

# Session 7 Leader Guide: Problem Solving

## Objectives

In this session, the participants will:

- Learn the five steps to problem solving.
- Practice the steps using a problem the participants are experiencing now with eating less fat/calories or being more active.

## To Do Before the Session:

- If providing Food and Activity books; one per participant.
- Review Food and Activity records from last session; add comments.
- Prepare Session 7 handout for participant notebook.

## Available in the GLB Providers Portal:

<https://www.diabetesprevention.pitt.edu/my/login.aspx>

- **Guidelines for Reviewing Food and Activity Records**

## Group Sharing Time (allow at least 5 minutes)

In the last session, you learned how managing food and activity cues can help you to “take charge of what’s around you”. This will help to support your efforts to make healthy food choices and be physically active.

- Were you able to get rid of one problem food cue? Please share your experience.
- Were you able to add one positive cue for being more active? Please share your experience.
- Did taking charge of your food and activity cues help you create an environment that supported healthy eating and being active?
- Are there additional food and activity cues you would like to focus on this coming week?

Let’s take a few minutes to talk about your experiences this past week. *[Choose only a few of the following prompts to guide discussion.]*

- Overall, how did it go last week? What went well: What problems did you have? What could you do differently?
- How close did you come to your calorie and fat gram goal?

- What change did you make in your eating pattern this past week that you are most proud of?
- Were you able to follow your plan to reach your goal for minutes of planned activity during the week? How did it go? What did you learn? Were you able to make the active lifestyle choices to increase spontaneous/unstructured activity and to decrease the time you spent sitting? How did it go? What did you learn?

*[Problem solve with the participants to address any barriers.]*

*[Praise all efforts to self-monitor and to change eating and activity behaviors. Be positive and nonjudgmental. Encourage group discussion.]*

### **Session 7: The 5 Steps to Problem Solving (pages 1-3)**

In the first six sessions of GLB, you learned *how* to eat healthy and be more active. Healthy eating and being active will help you lose weight, prevent diabetes, and be healthier in general.

But healthy eating and being more active means changing your habits, and making the changes a permanent part of your lifestyle. Many things can get in the way of changing habits. That's what we'll focus on in the next several sessions. We will discuss:

- Negative thoughts,
- Slips and your reactions to slips (a slip is when you don't follow your eating or activity plan),
- Stress, and
- What people say and do (or "social cues").

All of these things can get in the way of healthy eating and being more active.

What are some examples of things that get in the way for you?

Name several problems that the participants have already discussed at earlier meetings if possible, e.g., you wanted to go out for a walk, but it was too cold or you wanted to eat fewer calories and make healthy food choices, but your family/roommates wanted you to buy potato chips.

It's inevitable that problems like these will come up.

**But problems can be solved.** Today we're going to talk about the *process* of problem solving. This is the process that we will be working on together throughout the program. In fact, we have been working the problem-solving process to some extent already. Each time you discuss with each other the ways you have handled challenges and brainstormed solutions, this is problem-solving. Now we will talk about the steps to problem-solving in more detail.

[Distribute Session 7 handout. Review the information and include the following:]

### **The five steps to problem solving:**

1. The first step is to **describe the problem in detail, as a chain of actions.**

For example, instead of defining the problem as "I eat more calories than I should," be specific about the kinds of foods you eat that are high in calories - maybe high-calories desserts and candy. Be specific about when you eat them, and describe these situations in detail. For example, you may eat high-calorie desserts when you go to your mother's house and she offers them to you.

Also, **look at what led up to the problem.** Many problems involve a chain of actions: one action leads to another and then another and eventually this leads to inactivity or overeating. This is called an "**action (or behavior) chain.**"

#### **Try to see the steps (or "links") in the action chain, including:**

- **Things that "cued" you (made you want) to eat or be inactive.**  
We've talked about food and activity cues before. Examples are a bakery near where you work, television watching, or a carton of ice cream in your freezer.
- **People in your life who don't support your efforts** to lose weight, eat a healthy diet, and be more active. Examples are a co-worker who offers you doughnuts every morning, family who insist that you deep-fry chicken rather than baking it, or a spouse who wants you to watch TV in the evening rather than go for a walk.
- **Thoughts or feelings that get in your way.** Examples are self-defeating thoughts like, "I'll never be disciplined enough to walk every night." Or eating in response to feelings of boredom, stress, loneliness, or anger.

Here is an example of an action chain. [Refer to the "Example" and the text box with "Sarah's action chain".]

- It may seem complicated to look at a problem in this much detail. But actually, it makes problem solving much, much simpler.
- You see that the real problem may not be the last step (eating the cookies) but rather all of **the things that led up to it** (like not eating lunch and so on).
- Uncovering the action chain will help you to **find the "weakest links" in the chain to break.** There's a saying that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. By naming all of the links in the chain, you will be able to find the weakest ones, the places where you can make a change most easily.

2. Step 2 is to **brainstorm your options for each link in the chain** (page 2). What are all of the possible solutions to the problem? "Brainstorming" means to create a storm of ideas in your brain. Let the ideas pour out, no matter how crazy they may seem. Anything goes. The more ideas the better. And it's actually helpful to include some crazy, extreme ideas because it helps open your mind and stir up your creative juices.

By brainstorming, **you'll see that you aren't at all helpless and powerless to change your situation.** You have many options. Here are some possible solutions for Sarah. *[Review and discuss the "Links in Sarah's Action Chain" and "Some of Sarah's Options".]*

3. Third, **pick one option to try (page 2).** Weigh the pros and cons of each option, and choose one (or it might be a combination of several) that is **very likely to work** and that **you can do**. In other words, be realistic. You should be confident that you will succeed.

