

# Bead #9 Black and White

"It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it."

— John Steinbeck (author)



## Bead #9

**What do you do when** you are faced with a problem, difficult decision, conflict or challenge? When you were younger, your parents probably solved most of your problems and made decisions for you. Now that you are growing up, it's time to learn how to solve problems and make some decisions on your own. Learning how to solve problems is a super important skill that you will need

for the rest of your life. If you start now with small problems or decisions, when you get older and face bigger, more important issues, you'll have plenty of experience.

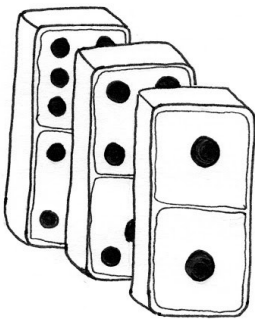
### PROBLEM SOLVING

Rarely are problems, conflicts or challenges simple "black and white" or "yes or no" situations. They often have a lot of complex factors and issues, which is why solving problems or making decisions is a process. Once you learn the steps, you can apply them to almost any situation. Some problems are easy to solve (I forgot my lunch today) while others are difficult (I am failing math class and will be grounded if I don't bring up my grade).



**You may be tempted** to jump to conclusions or rush into a decision, but next time you're faced with solving a problem, try these steps.

**STEP #1: Define the problem.** Seems really obvious, right? But it's important to be as specific as possible when naming the problem. You may have to dig a little. Try not to blame others.



**STEP #2: Analyze the problem.** It may be necessary to look beyond the obvious. Asking yourself why it's a problem or why it's important to you might help. You may need to ask for input from others.

**STEP #3: List all the possible options for solutions.**

Come up with as many as you can. Be creative and think outside of the box! Don't stop to evaluate or criticize your ideas. In brainstorming, there are no bad ideas.

**STEP #4: Go back over your list of solutions and start to evaluate them.**

Write down pros and cons for each one. Make sure you consider the short- and long-term consequences of each choice. Next, cross off the ones for which the negatives clearly outweigh the positives. Rank the solutions that remain.

**STEP #5: Pick your best solution(s) and make a plan to do it!** Questions to consider include: Who will do what? When will they do it? What's needed to put the solution into action? If your solution involves talking with someone, now is a good time to practice and role play what might happen.

**STEP #6: Evaluate the solution.** It's important to know that not all solutions work. Afterward, ask yourself: What worked? What didn't work? What could I have done or do differently next time?

**STEP #7: Celebrate!** If the solution worked, pat yourself on the back. If it didn't work, re-analyze the problem and try something different. Remember – problem solving isn't easy but it's a really important skill that takes time to develop ... unless you want to spend the rest of your life letting other people make decisions for you!

## DECISION-MAKING

**We make numerous decisions** every day and our decisions range from routine, every-day types to those that have long term impacts. For example, what to wear to school is a routine, daily choice but whether to join a traveling soccer team or a lower-commitment park district soccer team, whether to take French or Spanish, or whether to take the really tough Algebra class are all decisions that take more time and thought.

**Decision making** and problem solving are similar. Coming up with possible solutions and thinking about long- and short-term consequences are key to making good decisions.

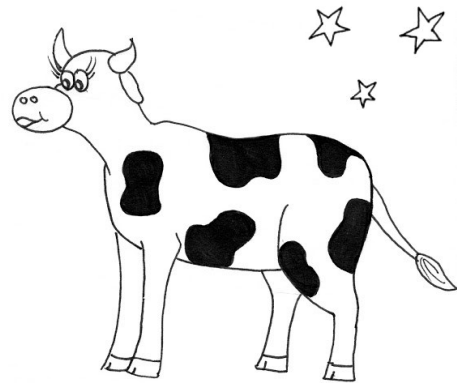
“Again and again, the impossible problem is solved when we see that the problem is only a tough decision waiting to be made.”

— Robert H. Schuller  
(minister)



# Activity

**Let's see how this process works** to make a decision and solve a problem. We've provided two examples in the tables that follow.



**DECISION:** Should I accept a summer babysitting job?

## Unlike cows, problems are rarely black and white!


### #1: Define the PROBLEM or DECISION:

A new family moved into the neighborhood with two young boys. After babysitting for them once, the mom offered me a full-time babysitting job this summer.

### #2: Analyze the PROBLEM or DECISION. Make notes here:


I'm not sure I want to commit to working full time this summer but I would earn a lot of money which I could really use.

The boys are very active. Although I enjoyed playing sports with them, they didn't listen to me when it was time to stop and eat dinner. I'm worried they would be hard to babysit every day.

