

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Staying Socially Connected

OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2
Competency D - Use Digital Technology	N/A	N/A

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment
<input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship
<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Credit | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independence |
|---|--|

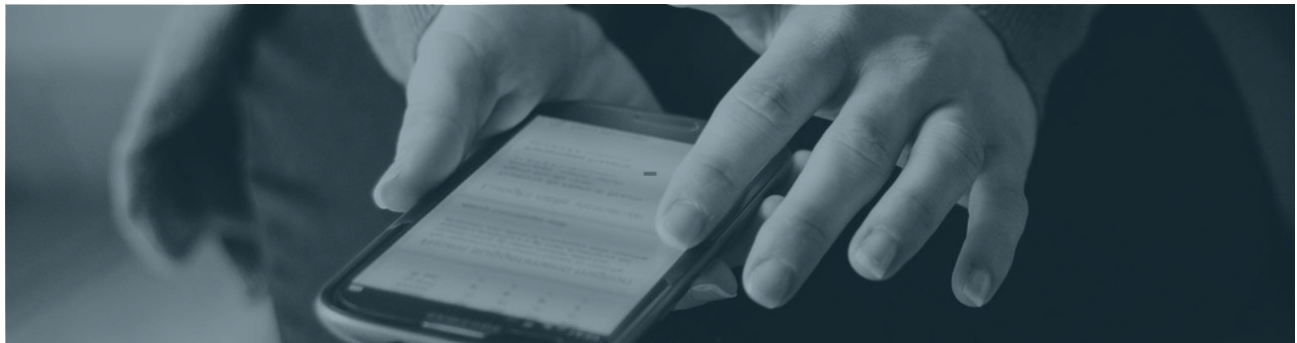
Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability
<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and innovation
<input type="checkbox"/> Digital | <input type="checkbox"/> Numeracy
<input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing |
|--|---|

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The opinions expressed in this report are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.

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Note For Practitioners

This resource has been designed for learners with Level 2 skills.

- This resource is designed to be used by learners in various settings, including independent learning, 1-to-1 tutoring, small groups, and classroom learning.
- This workbook does not need to be completed in a single session. Learners should take breaks as needed. Learners may also skip sections that they do not feel apply to them, their comfort levels or their needs.
- Practitioners are encouraged to supplement this resource with
 - discussions about learner experiences related to the content
 - examples that are culturally relevant to the learner
 - additional activities, as desired
- Discussion with a partner, instructor or a group is built into various activities. This interaction will help build the learners' social comfort levels.
- Practitioners should be sensitive to the emotional needs of the learners. Some of the content and activities may be difficult for those who struggle socially.

A social connection can take place anywhere: in a physical place where people connect face-to-face or via a virtual space such as social media or a private online forum. It can involve family, a neighbour, or strangers. It can be with one other or a few other people as well as larger groups. It can involve social or work situations.

This resource will consider positive aspects of social connections, including:

- why a learner should engage socially
- social anxiety and other sources of social isolation
- finding interests
- skills for successful engagement, etc.

It will also discuss adapting and making changes to improve social connections. It will then explore some problem solving to combat roadblocks to connecting socially.

An overview and activities for problem solving are included in this resource. For more information on problem-solving ABC Life Literacy’s UP Skills for Work Problem Solving Skills for Success workbook is recommended. <https://abclifeliteracy.ca/skills-for-success/>. Their Problem Solving video is also excellent. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztNGbwf7bIY. It isn’t recommended that both resources are used as different problem solving steps are used. That may cause confusion for the learners.

Skills for Success

In May 2021, the Government of Canada introduced an update to its Essential Skills model. The updated model has been renamed Skills for Success.

There are nine Skills for Success:

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and Innovation
- Digital
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Reading
- Writing



To find out more about the Skills for Success, visit

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF)

The OALCF is a competency-based framework that Ontario’s Literacy and Basic Skills programs use to develop programs for each person receiving literacy support. For more information, visit the Ontario Government’s website at

https://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/lbs_oalcf_overview.html

Staying Socially Connected

Overview

As social creatures, all humans need social connections. We need to be part of a community. A community doesn't mean just where you live. It can be any place where people connect socially. For example:

- friends' or family's homes
- a workplace
- community meeting places
- sports facilities
- a virtual space such as social media



Social connections are the relationships you have with the people around you. They may be with:

- your family and friends
- co-workers
- people you only know casually
- your neighbours
- some so far away you only connect with them by phone or online

Activity 1

Other than close family and friends, we make connections with people in various ways.

