

# Problem Solving: A Collaborative Model

Collaborative problem solving is an effective problem tool for small groups (couples, teams etc.) The Model described requires input from all interested parties AND has a goal of creating win /win solution scenarios. What is described below is a process, and should be used to bring some understandable structure to the problem solving interaction. This is often best used when there is conflict or the appearance of conflict between parties.

## Step I

### Defining the problem:

Describe the needs that are being experienced as blocked or potentially blocked in the situation. Be specific.

The use of **needs** as the language for defining the problem has several benefits.

1. This encourages all parties to examining more closely their motivations and fears around the situation or issue.
2. It provides a vehicle for a more empathetic understanding of all involved.
3. It avoids the mistake of defining the problem in terms of competing solutions (my way or yours). This helps create the win/win outcome that is desirable. (Avoid wants. Wants are solutions.) Needs are what is required for effective functioning.  
Example: "I need transportation to work tomorrow."  
Not: "I want to take your car to work tomorrow."
4. By using this approach, the mutual goal for the activity should become, for all parties, to get their needs met.

## **Step II**

### Brainstorming alternative solutions:

The process of brainstorming is one of encouraging creative thought. Two basic principles must be observed when brainstorming:

1. Quantity leads to quality. The more different ideas that are considered, the more likely good quality and needs meeting solutions will be generated. This also has the benefit of encouraging participation and thus greater ownership in the process.
2. No evaluation. Avoiding judgment of any proposed solution, at this stage, is a necessity if creativity is to be encouraged. The inclusion of objectionable or outlandish solutions can be dealt with in the subsequent stage. For now, anything goes.

## **Step III**

### Evaluating pros and cons:

After all possible solutions have been suggested, in a systematic manner, each solution should be thoughtfully evaluated. A list of pros and cons should be generated for each. Some obviously unusable ideas can simply be discarded by agreement. Every effort to consider all possible aspects of each solution should be made.

## **Step IV**

### Choosing a solution or solutions:

If the primary goal is for all parties to get their needs met, the final solution/solutions should reflect this win/win scenario.

## **Step V**

### Make a plan:

WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE?

These and other questions should be answered to specify responsibility and accountability for carrying out the solution(s).

## **Step VI**

### Implement the plan:

Diligently follow the plans developed in step V

## **Step VII**

### Evaluate the results:

Determine if the outcome of the process was as intended. If it is lacking, determine where the failure occurred. Was the plan not carried out properly? Were there unintended or unanticipated consequences? Were there needs that were not recognized initially etc.? Recycle to the appropriate step to re-solve the problem for a better set of outcomes.