#3: Possible Solutions	#4: Evaluate: Pros/Advantages	#4: Evaluate: Cons/Disadvantages	#5: Rank solutions and pick the best one
Decline the full time job and hope to receive other smaller ones during the summer.  ☆ ☆ ☆	I wouldn't be committed to working every day.  I would be available if other families call, which would help me get many babysitting jobs during the school year.	It's risky because I might not get many other babysitting jobs.  I would earn significantly less money over the summer.	#4
Accept the job and hope for the best.	I would work full time and earn money.  I would set new rules for the boys on day one.	The boys could be very difficult, making for a long, frustrating summer.  I would be unavailable for other jobs if they happen.	#3
Talk to the mom and explain my concerns about the boys listening to me before accepting the position.  	She might be able to correct the situation before I start.  I would practice how to communicate with an adult in a tricky situation.  She would think highly of me.	She might be defensive or get angry and withdraw the job offer.  She might punish or threaten the boys which could harm our relationship from the start.	#2

Keep moo-ing to the next page

## Unlike cows, problems are rarely black and white!

#3: Possible Solutions	#4: Evaluate: Pros/Advantages	#4: Evaluate: Cons/Disadvantages	#5: Rank solutions and pick the best one
Share the job with another friend so that we each work part time.	<p>I would have the perfect summer job — three days per week and still have some time for fun.</p> <p>My friend would also have a summer job.</p> <p>I would earn money.</p>	<p>My friend wouldn't be available to have fun with me on my days off.</p> <p>I wouldn't earn as much money as taking the job myself.</p> <p>The employer might not accept the arrangement.</p>	<p>#1</p> 

### #6: How did the solution you tried work out? Make notes here:

I had the best summer! I loved working three days per week. At first, I worked Monday, Wednesday and Friday and my friend worked Tuesday and Thursday but we decided it was better for the boys to have the same person a few days in a row. When I worked Monday through Wednesday, it gave me a long weekend and I was able to go to my cousin's cottage three times over the summer. My friend and I were able to fill in for each other when needed (like when our families went on vacation). We also decided to talk to the mom about our concerns before the job started and she was really happy we shared our concerns. My friend and I sat down with the boys and actually wrote out rules for the summer that they agreed to. I had so much fun with them that some days, even when it was my friend's day to babysit, I went to their house to play with them! Even though I didn't earn as much as I would have if I had taken the job full time, I set a goal to save half of my earnings and now have a healthy savings account for when I need it. It turned out to be a good decision.



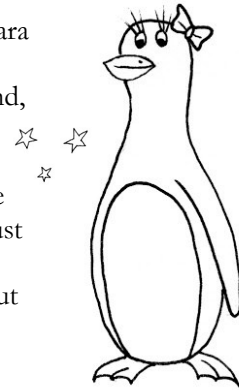
"A problem is a chance for you  
to do your best."

— Duke Ellington  
(musician)

## NEXT: Use the chart to solve a conflict or problem:

**HERE'S THE PROBLEM:** You and Tara have been best friends since preschool. As neighbors, not only have you seen her almost every day but your moms are good friends, too. You both have just started seventh grade and you are discovering that your interests are changing and you don't have as much in common anymore. You spent a lot of time with Alexis at day camp over the summer and now really enjoy being with her group of friends. When Tara calls, you just don't feel like hanging out with her anymore. It seems that all she wants to do is go the mall and talk about boys. You and Alexis, on the other hand, enjoy being active and love to ride your bikes, play tennis and go swimming.

**Although you declined** Tara's offer to go to the mall the last three times she called, you don't think she understands that you want to move on. Your mom just told you that she accepted an invitation for your family to spend tomorrow with Tara's family on their sailboat. You were planning to go miniature golfing and out for pizza with Alexis and your new group of friends.



### Unlike penguins, problems are rarely black and white!

#### #1: Define the PROBLEM or CONFLICT:

I am angry and feel that my mom should not have made plans for me without asking.

I find sailboats boring and would rather go miniature golfing.

I don't want to be best friends with Tara anymore and don't have the courage to tell her.

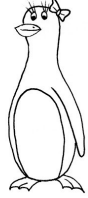
#### #2: Analyze the PROBLEM or CONFLICT. Make notes here:

I don't know how to tell Tara that I don't want to be good friends. I don't want to hurt her feelings.

The situation is especially tricky because our moms are best friends and we live in the same neighborhood.