1. Answer and discuss the following questions with a partner, group, or your instructor.
 - a. Are you employed and do you work with others?
 - b. Do you belong to any organizations or groups that meet regularly?
 - c. How much time do you spend socializing with others?

Characteristics of Social Connectedness

Social connection is more than the number of relationships a person has. It's about:

- meaningful and regular social exchanges
- close bonds with others
- support from friends, families, and others in the community
- a sense of belonging
- feelings of being loved, cared for, valued, and appreciated

Health Benefits of Being Socially Connected

We all think we know how to take care of ourselves. We need to have healthy habits, including:

- exercising regularly
- eating nutritious foods
- stress management
- stopping smoking
- using alcohol or cannabis in moderation

**Socialize
to
live longer!**

People with strong social ties can triple the odds of survival. Social connection can affect:

- weight management
- diabetes control
- hypertension (high blood pressure)
- cardio vascular disease (heart, lungs, and blood circulation)
- cancer
- immune function (ability to avoid disease)
- mental health
 - lower anxiety and depression
 - better emotional reactions
 - higher self-esteem

Social Isolation

Social isolation means you have a limited social network. It isn't just about having (or not having) social connections. It's about having little contact or communication with other people. Your social connections may not meet your needs. In fact, social isolation is:

- more harmful than not exercising
- twice as bad as being overweight
- similar to smoking 15 cigarettes a day



You shouldn't feel guilty about being socially isolated.

Isolation often has nothing to do with your character or personality. Anyone can become isolated.

How do People Become Socially Isolated?

Anyone can become socially isolated. Isolation often has nothing to do with your character or personality. For example, someone may:

- be recovering after pregnancy and childbirth. So, they don't often talk to anyone besides their partner.
- have moved to a new city a few weeks ago. They've met people, but they don't know any of them well.

You might also feel isolated in other circumstances, for example:

- A. Isolated by Being too Busy
- B. Isolated by Circumstances
- C. Social Isolation and Technology
- D. Isolated by Social Anxiety

We'll talk more about these in the following sections.

A. Isolated by Being too Busy

Some people live busy lives. They try to juggle work, school, hobbies, self-care, and more. Their social connections may fall by the wayside. Before they know it, they are not connecting socially anymore. They are socially isolated.

Activity 2

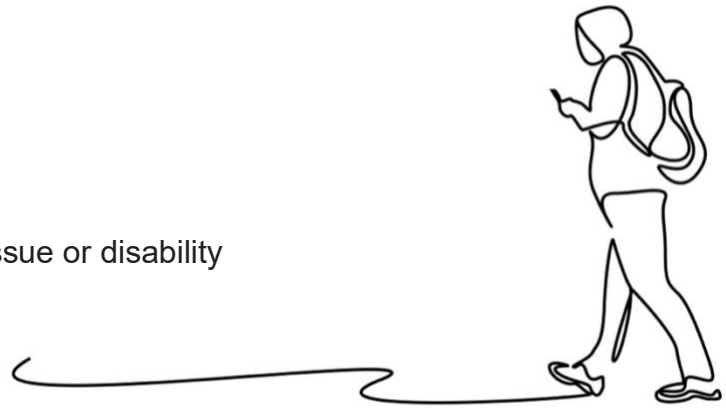
Let's look at the life of Zack

- Zack has a good job working from home.
 - As a hobby, Zack is learning to paint through YouTube.
 - Zack eats healthy foods and gets exercise by going for a run.
 - Zack used to play soccer or hockey with some friends, but he doesn't have the time anymore.
 - Recently, Zack feels his life is too busy.
 - Zack isn't really happy. He is starting to feel depressed.
1. Discuss the following questions with a partner, group, or your instructor.
 - a. Do you think Zack is socially isolated?
 - b. What are some ways that Zack could change his life to be more socially connected?
 2. Are you so busy that you feel it is affecting your social connections? If yes,
 - a. How could you adapt your life?
 - b. What is one way that you could be more socially connected?

