



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

September 2024



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DEER OAKS PRESENTS

September On-Demand Seminar

*Crafting Joy: Finding Fulfillment
in Creative Pursuits*

*Available OnDemand starting September 17th
Access via deeroakseap.com*

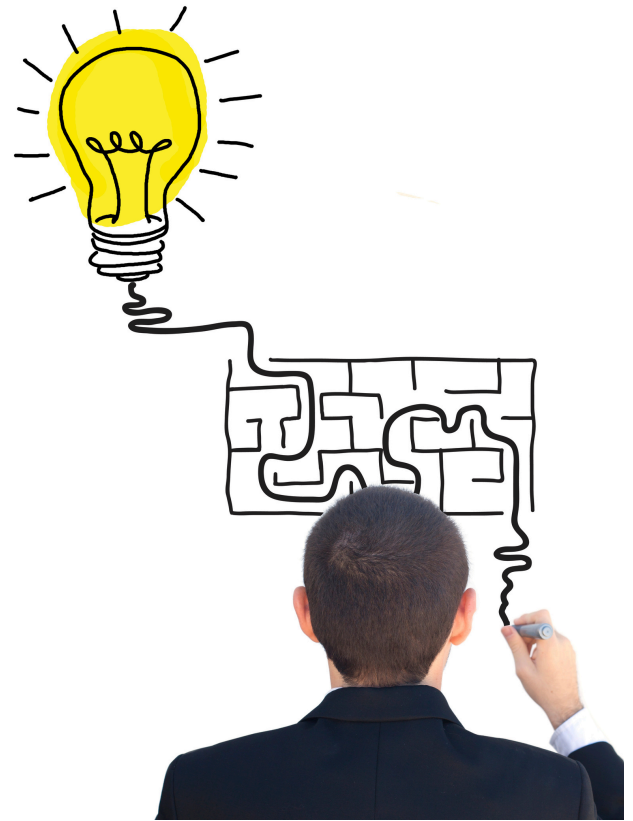
CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Creative problem-solving is an approach to solving problems and generating new ideas. It's been used in organizations for many years and can also be applied to personal life. The creative problem-solving approach begins with two assumptions: that everyone is creative in some way, and that creative skills can be strengthened with practice.

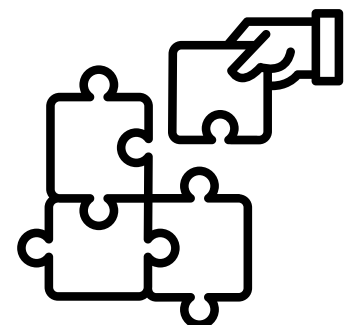
The creative problem-solving method was developed in the 1940s by Alex Osbourne and Sid Parnes. Osbourne also coined the term brainstorming for one of the tools that can be used in their approach.

Key Elements of Creative Problem-Solving

- **Balance divergent and convergent thinking.** Divergent thinking is the open-ended, unrestricted, idea-generating mode of thought that is commonly associated with brainstorming. Convergent thinking is the logical thought process used in prioritizing and choosing solutions. Each has its place in creative problem-solving, but they must be separated and used in sequence. Ideas are generated in response to a problem using divergent thinking, without the limiting or suppressing effect of convergent thinking. That pool of ideas is then refined and developed into solutions using convergent thinking.
- **Reframe problems as questions.** The bare statement of a problem ("The problem is...") can be seen as an obstacle and can limit the range of responses you consider. Framing the problem as a question ("How might we...?"), invites exploration, curiosity, and innovation.
- **Defer or suspend judgment.** While generating ideas in response to a problem, resist the temptation to judge them, even if they seem unreasonable. Judging or ranking ideas as they are being generated shuts down their flow. It can keep you from coming up with the next idea, which might have been the best one. It can also lead you to settle for an idea that doesn't lead to an ideal solution. The time for judging and prioritizing is after the unrestricted flow of ideas has been exhausted.



- **Use "Yes, and" rather than "No, but" language.** Use positive language while generating ideas in response to a problem. "No" and "but" are words that stop conversation and the creative flow of ideas. The same is true after the full list of ideas has been generated and when you work on refining them into the best and most viable solutions. "Yes, and" language encourages continued, expanded, and deeper discussion. (The "yes, and" rule is also followed in improvisational comedy to keep the conversation going.)