It's also helpful to try to **break as many links as you can, as early as you can** in the chain.

For example, it will be much easier for Sarah to control her eating in the evening if she eats some lunch and doesn't arrive home hungry. It will be easier for Sarah to avoid eating too many cookies if she doesn't buy the cookies in the first place. Another reason to try to break an action chain as early as possible is that **you will have more links to work with.** If eating lunch doesn't help Sarah and she still arrives home tired, stressed, grumpy, and hungry, she can still choose low-calorie snacks like fruit or yogurt when she gets home.

Let's say that Sarah chooses the option of packing a healthy snack.

4. Fourth, **make a positive action plan (page 3).** This is where you spell out exactly:
  - What you will do,
  - When you will do it, and
  - What you need to do first.
  - Also, make a plan for any roadblocks that might come up,
  - And build in steps that will make success more likely. For example:
    - Involve someone else.
    - Find ways to make it more fun and enjoyable.
    - Write your plan down and post it on your refrigerator or calendar or add a reminder to your phone or computer.
    - Tell your plan to someone else, so you're committed to following it.
    - Join an exercise class or club so you're more committed.
    - Make a date with someone to go for a walk.

GLB recommends planning ahead for healthy eating, being active, and now planning ahead for trying the option that will solve the problem. Note that part of

the planning process is to think about any roadblocks that might get in the way and to come up with a couple of back-up plans to deal with them.

Sometimes if you build in a step to get yourself over the first "hump," then everything begins to snowball and the rest is much easier.

For example, here is Sarah's action plan [*Review and discuss Sarah's action plan.*]

5. The fifth step of problem-solving is to **try it. See how it goes.** Did it work? If not, what went wrong? Use what you have learned to problem solve again and make a new action plan.
  - If the first option works, great. If not, keep trying different options until a solution is found.
  - Don't ignore a problem and let it cause frustration.
  - Problem-solving, like lifestyle change, is a process. Don't give up. It often takes many tries to find a solution.
  - Remember your purpose. Why is losing weight and improving health important?

Now let's practice by helping Sam and Sadie solve their healthy lifestyle change problems.

### **Practice (pages 4-7)**

Divide your participants into an even number of groups (or with a partner). Have at least two groups.

Ask half the group to read Sam's problem on page 4. They should work together to complete "The Lifestyle Balance Problem Solver for Sam or Sadie" on page 6 to solve Sam's nighttime snacking problem. They should then complete page 7, "Make a Positive Action Plan for Sam or Sadie".

Ask the other half of the group to read Sadie's problem on page 5. They should work together to complete "The Lifestyle Balance Problem Solver for Sam or Sadie" on page 6 to solve Sadie's problem with not getting enough physical activity. They should then complete page 7, "Make a Positive Action Plan for Sam or Sadie".

Allow time for the small groups/partners to work through the steps.

Bring the entire group back together.

- Ask a participant to read "Sam's problem: Nighttime snacking" on page 4.
- Ask someone from each group who worked on Sam's problem to read their problem solving steps listed on page 6 and his action plan listed on page 7.
- Repeat this process for "Sadie's problem: Too tired to exercise" on page 5.
- Ask for comments/input/feedback from the entire group.

*[Note: Usually each group comes up with a different solution for Sam and Sadie. Every problem has many different solutions. The goal is for each participant to find what works best for them.]*

## To Do (page 8)

Turn to page 8 and let's focus on what you can do between now and the next session.

Please continue to keep track of your weight and eating. Come as close as you can to your calorie and fat gram goals.

### **New things to practice:**

It's normal to have problems in life. It's also normal to run into a problem(s) while working to change your eating and activity behaviors. Remember that problems can be solved.

Life's more challenging problems usually require a lot of trial and error to find solutions that work for you. Keep reminding yourself that each day, you are doing your own personal research to find what works best for you. Don't give up.

Between now and the next session, work on solving a particular food or activity problem. Name a problem that is getting in the way of meeting your weight, calorie, fat gram, and/or activity goals.

Work through the 5 steps to problem solving by using the worksheet on page 10, "My Lifestyle Balance Problem Solver". Then use page 11 to make a positive action plan. *[If time allows, participants can start working on the worksheet on page 10.]*

Follow your plan. You can share your experience/give feedback next week.

Let's talk about your activity goal for this coming week.

- If your goal for last week was 120 minutes, your goal is to add 30 minutes for a new activity goal of **150 minutes**. *[Note: This is the standard GLB exercise progression. Many participants will be able to comply. However, flexibility is included based on health or other barriers to exercise.]*
- If you were active for less than 120 minutes last week, that's okay. Start at your current activity level and try adding 30 minutes more this week.
- If you were already doing more than 120 minutes of activity, great work. Keep it up.

*[Note: You should make exceptions for individuals with serious health problems that limit their mobility. For them, they should start where they are and gradually increase as much as they can.]*

As before, make a plan to be active this week. Remember how important it is to make a plan for activity...it doesn't just happen.

*[Give participants time to complete the chart on page 8.]*

*[Announce the day, time, and place for the next session.]*

**After the session:**

- Weigh participants who did not do so prior to the group meeting.
- Complete data forms and documentation required in your setting.
- Follow your program's protocol for managing absences.
- Review the self-monitoring records from the previous week. Write brief comments. Be positive and nonjudgmental.
  - Praise all efforts to self-monitor and to change eating and activity behaviors.
  - Highlight especially any positive changes made that relate to the session topic of the week before the records were collected: coming close to their calorie, fat gram, and activity goals and any efforts to change a food or activity cue.
  - Refer to **Guidelines for Reviewing Food and Activity Records** available in the GLB Providers Portal.