B. Isolated by Circumstances

It isn't only people who are too busy that become socially isolated. A person may:

- have moved to a new place
- be unemployed
- have started a new job
- work from home or alone
- have had a long-term health issue or disability
- have language barriers
- have financial concerns
- be a victim of discrimination
- have broken up with a partner and feel like they've lost their mutual friends
- have left home to start college
- be a senior who recently retired
- live in a remote location
- have a small baby
- have young children to mind



Activity 3

Choose one of the circumstances listed above. With a partner or instructor share how you would feel if you experienced that circumstance.

Activity 4

Let's look at the lives of two different people.

Mel stays home to mind two small children. Mel likes staying home to pay a lot of attention to them. Mel does crafts and plays games with the kids. Mel teaches them to cook and bake. Mel takes the children for walks and plays ball with them. After the kids go to bed, Mel spends the evening doing an online class or watching tv.

Ari also minds two small children. Most days, Ari likes to take the children to the park. There, Ari has some time to sit and visit with other parents. Ari also takes the children to a parent and child program twice a week. At that program, the children get to play together. The parents spend time together learning new things and having discussions. Ari has a partner who is home in the evenings to mind the children. Sometimes, Ari goes to an evening class for skills improvement to prepare for work.

1. Discuss the following questions with a partner, a group, or your instructor.
 - a. Which person, Mel or Ari, may need to increase their social connections?
 - b. How could either Mel or Ari make better social connections?

C. Social Isolation and Technology

Communication technology (TVs, Smartphones, Computers) has become very popular. Before, people used to go out and socialize at sports or clubs. People often gathered at friends' and family's houses to play games.

Now, people can watch movies or play games online. They send quick texts, messages, or voice mails.

Connecting with people online is better than no connection. It doesn't beat the value of face-to-face, though.

D. Isolated by Social Anxiety

Some people may experience some form of social anxiety. They may be shy. They may not feel confident in social situations. They may not even feel safe. Past experience may have included criticism or even bullying.

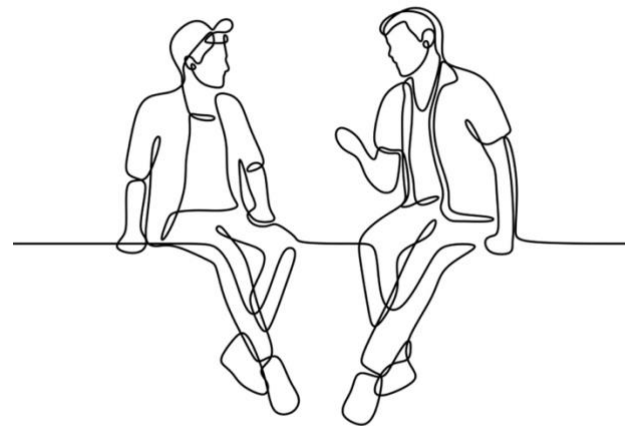
Social anxiety isn't just the occasional butterflies in your stomach, though. It's:

- fear that others will judge, embarrass, or reject you
- an overwhelming feeling of dread before a social gathering
- concern that any tiny mistake might lead to humiliation
- self-isolation
- low self-esteem or confidence
- your heart trembling or pounding (palpitations)
- nausea
- panic or anxiety attacks

If you get any of these feelings, you are not alone. Your reactions are not “weird”. Social anxiety is a common mental health condition.

Social anxiety can affect your everyday life. It can mess with work, school, and relationships, and make it hard to function. It can affect people in all sorts of everyday situations, such as:

- socializing at a party
- interacting with strangers
- working at a new job or taking on new duties
- eating in front of others
- making phone calls or on video calls
- meeting strangers
- starting conversations



For some people, it can be so upsetting that they avoid any social contact altogether. It's not just large groups. They avoid other things like:

- social gatherings
- getting together with friends or family
- any group activities including sports and clubs
- going to work, school, or training
- volunteering

Activity 5

1. Look at the following list of situations that may cause social anxiety. Put a check mark in the box beside any that cause you anxiety.

- social gatherings
- meeting or interacting with strangers
- going to work
- working at a new job or taking on new duties
- eating in front of others
- making phone calls
- starting conversations
- getting together with friends or family
- any group activities including sports and clubs
- volunteering



2. Consider each of the following symptoms of social anxiety. Put a check in the box to mark if you often, sometimes, or never experience these symptoms.

