3: Wrap Up and To-Do List (10 minutes)

Key messages

These are the key messages for this session. They should be reinforced from time to time throughout this program.

- Problem solving is a process. Do not give up when you cannot come up with a solution immediately. And do not give up when your first plan to solve the problem does not work. It often takes many tries to find a solution.
- Problems are inevitable, but most problems related to eating less and being more active can be solved.
- Following a procedure for solving problems helps us see that we are not powerless to change our situation.

Classroom Presentation

Part 1: Weekly Progress and Review

Estimated time: 10 minutes

Weigh In

Notes

Weigh participants privately, and have them record their weight on their “How Am I Doing? Weight” chart.

Record participants weight in your Lifestyle Coach’s Log.

Distribute:

- Session 9 handouts to insert in the Participant Notebooks.
- Session 9 “Food and Activity Trackers.”
- Session 7 “Food and Activity Trackers” with your notes.

Collect Session 8 “Food and Activity Trackers.”

Week in Review



Refer participants to their “How Am I Doing? Physical Activity” charts.

Present: Write in your minutes of physical activity for last week.

Ask: Does anyone need help recording his or her activity on the chart?

Assist participants where needed.

Present: Last week, we studied the cues that make us eat and be inactive. We looked for ways to replace the problem cues with positive cues. You came up with a plan for replacing your own negative cues with positive ones.

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Ask: How did everyone do? What about physical activity cues? Did you have any problems? Any volunteers want to share their experiences?

Open responses.

Present: What could you do differently next week?

Open responses.

Address any issues or confusion about what they were supposed to do last week.

This Week

Notes

Present: This week we will –

- Talk about the five problem solving steps to help you reach your healthy eating and physical activity goals.
- Give you the opportunity to apply these steps to a problem that is getting in the way of you meeting your goals.

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Part 2: Five Steps to Problem Solving

Estimated time: 40 minutes

Introduction

Notes

Present: Throughout the last eight sessions, you learned a lot about how to eat healthy and to be active. If applied consistently, the strategies you learned will help you prevent or delay type 2 diabetes. They may also help you lose weight and be healthier in general.

Making these changes over 8 sessions, with lots of group support, can be different from making these changes a lasting part of your lifestyle. Many factors can get in the way of permanently changing habits.

So, for the next several sessions we will focus on making these changes a lasting part of your lifestyle. We will discuss –

- Negative thoughts and how to overcome them.
- Slips (when you temporarily do not follow your eating or physical activity plan) and your reactions to slips.
- Stress.
- Social cues (what other people say and do).

All of these factors can get in the way of healthy eating and being physically active.

Ask: What are some factors that get in the way of changing unhealthy habits?

Open responses.

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Note to Lifestyle Coach

Name several problems that the participants have already discussed at earlier sessions. Below are some possible examples:

- You wanted to go for a walk, but it was too cold.
- You wanted to eat less fat, but your children wanted you to buy potato chips.
- You don't feel it is safe to walk in the evening.
- You're reluctant to walk when it's dark. (This example is most appropriate during winter).

Present: It is inevitable that problems will occur, but problems can usually be solved. Today we are going to talk about a process for solving problems, and we will work on problem solving skills throughout the rest of the program.

Step 1: Describe the Problem

Notes

Present: This problem solving process has five steps:

1. Describe the problem.
2. Brainstorm your options for solving the problem.
3. Pick one option to try.
4. Make a positive action plan to put the chosen option into effect.
5. Try it.



Refer participants to “Step 1: Describe the Problem in Detail” in the Participant Notebook.

Present: You have a separate handout for each step.

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STEP 1: Describe the problem.

First, describe the problem in detail. Be specific about the —

- Kinds of food you eat that are high in fat and calories (e.g., pastries, red meat).
- Situations in which you eat these foods.
- Circumstances associated with eating these foods (including thoughts, feelings, and behaviors).

For example, instead of saying “I eat too much fat,” say “I eat high-fat desserts when I go to my mother-in-law’s house. She gets her feelings hurt if I don’t eat the cookies she baked, and my spouse gets upset because I upset my mother-in-law.”

This series of events and thoughts is called an “action (or behavior) chain.” In this case, it includes such factors as —

- Food or activity cues (as we discussed last session): the situations that cue us to eat or be inactive.
 - Not wanting to hurt mother-in-law’s feelings.
 - Not wanting to cause an argument with spouse.
- Friends and relatives who do not support our efforts to lose weight and be more active.
 - Unsupportive mother-in-law.
 - Unsupportive spouse.
- Thoughts or feelings that get in the way.
 - Perhaps this person has defeating thoughts such as “I can’t stand up for myself, so I’ll just eat the cookies.”
 - Perhaps being at mother-in-law’s house makes this person feel bored, stressed, lonely, or angry.