#3: Possible Solutions	#4: Evaluate: Pros/Advantages	#4: Evaluate: Cons/Disadvantages	#5: Rank solutions and pick the best one
Text Tara and tell her Alexis is my new best friend.	I would finally be expressing my feelings honestly. I probably wouldn't have to go out on her boat tomorrow (Tara wouldn't want me to). Texting is easier than talking face-to-face.	I will undoubtedly hurt Tara. By texting I won't be able to communicate effectively or gauge her response. Tara could forward the text to many other people and start a big drama.	#4
Go on the boat with Tara's family, and use it as an opportunity to explain the situation to her.	I would talk to her in person. My mom would be happy that I went on the boat.	The boat is probably not the best place for a difficult conversation. Tara might feel hurt and angry and that would ruin the day for others.	#3

## Unlike penguins, problems are rarely black and white!

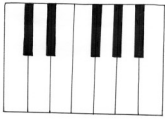
#3: Possible Solutions	#4: Evaluate: Pros/Advantages	#4: Evaluate: Cons/Disadvantages	#5: Rank solutions and pick the best one
<p>Go on the boat with Tara's family, enjoy the day but wait until I have alone time to talk with her.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">☆☆☆</p>	<p>I might enjoy a day on the boat now that summer is almost over.</p> <p>I might recall why Tara has been such a good friend.</p>	<p>I might be sending the wrong message to Tara.</p> <p>I won't be able to keep my promise to Alexis to go golfing.</p>	<p>#2</p>
<p>Explain the situation to my mom and tell her why I don't want to go on the boat with Tara and her family.</p>	<p>My mom needs to know how I feel.</p> <p>My mom might understand my dilemma and allow me to go with Alexis.</p> <p>My mom can help me role play my difficult conversation with Tara — planned for another day.</p>	<p>My mom might get angry and worry that this will affect her friendship with Tara's mom.</p> <p>My mom may make me go on the boat anyway.</p> <p>I haven't solved the problem. I still need to have a talk with Tara.</p>	<p>#1</p> <p>☆☆☆</p> 
<p>Yell at my mom for making plans without asking me and then jump on my bike and ride to Alexis's house and hide there for the day so my mom can't make me go out on the boat.</p>	<p>I will not have to go out on the boat with Tara.</p> <p>I will spend the day with Alexis.</p>	<p>I will cause everyone a great deal of worry and concern.</p> <p>I will undoubtedly be punished.</p> <p>It doesn't solve the problem.</p> <p>I will harm the trust I have with my Mom.</p>	<p>#5</p>

**#6: How did the solution you tried work out? Make notes here:**

My mom said that she could see Tara and me drifting apart and understood why. She was proud that I didn't give in to pressure to act as if I liked boys and shopping all the time. She told me a story about losing her best friend in ninth grade. She reminded me that it's natural for friendships to change but it's not OK to purposely hurt someone, avoid conflict or to gossip behind someone's back when my feelings are hurt. My mom also told me it's a good idea not to "burn any bridges" because Tara and I might be more in sync later.

As I started to tell my mom that I was angry she made plans without asking me, I realized I had done the same thing to her! Now that I am allowed to make some plans on my own, we agreed that in the future we would check in with each other before making promises to someone. My mom called Alexis's mom to make sure I could spend the entire day with her and then allowed me to go miniature golfing. I promised Mom that I would find the time to talk with Tara in person this coming week. I know it will be really hard but my mom will practice with me about what to say, how to say it and how to respond to Tara. I feel much better now that my mom knows what's happening and can support me.





ON A FINAL NOTE ...

**Use this worksheet** to work through a problem or tough decision that you are facing now or one that you have coming up soon. You may want to make photocopies of a blank form so you can use it again and again.