Putting Creative Problem-Solving to Work for You

It's helpful to apply the elements of creative problem-solving as part of a larger process, and several models have been created to do this. Most follow this four-step structure:

- **Identify the problem.** Be clear about the problem you're trying to solve. People often confuse symptoms with the underlying problem. Get at the heart of the matter. In business, that might require gathering data. In your personal life, it might involve thinking more deeply about what's bothering you and why that might be. Once you have a clearer picture of the problem, reframe it into a question or set of questions to enable more open-minded consideration.
- **Generate new ideas.** In response to your question about the problem, start coming up with ideas using divergent thinking. At this stage, no idea is "good" or "bad." The goal is to come up with a list of ideas for more critical consideration later. Using "Yes, and" language can help with this:
 - Brainstorming is one technique for generating ideas. In a group, brainstorming can be more effective if participants prepare for the session by coming up with their own list of ideas, then share those to get the session started. That can keep a dominant person or an idea that is immediately attractive from suppressing other valuable ideas. You can also brainstorm on your own by simply building a list of ideas.
 - Other tips for idea generation include looking at a problem from different perspectives, varying your environment, and taking breaks to allow ideas to incubate in your subconscious.
- **Evaluate the options.** Review the ideas to determine which have merit or potential. Remember that raw ideas, as initially expressed, may conceal hidden value. An idea that seems impractical at first, might, with refinement and development, turn out to be the ideal solution.
- **Implement a solution.** Once you've settled on a solution, put it into practice. In an organization, this may involve project planning and communication. If it's a personal change, you may need to consider what will help you make the change and stick with it.



For More Information

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NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK (SEPTEMBER 5-11)

Suicide Prevention: Be the One to Help

Are you, or is someone you know, in crisis? You are not alone, and help is available. In the U.S., call 988, text TALK to the Crisis Text Line at 741741 (<https://www.crisistextline.org>), or visit the 988 Lifeline website (<https://988lifeline.org>). If you are outside the U.S., click here to find a suicide crisis helpline at <https://findahelpline.com> or <https://faq.whatsapp.com/1417269125743673>.

If you're concerned that someone you know may be at risk of suicide, there are ways you can help. You can reach out to them, ask direct questions, listen with empathy, and help them connect with support. Don't wait for someone else to step up, and don't just hope that the person will find a way to help themselves. By being there for a person in emotional crisis, you might save a life.

Warning signs aren't always evident when a person is thinking about suicide, but it's important to notice them when they are—and whenever someone you know seems to be in emotional distress—so you can offer help and support.



Signs of Emotional Distress

Pay attention to changes in behavior, moods, and personality, which can be signs of emotional distress and depression and, in some cases, of increased risk of suicide. These may include:

- Acting unusually anxious or agitated
- Being more confrontational or angry
- Having significant mood swings, such as being very sad one day and very happy the next, or very anxious one day and very calm the next
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits, such as sleeping or eating more or less than normal
- Withdrawing from friends and family, becoming quiet and distant, avoiding contact, not returning messages, wanting to be left alone
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday tasks, work, or studies
- Losing enthusiasm for the things the person normally enjoys
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Warning Signs of Suicide Risk

Other signs can be indications of more immediate suicide risk. These include:

- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Talking about feeling hopeless, worthless, or empty, or having no reason to live
- Talking about feelings of unbearable pain
- Making statements like, "It would be better if I wasn't here."
- Talking about feeling trapped, with no way out of a difficult situation
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Giving away valued possessions
- Putting affairs in order; making a will

- Saying goodbye to friends and family, or sending messages that feel like an ending
- Acting recklessly; taking uncharacteristic risks
- Making plans for or taking steps toward suicide, such as stockpiling medications, buying a gun, or searching online for lethal methods

What You Can Do

If someone you know shows any of these signs, talk to them. Ask them directly whether they have thoughts of suicide. Don't worry that raising the subject of suicide will put the idea in their head. Studies have shown that direct talk of suicide reduces, rather than increases, risk.^{1,2} It gives the person permission to talk about difficult thoughts and emotions, and that gives you an opportunity to listen, be there for them, help keep them safe, and connect them with help.

For More Information

U.S.A.

