

TAKING STOCK – TAKING ACTION

A robust planning approach for tackling tough times.

Having a deliberate plan that involves taking some sort of constructive action helps to reduce stress and increase a sense of control during tough times (even those where change is slow or uncertain). If the mind has some sort of blue-print for the immediate future – it feels less hassled by uncertainty. An effective tool, that's good to remember.

TAKING STOCK & SETTING YOUR MINDSET

As we absorb difficult news, we tend to move from a reaction phase where our mind is focused on what's going wrong (& worrying) and then (by working things through in a planned way) focused on solutions and actions.

Identifying where our mind is focused!

The mind is problem-focused

1	2	3
Still in shock, Unsure	Feeling the frustration	Acknowledging the challenge
<i>This can't be right?!</i>	<i>This shouldn't be like this!</i>	<i>This is hard, awful, or sad..</i>

What's helpful: Take time to absorb the news of the situation. Be patient with yourself and others. Accept that reactions to difficult circumstance are human and normal. Don't make any rash decisions when feeling too wound up – talk about, or write down what's challenging you. Manage frustration - by taking time out, breathing deeply and setting your own mindset eg "let's work through this".

The mind is solution-focused

4	5	6
Identifying the needs	Making requests Problem-solving	Trying things out, making changes
<i>This is what I need..</i>	<i>This could be a solution for me</i>	<i>This is what I can and will do now</i>

What's helpful: Accepting the change and not taking it personally. Taking stock of what your main needs are right now. Take time to write down the things you need for living and working well right now. Make requests for information or changes that might support you. Use a problem-solving approach to tackle challenges, by determining reasonable options and making choices to try new things out.

Identifying the needs and making requests?

Here's a great template for talking with others about what you need and making requests for information, decisions or actions that's likely to support you. It helps you to be heard, so at least your ideas are on the table.

Prepare a conversation that starts like this:

1. When situation 'X' _____ happened
2. I realised the impact on me is (or will be) _____
3. The main challenge for me is _____
4. Because I have a NEED for # in my life right now
5. I would like to ask that _____ can we discuss?

Include the NEEDS that are important to you, for example #

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Certainty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> Purposeful activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Connection | <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial security | <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking after family | <input type="checkbox"/> Support |

Living to your values and work ethic

You can put yourself in a better position to cope and communicate if you reengage your own personal values and work ethic. Determine your own deliberate mindset in how you want to approach things – eg with patience, respect, collaboration, open-mindedness and a "let's work this out attitude". You might have to adjust your expectations and goals, yet you will manage it.



TAKING ACTION & PROBLEM-SOLVING

Everyday we use our natural mental abilities to problem-solve and plan. This is often done sub-consciously for normal sorts of problems, like fixing a broken tap or working out how to give someone constructive feedback. However, when used consciously during times of challenge and change, we can access clearer thinking, make informed decisions and muster the help we need.

The following steps in problem-solving and planning help you to access the 'control' centers of the brain and determine wise action. When your mind wanders to frustrations or worries, remember *you have a plan, and you're following your plan*, until it's the time to review it.

INSTRUCTIONS. On a separate piece of paper (or typed up on your smart device or computer) write your answers to each question. Tip: ask for advice or input from a mate or family member.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. Define the problem (or need) as specifically as you can (*eg making enough money pay off my loans*)
2. List a few realistic options for resolving it (are they reasonable and achievable with help?)
3. For each of the options (option A, B, C) write the advantages and disadvantages of each
4. Choose the option that best solves the problem and meets your need (the one with the most advantages, where you can muster the resources to put it into place and where you can live with the disadvantages)
5. Plan how to implement the option as an Action (see Action Planning)

ACTION PLANNING

6. Define the specific action you want to take (including when you want to have it done by)
7. List the critical steps (smaller actions) that will allow you to achieve it
8. List the resources, information or help you need to achieve the plan
9. Execute the plan and monitor how it's going (set a review date: *eg "we'll see how this goes for the next two weeks and review then"*)
10. Review and modify the plan. If you hit a snag, don't give up, use problem solving, get advice and try Plan B.

When in doubt or too stirred up to think, just choose a short-term wise action from the list below.

Safe and wise actions

- ☐ Just listen, breathe or observe things without reacting
- ☐ Ask for help or advice
- ☐ Continue carefully and see what happens
- ☐ Clarify the issue or need (get more information)
- ☐ Accept things for the time being and cope for now
- ☐ Give feedback or ask for change
- ☐ Step back and check my thinking and assumptions
- ☐ Tactical withdrawal (leave it for now and get advice)

Refocus on the next wise action:

- *What do I need to be doing right now, that's sensible and serves me (and others) well? (the task at hand, or resting, talking, thinking or planning?)*
- *What single action can I start right now that can help me navigate the situation? (even it doesn't yet solve the situation)*

When doubt strikes:

Say "I have a plan and I'll stick to the plan, until I review or change the plan"

