

PROBLEM-SOLVING WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS TOO BIG

MAKE THE PROBLEM SMALL ENOUGH TO WORK WITH

When several problems arrive at once, the first skill may be defining one piece clearly rather than trying to solve everything.

1. NAME ONE PROBLEM

- Use specific, observable language.
- Instead of 'my life is a mess,' try 'I have three overdue bills and do not know which to pay first.'
- Separate the problem from your identity.

2. SORT INFLUENCE

- What can I control directly?
- What can I influence with help, advocacy, accommodation, negotiation, or resources?
- What is outside my control right now and may require acceptance, grief, or protection?

3. BRAINSTORM OPTIONS

- List several possibilities before judging them.
- Include small options, asking for help, doing nothing temporarily, requesting accommodation, changing the environment, or gathering more information.
- Consider culture, disability, finances, safety, and access.

4. CHOOSE ONE NEXT STEP

- Which option is safest and most realistic?
- What are the likely benefits, costs, and barriers?
- Can the step be made smaller?
- What would 'good enough for today' look like?

5. TRY & REVIEW

- Put the step on a calendar or attach it to a routine.
- Afterward ask: What worked? What got in the way? What did I learn?
- Adjust the plan rather than treating an imperfect result as failure.

WHEN THE PROBLEM IS SYSTEMIC

- Racism, discrimination, poverty, inaccessible systems, unsafe housing, legal problems, or workplace exploitation may not be solvable by individual coping alone.
- Advocacy, community resources, accommodations, legal information, or collective action may be part of the solution.

You do not need to solve your whole life today. Define one problem, choose one step, learn, and adjust.