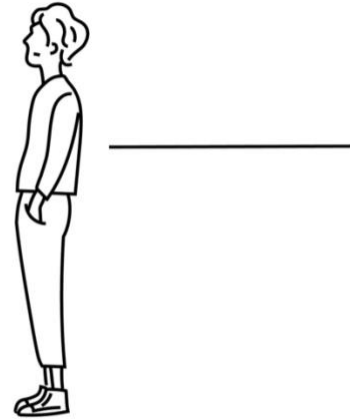
Symptom	Often	Sometimes	Never
Self-isolation			
Low self-esteem or confidence			
Trembling or pounding heart (palpitations)			
Nausea			
Fear of judgment or criticism			
Panic or anxiety attacks			

3. Did you check *Often* or *Sometimes* for several or all of the above? If so, you might have some social anxiety.

Social Fears

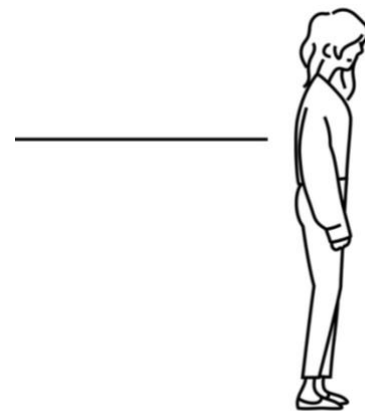
We all fear some social situations. But for some of us, these fears cause extreme anxiety that may restrict social connection. Some common social fears are:

- being in groups or crowds
- public speaking
- starting or having a conversation
- voicing opinions
- meeting someone new
- shaking hands
- dating
- being embarrassed
- being the centre of attention



Let's talk more about this last one. Some people are more affected by embarrassment than others. Like other fears, the fear of embarrassment can cause social anxiety. Embarrassment is when we worry about how other people see us. Embarrassment is an uncomfortable feeling. It can leave us feeling upset, isolated, or hurt. It can even stop us doing things we want to. It can be so serious, that we socially isolate ourselves. We could be embarrassed about:

- something we've said or done
- how we look
- something that's been said about us
- physical symptoms, such as
 - blushing
 - sweating
 - trembling
 - having a shaky voice



Activity 6

1. Read the two examples in the table below. These list social fears and activities people might avoid because of their fear.
2. in the blank row at the bottom of the table, list a possible social fear. You may use some social fears listed on the previous page or choose your own.
3. In the second column, list social activities people might avoid because of fear.

Social Fear	People might avoid
Fear of large crowds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shopping in large grocery stores or malls • travelling (planes, trains, buses or ships), • going to concerts, sporting events, festivals, • Attending large family or friends' celebrations like birthdays, anniversaries or weddings.
Fear of being the centre of attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal celebrations, like your own birthday party, graduation, receiving an award • public speaking

Getting Socially Connected

We have discussed a lot about social connection and isolation. We have looked at some of the causes of social isolation. So now, let's see what we can do about getting more connected. There are three important skills we have to develop to help us do that:

- adaptability
- goal setting
- problem solving

Adaptability

Adaptability means you have the skills to adjust to situations. It's your ability to change your actions as needed. Being adaptable involves thinking things out. It is being open-minded when you face obstacles.

Have you had to adjust to any big changes in your life? Do you think you are good at adapting to change? Or do you:

- find change difficult or stressful
- like to have a routine and stick to it
- get upset whenever you need to change
- avoid new situations and circumstances

If so, you may need to move out of your comfort zone. You may need to adapt. To be more socially connected, you may need to:

- learn to be more adaptable and more flexible
- see the positives in making changes
- be uncomfortable for a bit as you adapt
- try doing activities differently
- meet new people
- try new things

Try New Things

You may be frightened to try new things. You can adapt to new situations to combat social isolation, though. Here are ten tips to help overcome and prevent social isolation for everyone:

- Get involved with activities, such as a social club or sports team.
- Check out programs at service agencies, senior centers. or public libraries.
- Take an in-person class to learn something new.
- Reach out to an old friend you've lost touch with.
- Volunteer for a cause you care about.
- Eat lunch in a communal space..
- Stay physically active with group exercise, such as a walking club.
- Work out with a friend.
- Find a faith-based organization.
- Schedule time each day to stay in touch with family, friends, and neighbours in person, by email, on social media, by a voice call, or on a video call.