**Unlike cows (and penguins), problems are rarely black and white!**

**#1: Define the PROBLEM or DECISION:**

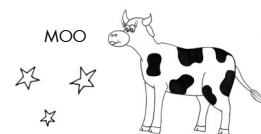


**#2: Analyze the PROBLEM or DECISION. Make notes here:**

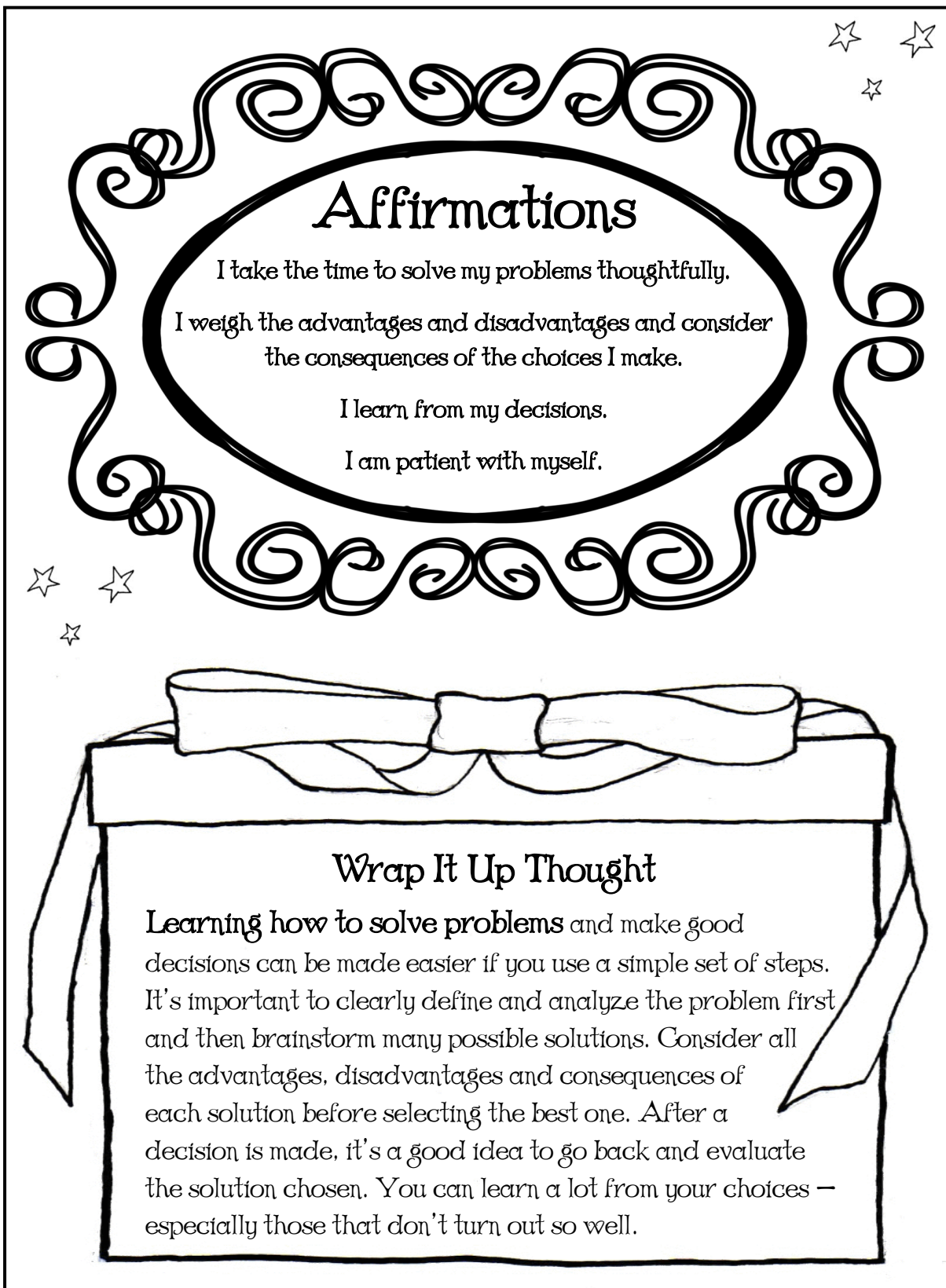


#3: Possible Solutions	#4: Evaluate: Pros/Advantages	#4: Evaluate: Cons/Disadvantages	#5: Rank solutions and pick the best one
			
			
			

**#6: How did the solution you tried work out? Make notes here:**







## Affirmations

I take the time to solve my problems thoughtfully.

I weigh the advantages and disadvantages and consider the consequences of the choices I make.

I learn from my decisions.

I am patient with myself.

### Wrap It Up Thought

Learning how to solve problems and make good decisions can be made easier if you use a simple set of steps. It's important to clearly define and analyze the problem first and then brainstorm many possible solutions. Consider all the advantages, disadvantages and consequences of each solution before selecting the best one. After a decision is made, it's a good idea to go back and evaluate the solution chosen. You can learn a lot from your choices — especially those that don't turn out so well.

Bead #19

**Thomas Edison** was an amazing man. Best known for inventing the light bulb system, he holds more than 1,000 inventor patents, a record that still stands today!

**Life wasn't easy for Edison.** He was very sick as a child and lost his hearing later. He didn't let that stop him. He was a hard working and curious boy. His first invention, an electrical vote counter, turned out to be a flop because there wasn't a big need for it. He never let that discourage him and refused to label anything as a "failure." He would say, "Every wrong attempt discarded is a step forward."

**When he invented** the electric light bulb system, he had over 40,000 pages of notes and tried 1,600 materials to find what worked for the filament (the part inside the light bulb that actually lights up). Now that's perseverance! Edison had a system for problem solving.