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Present: It may seem complicated to look at a problem in this much detail. However, breaking a behavior chain into the small events that led up to the behavior makes the problem we're trying to solve less overwhelming and more manageable. As with other strategies for a healthy lifestyle, this one requires practice.

Continue: Let's look at another example of an action chain.

Sarah is a busy woman with a job and a family.

Yesterday she was extremely busy at work and she did not eat lunch because she did not have time to go out. In the afternoon, her boss was critical and demanding, and Sarah felt stressed and anxious.

At the end of the day, Sarah went home tired, upset, and hungry.

Ask: What do you think Sarah did?

Open responses.

Continue: She went right to the kitchen. She immediately saw a package of cookies on the counter, and before she knew it, she had eaten about eight of them.

Let's look at what led to Sarah eating the cookies – the action chain. Doing so allows us to realize that the problem of Sarah eating cookies goes deeper and is more complex than it seems at first glance.

Sure, Sarah ate the cookies, and little can be done after the fact. But the links in the chain of events that led to her eating the cookies (not eating lunch, becoming stressed) must be dealt with so that the chain reaction that led to Sarah's overeating does not happen again.

Uncovering an action chain will help us to find the “weakest links” in the chain. When we find the weak links, we can begin the process of breaking them. By naming each link in the chain, we begin to see places where we might be able to break the chain.

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Step 2: Brainstorm Your Options

Notes

Present: Step 1 is to describe the problem and action chain in detail. In this example, Sarah skipped lunch, got stressed at work, came home hungry, and ate a lot of cookies. Let's move on to Step 2.



Refer participants to the "Step 2: Brainstorm Your Options" handout in the Participant Notebook.

STEP 2: Brainstorm your options for solving the problem.

What are all of the possible solutions to the problem? Let the ideas pour out, no matter how extreme or silly they may seem. Anything goes; the more ideas the better.

Ask: What kinds of things could Sarah do differently to avoid eating cookies the moment she arrives home?

Open responses.

Offer these ideas:

- She could choose *not* to buy the cookies (remove a food cue).
- She could work through her stress before leaving work, by talking with her boss or getting support from a co-worker.
- She could bring lunch or keep healthy snacks at her desk, so that she does not have to go out for food.
- She could go for a walk to unwind or do some activity she enjoys as soon as she gets home (e.g., gardening, art work, or even cleaning out a closet).
- She could quit her job and find a less stressful one.
- She could start her own business, so she would be the boss.

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Present: By brainstorming, you will see that you are not powerless to change your situation. Just look at how many options Sarah has.

Step 3: Pick One Option to Try

Notes

Present: After you have brainstormed your options, it is time for Step 3: Pick One Option to Try.



Refer participants to the “Step 3: Pick One Option to Try” handout in the Participant Notebook.

STEP 3: Pick one option to try.

Weigh the pros and cons of each option and choose one, or a combination of several, to try.

Be sure to choose the one you think has the best chance of working, one that you are able to do and are willing to do. In other words, be realistic. You should be reasonably confident that you will succeed.

It is also helpful to break as many links in the action chain as you can, as early as you can.

For example, let's say Sarah chooses the option of bringing her lunch to work so that she does not arrive home hungry. That might work even if she had cookies in the house.

Or she might choose not to buy the cookies so that when she arrives home hungry, she cannot eat cookies. She'll have to eat something else (more healthy than cookies, let's hope).

A third possibility is that Sarah might choose both options. Obviously, by choosing both, she increases her chances of success. Even if she is hungry when she arrives home, she won't be as hungry as if she had not eaten lunch, which means the temptation to overeat anything will not be as great. In addition, if she is hungry but has not bought cookies, she is more or less forced to choose a lower-calorie snack (such as fruit).

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Step 4: Make a Positive Action Plan

Notes



Refer participants to the “Step 4: Make a Positive Action Plan” handout in the Participant Notebook.

STEP 4: Make a positive action plan to put the chosen option (or options) into effect.

Present: The fourth step is to make a positive action plan for the option that you choose. Spell out exactly –

- What you will do.
- When you will do it.
- What you need to do first.
- How you will handle any roadblocks that arise.

Consider the following to make success more likely:

- Involve someone else.
- Make your plan fun and enjoyable.
- Write your plan, and post it in a prominent place in your home.