You might have fun and meet people with similar interests.

Ask for Help

Social isolation isn't a problem you have to face by yourself. There's never anything wrong with asking for help. Talk with others about your feelings of isolation. Let people know that you need help. You might even be helping someone else. You never know who else might feel alone. You can talk to:

- family
- friends you haven't been spending much time with
- co-workers
- neighbours
- community service organizations, clubs, etc.
- a support group
- a professional therapist

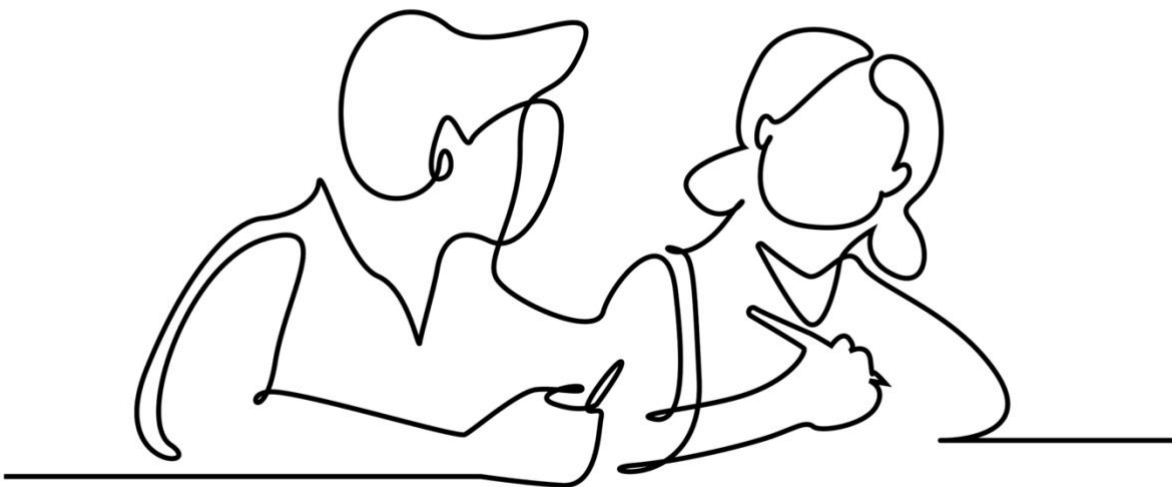
Activity 7

1. Look at the suggestions in the “*Try New Things*” and “*Ask for Help*” sections above. Put a check beside any that you feel might interest you.

Remember: you aren't the only one who feels isolated. Other people can understand and help.

2. If you wish, discuss the above question with a partner, group, or your instructor.
3. Do you want to adapt so you are more socially connected?

If so, keep reading. If not, then remember to watch for social isolation in your friends and family members. You could help them to become connected.



Goal Setting

You may want to adapt and try new activities. However, it may seem too difficult. Where do you start? You should start by setting a goal!

It may be difficult for you to set new goals. You may need to step out of your comfort zone. You may need to get over some challenges, such as:

- being afraid of failure. “What if I set goals and can’t reach them?”
- setting too many goals and getting yourself overwhelmed
- not believing that setting goals works
- failing at setting goals in the past
- not wanting to wait to go through the process
- procrastinating

It is always important to create goals in your life. If you never set a goal, how can you reach it? It doesn’t matter:

- if they are long-term or short-term
- what their purpose is
 - getting more physically active
 - eating better
 - getting more socially connected

However, the steps you take to achieve them will help you be more successful. There are different types of goals, including:

- goals that are easier to work towards
- goals that are more successful



The Best Goals are SMART Goals

SMART is an acronym for:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant (results-based)

Time-Based

Here is an example of a SMART goal a person could set:

- I will join a club, group, or class related to a hobby I enjoy. I will do it to meet like-minded people and form new connections. I will do it within the next month

Let's break that down, by looking at Kai.