**When you look at the bead,** remember that many decisions are not easy "black and white" or "yes or no" issues. Take your time making big decisions or resolving problems. Weigh all the possible pros and cons and consider the consequences of your actions.

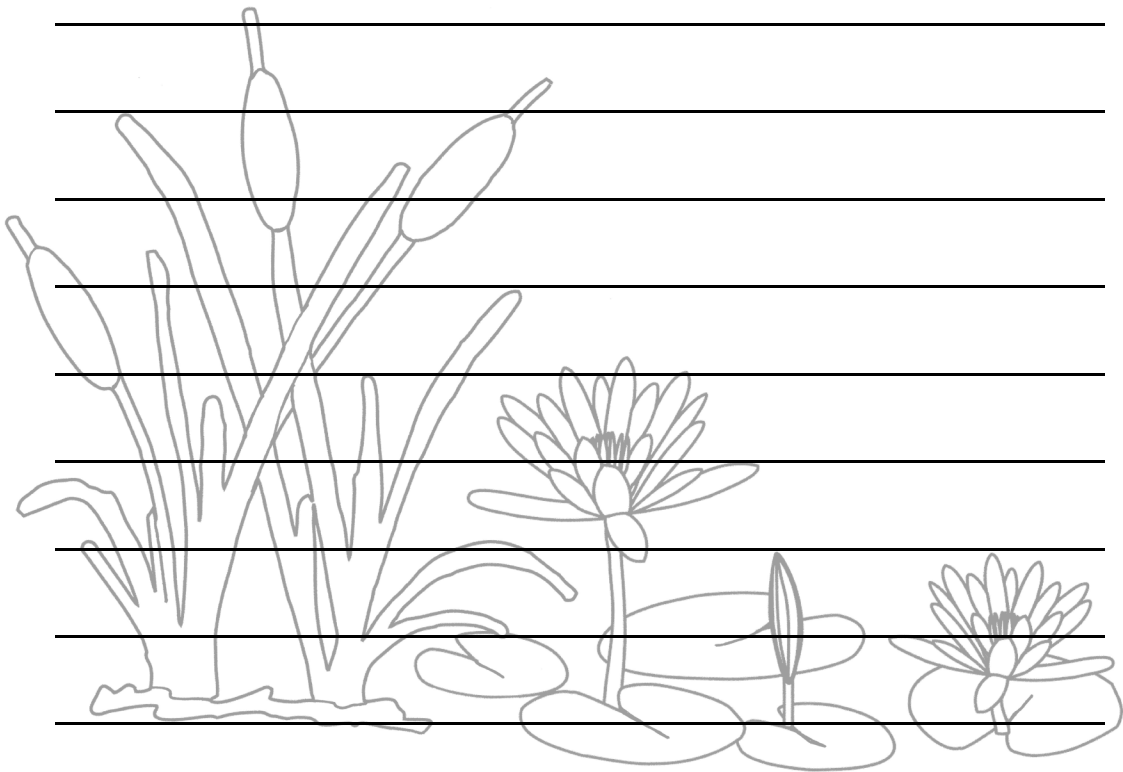
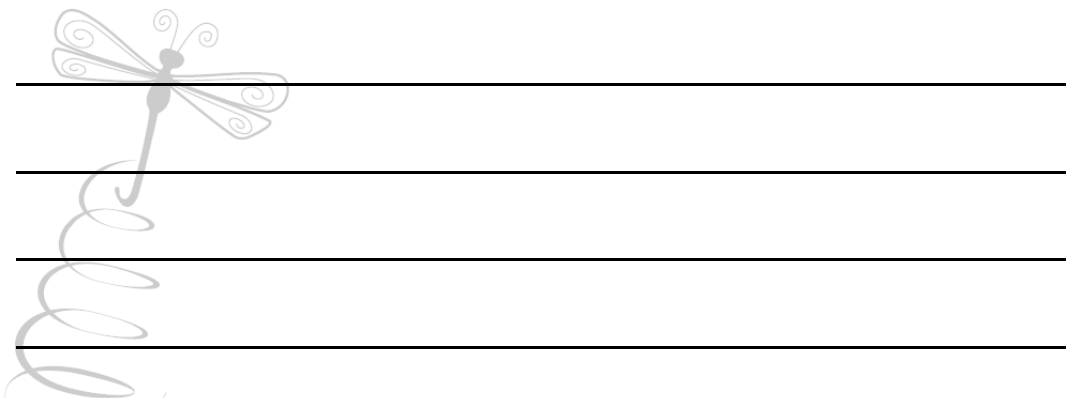


explore, embrace, empower

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