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Problem Solving



Money



Work



Family & Social Relationships



Health & Safety



Sports & Leisure

Poor problem solvers, or those who have lost their ability to break a problem into its components, often skip the most essential step in the process. No problem can benefit from a successful resolution if it isn't clearly defined.

Most problems are very clear. If you are having lunch with a friend and she begins choking on a piece of chicken, you know what the problem is—food is blocking her airway. Once you've identified the problem, you can immediately begin working toward a solution.

Other problems aren't so clear. On a different day, you're having lunch with another friend, and something seems wrong. There is tension between the two of you. You're both cordial, you have polite conversation, but you know something isn't right. What's the problem here? Is your friend angry at you for something? Is your friend preoccupied with another problem? Or is everything actually fine with your friend and might something else be subconsciously bothering you?

Approaching this problem requires you to think carefully about what the problem is as you perceive it. Once you clearly state the problem in your own words, you can begin working toward a solution. In this case, the problem might be stated, "There may be a problem between my friend and me." This is a simple statement, but it opens the door to the generation of several possible solutions or further analysis.

In this unit, you'll practice identifying a clear problem statement based on a brief scenario. Then you will use the information from the problem statement to generate a solution that you think will work best. As you move through the book, you'll practice analyzing problems at a deeper level; but for now, simply generate a quick solution for each problem based on the limited information you have.

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Making Inferences



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Some problem-solving skills are more easily taught than others. For example, there are specific strategies one can use to paraphrase information or even analyze a problem. A skill like making inferences, however, isn't so easily approached. But an inference is often a key factor in how you will approach a problem. A correct inference can be a solution in itself. For example, consider that a friend of yours has been treating you very rudely lately. If you ignored the situation, it probably wouldn't get any better, but if you examined the situation closely, you could certainly make some inferences about why she might be mad.

An inference is a *guess*, basically. Sometimes our guesses are correct; other times we're way off base. Many situation comedies base their whole plots on inferences gone wrong. The key to making inferences is not to jump into the deep end with an assumption. Dip your toe in the water instead and keep examining the problem until you've made the most educated guess possible. In the example above, you might jump to the conclusion that your friend is just a nasty person who enjoys being mad at you. But if you look closer, you'll probably infer a different reason for your friend's anger. Did you break a promise to her, borrow something and never return it, or say something behind her back? A good inference is based on a fact. The key is to find that fact and connect it with your inference.

A good inference is often based on more than just words. Other people's body language, gestures, or eye contact can help you make an inference as well. When you get dressed up for a special occasion and ask, "How do I look?" you'd better listen and watch carefully for your real answer.

In this unit, you'll make inferences in a variety of situations. Consider all the factors available to make your best guess about what's going on.

2. What does Ms. Parker need to think about now that Mark is sick? Choose all appropriate answers.
- a. helping Mark feel comfortable
 - b. what restaurant to go to for lunch
 - c. whether to continue as planned or return home
 - d. how the other children feel
 - e. the subway schedule for a return trip
 - f. cleaning up the mess Mark made
 - g. taking Mark to the nearest hospital for surgery

3. Later, Ms. Parker told a neighbor about the trip to the city. Her neighbor said, "You should never have tried to take all three children by yourself." How did that make Ms. Parker feel?

4. What could the neighbor have said that would have supported Ms. Parker?

5. What are some other safety tips you need to consider if you're taking children to a big city?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

6. Would you be comfortable taking care of three children on a short trip? Explain your answer.

Questions

1. What things at the beginning of this story tell you that David might not enjoy having a two-year-old around?

a. _____

b. _____

2. Why might David's sister have been so panicked and rushed when she came into his house?

3. Read the last part of the third paragraph again. David mentions that he only heard a few words his sister said as she hurried out the door. Use these words to recreate exactly what his sister might have said.

4. Why did getting down on the floor with the toddler loosen David up?