- Kai sets a goal to join a small group computer class this month. This part of the goal is both Specific and Measurable. Kai knows exactly what the goal is: to join a class. Kai will be able to tell when the goal is actually met.
- It is Achievable. Kai decides joining a small group computer class is doable. It is only one first step to be more socially connected.
- It is Relevant. The goal suits Kai's interests as it relates to their need to improve their computer skills for life and work. The goal suits Kai's needs. Kai can meet like-minded people and make new connections.
- The goal is Time-Based: it will happen within the next month. Kai will do it by a specific time.

Activity 8

Consider Ben's goal:

Tomorrow, I will introduce myself to the new employee at work. I can suggest we have lunch together. This will give me a new social connection. It might also help someone who may need a friend.

1. Discuss Ben's goal with a partner, group, or your instructor.
 - a. Break Ben's goal down into its parts and see if it is a SMART goal.

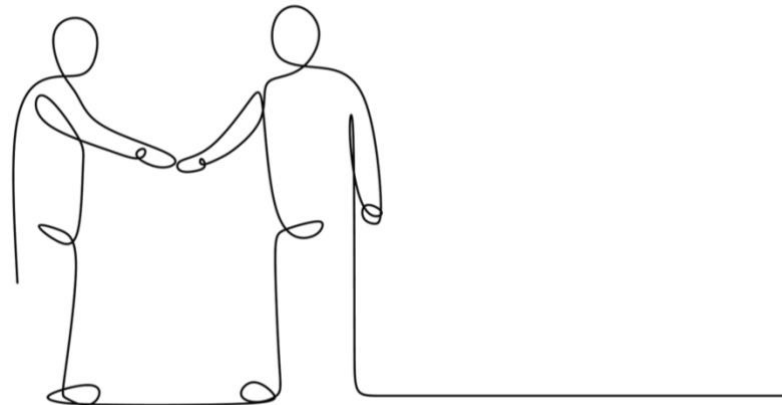
Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-based



Next, consider Jo's goal:

"I think I should try to meet a neighbour."

2. Discuss Jo's goal with a partner, group, or your instructor.
 - a. Why isn't Jo's goal a SMART goal?
 - b. How could Jo make the goal SMART?

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant (results-based).

Time-Based

Now it's your turn.

3. Consider both Ben's and Jo's ideas to get better socially. Then choose a goal of your own. Write it out.
4. Use the SMART goal test to judge your goal. Use the headings below.

Is it:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-Based

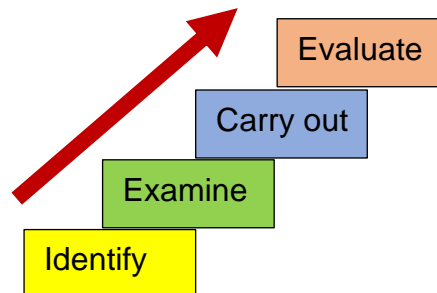


Problem Solving

Often, the challenging part of SMART goals isn't setting them. You think they are "Achievable", but how do you achieve them? That is where problem solving comes in. You must figure out how to make the changes and overcome obstacles. You must solve the problems you face.

Here are some possible steps to solving problems:

1. IDENTIFY your problem(s) or goal(s)
2. EXAMINE your options
3. CARRY OUT effective plan or strategy
4. EVALUATE how well the solution or decision worked



Let's look at these steps

1. IDENTIFY the problem or goal

Before you can solve a problem, you must know about it..

- What do I think I want to do?
- Why do I want to do it?
- What is my actual goal? Is it a SMART goal?
- What is the actual problem?

2. EXAMINE your options

a. Analyze

Think about the problem using the information gathered

- Break down the problem into smaller parts or obstacles.
- Identify possible causes and effects of the obstacles.

Think carefully about each possible obstacle.

- Consider what you did before with a similar issue
- Ask others for help in understanding the goal or problem.
- Use Google, social media or YouTube for some solutions to the obstacles

b. Develop multiple action plans based on:

- Brainstorm solutions considering:
 - The information you have gathered and analyzed
 - Your end goals
 - What has been successful in the past
- What are the short- and long-term consequences of different options?
 - The positives
 - The negatives



CARRY OUT effective plan or strategy

Once you have developed some possible plans to challenge the obstacle(s), you:

- Make a decision. Which action plan do you try.
- Deal with one plan at a time so you do not get overwhelmed.
- Take action. Go ahead with your chosen plan. Do it.