Present: Let’s say that **Sarah** chooses the option of packing a lunch for work. In her action plan, Sarah decides to –

- Take lunch two days each week (Tuesday, Thursday).
- Shop for the lunch ingredients ahead of time.
- Make the lunch the night before.

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Furthermore, she recognizes a potential roadblock:

- She may forget to take the lunch with her.

In case she forgets, she comes up with an alternative plan:

- She looks for (and finds) a place where she can buy a healthy sandwich and that has quick service.
- She keeps healthy snacks at her desk.

Finally, to make her success more likely, she eats lunch with a colleague who has also brought lunch.

Present: So right there, Sarah figures out when she is going to take a lunch, when she will buy the ingredients for lunch, and when she will prepare lunch. She also comes up with plan for what she will do if she forgets her lunch. And, to make success more likely, she chooses to eat with a friend.

Step 5: Try It!

Notes

Present: What is the fifth step for all of this thinking and planning?



Refer participants to the "Step 5: Try It!" handout in the Participant Notebook.

STEP 5: Try it!

Present: See how it goes. If it works, terrific. If not, you can problem solve again. Use what you have learned to make a new action plan.

Remember, problem solving is a process. Do not give up. It often takes many tries to find a solution.

Present: So, let's review. Can you tell me the five steps to problem solving?

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Open responses.

Review:

1. Describe the problem.
2. Brainstorm your options for solving the problem.
3. Pick one option to try.
4. Make a positive action plan to put the chosen option into effect.
5. Try it.

Problem Solving Practice

Notes

Present: Now, let's apply this process to your experiences. I want each of you to think of a problem that you can solve using these five steps.



Refer participants to the "Problem Solving Practice" handout in the Participant Notebook.



Present: Do steps 1 through 4 using the "Problem Solving: Practice" handout.

1. Describe the problem in detail. Break it into sections. How are the sections linked?
2. Brainstorm your options.
3. Pick an option. Ask yourself "Is it likely to work?" "Can I do it?"
4. Make a positive action plan for the option you chose:
 - What you will do?
 - When and how will you get started?
 - What roadblocks might come up, and how will you handle them?
 - What will you do to make success likely?

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Also, ask for help if you need it. I am here to help you, as is the rest of the group.

Ask: Can anyone share a problem they want to solve?

Open responses.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

Work through at least one problem as a group. If the opportunity presents itself and the participants are interested and engaged, work through additional problems together.

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Part 3: Wrap Up and To-Do List

Estimated time: 10 minutes

To Do Next Week

Notes

Ask whether participants have any questions about what has been covered during this session.

For next week: practice using the five steps to solve a problem that you have related to achieving your food and activity goals.

- **Keep track** of your weight, eating, and activity. And do your best to reach your goals.
- **Try out the action plan** you created on the handout, and let us know how it went.
- **Collect menus** from your favorite restaurants, and bring them to the next session. We will use them during future discussions.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

Ask participants to name their favorite restaurants. For the next session, bring menus from those restaurants (you can find them on the Internet). Also bring copies of recipes that were modified to be healthier than the original (also available on the Internet). You could provide web addresses for participants interested in finding low-fat and low-calorie recipes. In addition, a list of low-calorie or low-fat substitutions for high-fat and high-calorie foods commonly served in restaurants would be useful.

Ask whether the participants have any questions about what was covered during this session.

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Closing

Notes

Summarize key points:

- You will always run into problems. Problems are normal.
- Using the problem solving process will help you find the best solution.
- Remember these five steps when you run into problems that are interfering with your goals.
 1. Describe the problem.
 2. Brainstorm your options for solving the problem.
 3. Pick one option to try.
 4. Make an action plan to put the chosen option into effect.
 5. Try it.
- You might not find a solution to your problem right away, but do not give up. It often takes many tries to find a solution that works.

Close: This session has given you the tools to take on problems you encounter as you work toward your goals. Next session we will focus on a real challenge when we are trying to eat healthy: eating out.

Session 10 covers ways to make sure you continue your healthy eating when you are not at home.

Ask participants whether they have any questions before closing the session.

Address questions or concerns.

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Make any announcements about time or location changes, contact information, or other issues.

After the session:

- Write notes on successes and, when necessary, recommend changes in the participants' "Food and Activity Trackers" from Session 8.
- Write the physical activity minutes recorded in the participants' "Food and Activity Trackers" in your Lifestyle Coach's Log.
- Use the Notes and Homework page at the end of this guide to write notes about the session.