#BeThe1To, "Be the one to help save a life,"
<https://www.bethe1to.com>

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, "Talk to someone now,"
<https://988lifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now>

Talk Away the Dark, "If someone tells you they're thinking about suicide,"
<https://talkawaythedark.afsp.org/thinkingaboutsuiuide>

Worldwide

Befrienders Worldwide, "Global Suicide Prevention,"
<https://befrienders.org>

Find a helpline, <https://findahelpline.com>

WhatsApp, <https://faq.whatsapp.com/1417269125743673>

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2. Mathias, C., Furr, R.M., Sheftall, A., Hill-Kapturczak, N., Crum, P., & Dougherty, D.M. (2012, June). What's the harm in asking about suicidal ideation? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 42(3), 341–351. doi: 10.1111/j.1943-278X.2012.0095.x

Source: Morgan, H. (2023, September 25). *Suicide prevention: Be the one to help* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS

Five years ago, the world was shaken to a degree that millions of people had never seen in their lifetime. In a strange way, this pandemic brought everyone closer in terms of shared experience. It simultaneously drove people more apart than ever by creating a deep-rooted fear of being close to anyone. Life is now somewhat back to normal, but nuances remain when it comes to social interaction.

Nowadays, most organizations are offering different working arrangements to their employees: working hybrid, becoming fully remote, or simply going back to the office like before. Everyone can agree that having options is great. However, it is also creating a bigger distance between people. Technology is definitely a good thing that has brought different ways to connect with people, yet people need human connection to feel that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

When human beings experience low levels of social connection, this can be associated with major declines in physical and psychological health, as well as a higher likelihood of antisocial behaviors. This in turn tends to lead to further isolation. Feeling lonely can have a negative impact on your mental health, in particular, when these feelings have lasted a long time. Isolation is often associated with a heightened risk of developing depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems, and increased stress.¹

When you connect with others, you nurture your emotional and physical wellbeing. Having trustworthy relationships and feeling connected to people in your life uplifts your potential to cope with challenges. Individuals who feel a sense of connection to others are less likely to develop depression and anxiety symptoms.² In addition, studies also proclaim that having dependable relationships enhances self-esteem; they lead to people being more empathic, trusting, and cooperative with others, and, as a consequence, others reciprocate.³

Find the time to connect with others.

With this said, have you asked yourself how many times you actually looked and smiled at someone? Try to go back to some of the key behaviors that allow you to grow human connections. These are some strategies that you can put into practice to build connections with others:

- Volunteering can be a great way to build connections. Try giving your time at a nonprofit organization near you, for example.
- Surround yourself with people with shared interests. Think about things you enjoy doing (reading, hiking, playing chess, yoga, etc.), and try to find a local group that meets regularly for those exact activities. Starting, or simply going back to, this kind of routine interaction is of utmost importance. Not to mention, it is a lovely way to get comfortable being around people again and build connections.
- Support groups may also be a useful first step toward connectedness. Knowing that you aren't alone and that others also have trouble cultivating relationships can enhance your outlook on establishing connections. Remember that support groups are a great way to learn coping strategies and gather suggestions about different ways to connect with others.

- Improve your communication skills. Every time you find yourself engaging in a conversation, make an effort to be present and listen to what the other person has to say. The more you show interest, the more genuine you come across. Ask questions. Show them you are listening and that you care.
- Don't hide away in your phone—everyone knows how easy it is to just turn to your phone whenever you are feeling uncomfortable in a social interaction. However, this can inhibit your ability to be social. When you are out and about, focus on being present; tune in to social cues. Take a chance to engage with others. You will find a lot about not only yourself but others too.

Important note: If joining a group or randomly starting a chat with someone you don't know gives you severe anxiety, consider reaching out to a mental health professional. They can work with you on developing strategies that may help you manage your emotional responses to some of the triggering thoughts and/or circumstances.

Bear in mind that not everyone needs to connect socially in the same way. If you're more of an introvert, hanging out with a group of people may not be what works for you. Try to find a way to connect that matches your personality and distinctive lifestyle. Everyone is built differently, and that is the magic of being human.

It's never too late to engage in human connection. The benefits are great and can have a long-lasting impact on your mood and prevent more serious mental health concerns.⁴



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