EVALUATE how well the solution or decision worked

- Reflect on the success of the process and the result. Did it work?
- Identify what worked that you might try again.
- Think about what didn't work so well. Not all plans work out, but that's ok.
- Consider what you learned from the experience
- Provide opportunities for feedback from others

Note: Problem solving doesn't always move along from one step up to the next. Sometimes you have to go back and repeat a step or steps. For example, Say you find that you can't choose a plan to **carry out**. You might go back and re-examine things. Once you have done that it might be clearer which plan to try first.

Here is an example.

Eli is a newcomer to Canada. Although Eli speaks English, it is with an accent. Eli has trouble making social connections. Eli wants to get work but doesn't feel confident enough.

1. Identify the problem or issue

→ Eli wants work but isn't confident

2. EXAMINE the options

a. Analyze

Break down the problem into individual obstacles

→ Eli speaks English but not well. He is embarrassed by this.



- Eli has trouble making social connections.
- Eli isn't confident enough to apply for work.

Eli could:

- break down the issue. There are probably two parts. Eli doesn't think his English is good enough. Eli doesn't know how to look for work in Canada.
- think about the research
 - What did other people or Settlement Services say?
 - Did Eli find it easy to make friends or to work before moving to Canada? How did Eli develop those connections?

b. Develop multiple action plans

Here are some suggestions for Eli:

- Join a conversational English class, in person or online.
- Speak in English to as many people as often as possible. For example, at home, with neighbours, in stores, and at other places.
- Go to Settlement Services for help with English and employment.
- Go to Employment Services for help with getting work.

We will leave Eli there. Eli will have to *carry out the plan*, by:

- **making the decision of what plan to try** first.
- taking action to **address** the plan.

Lastly, once the plan has been completed, Eli should **evaluate** how successful it was. Eli can also consider the *next steps*. Eli can start the problem solving process over to solve other issues or obstacles.

Activity 9

Now it is your turn to try some problem solving.

1. Come up with a plan to solve a social isolation problem.
2. Use the chart on the next page to help you.

Note: Like we did for Eli you won't be able to actually complete the plan

1. Identify your goals	2. Examine your options a. Gather information to help b. Analyze c. Develop multiple action plans	3. Carry out effective plan or strategy	4. Evaluate how well the solution or decision worked

Get Started Making Social Connections

It is possible to change your life from social isolation. You may not feel that you are able to, but you can. Because it's possible to change your life doesn't mean it's easy. You need to continually put in the effort to become more social. Set yourself goals. Break down the problems you are facing. Look for solutions and try them out. You're building a healthier future with more happiness in your life.

Here are some tips:

Find your triggers

One step to managing social isolation is understanding what occasions or fears set off your social anxiety. Triggers can be different for each person. You might find large gatherings difficult. On the other hand, talking to one other person may be scary. What about going to new places or starting new things? Are they hard to do? What frightens you?

To pinpoint your triggers, keep a journal. Write about your feelings and what situations make you anxious. This will help you recognize the problem. It is a big piece in improving your social connections.

Shift your focus

Often, fear of criticism causes social anxiety. When we are afraid of criticism, we may focus just on ourselves. We think people are judging everything we do.

To help, shift your focus onto others. This shift can make you less self-conscious and reduce social anxiety. For example, in social situations, think less about how you feel. Instead:

- concentrate on the people around you
- follow the conversation actively
- ask questions and show genuine interest in the responses

Control negative thoughts

Social anxiety can have us thinking about the worst things that can happen. When this happens replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Ask yourself:

- Are these just feelings or is the worry real?
- What's one or more good things that could happen?

Build your self-esteem

Self-esteem is your confidence in your own abilities and your value.

Make efforts to build your self-esteem. This can make you more confident in social situations.

Remember to:

- be adaptable
- set yourself achievable SMART goals
- use problem solving to build strong action plans
- make sure you celebrate your achievements
- be understanding when you make mistakes
- remind yourself that as humans we all make mistakes. You're not a machine. It's okay to have off-days.

Seek Professional Help

Sometimes, we need a little extra help. This may be the case if our social anxiety feels overwhelming. Consider finding support from a mental health professional. They can provide strategies and treatments for social anxiety. They can help you move away from social isolation to being socially connected.

