

## **Table of Contents**

Narrator: Robert O'Gorman

Linda, Social Worker

Tom, 27 years old

Ellen, 42 years old: Part I

Ellen, 42 years old: Part II

Evelina, 64 years old

Conclusion

## Transcript: Solving Problems

**Narrator: Robert O'Gorman**

[Tom]

Just when I think I have one problem beat, another problem jumps up at me. So, I tell my doctor that I'm going to need some time to think about this.

[Ellen]

The one problem I had right away was, how to tell my family, friends, and co-workers about my cancer? But, my bigger problem was figuring out how I would be able to take care of my girls if I have to stop working or work less during my chemotherapy.

[Evelina]

After my diagnosis, I wanted to go home to the Philippines and start my faith healing, not this chemotherapy.

[Tom]

We considered each option on its own and talked about how it could affect us and our families, and the other parts of our plan.

[Ellen]

I wrote down a whole list of questions for my doctor, like: How would chemotherapy help me? What would happen if I decided not to have it? How often would my treatments be scheduled? Where would I have to go to get my treatments?

[Evelina]

Over the next few weeks, I realized that I wasn't going to die from my cancer soon. I started to feel less afraid of chemotherapy. I was ready to talk about the best treatments for me.

[Narrator]

Today we have more -- and better -- treatments for cancer than ever before. These treatments often result in cure or longer life. At the same time, cancer care has become more complicated, and therefore more confusing for the people who are living with cancer, whom we call cancer survivors. Cancer treatment can put a lot of physical, emotional, and social demands on the survivor. That means that cancer survivors must develop and use their problem solving skills.

[Narrator]

Almost every study of cancer survivors shows that people who have the tools to solve their unique problems report more feelings of success, better quality of life, and more sense of control over their lives and treatment. The problems they face include coping with therapy, managing home, work, and treatment, maintaining a good outlook on life, planning for the future, and so forth. To move forward with your life after cancer requires you to solve these kinds of problems. In order to do that, you must have the tools to perform your tasks and reach your goals.

[Narrator]

Welcome to Program Four in the Cancer Survival Toolbox, entitled Solving Problems. After listening to the program and working through the exercise, you will be better able to:

- Understand the importance of problem solving in surviving cancer;
- Identify problem solving skills you need when faced with a cancer diagnosis; and
- Learn the steps for making a problem-solving plan.

[Narrator]

Each day, we all face various problems -- some small and easily worked out, and others much bigger problems that require more thinking to solve. The problem-solving process is the way you think in order to solve a puzzle or problem. The five most common steps in the problem-solving process are:

1. Say what the problem is;
2. Get the facts that are related to the problem;
3. Create a plan and think it through carefully;
4. Carry out your plan; and
5. Check your plan as you go along and adjust it as needed.

[Narrator]

This process assumes that we want to play an active role in shaping our own lives, that we want to have control in our lives, and that, given the right skills or tools, we can. It's also important to realize that you might make a mistake now and then in trying to solve a problem. These mistakes might affect your ability to cope with the situation or solve a specific problem. That's OK -- you can follow the problem-solving steps to correct those mistakes. Let's discuss the five steps in more detail with help from Linda, an oncology social worker. Step 1: Say what the problem is.

## Linda, Social Worker

[Linda]

When I work with cancer survivors, the best first step I recommend in solving a problem is to identify exactly what the problem is. However you do that, by talking it through with someone else or writing it down, you will be better focused on what you are up against. Sometimes, the simple act of defining the problem will suggest steps to a solution. Look at the problem in as many different ways as you can. Use different words to restate the problem. Are other people affected by the problem? How do others, such as your family, your friends, your doctors, or your boss, see the problem? Now, what you want to do is rephrase your problem as a goal that you want to work toward and achieve. Don't be surprised if your definition of your problem changes as you go through the other steps of problem solving. That's fine. Problem solving is not a simple process, but one that changes, just like you and your cancer. Your definition doesn't need to be perfect; just do the best you can. You can always change it later.

[Narrator]

Step 2: Get the Facts that are related to the problem.

[Linda]

All good problem-solving starts with information and knowledge. So, I work with cancer survivors to get the facts that are as up-to-date as possible. This involves finding reliable sources of information. Talk to your oncology nurse or social worker, if one is available. You might also turn to cancer organizations, advocacy groups, support groups of other cancer survivors, the Internet, friends, and of course, your own family. Look at the way you rephrased your problem as a goal and ask yourself if you can reasonably achieve it with all the information you now have. If not, decide what other information and resources you may need. Are they available? Ask questions. Do your homework. Don't always accept the first answer you get. Don't be surprised if the answers to some of your questions result in more questions. You will find that the gathering of information never stops. If that seems like a lot of work, you may soon realize that this work is giving you the power and opportunity to improve your treatment, and possibly, your quality of life. As you increase your skills, you may find that you want to share your information with others. There are many survivors out there who are willing to share their experiences. Remember, of course, that each person's situation is different, but common threads are there for all to share.

[Narrator]

Step 3: Create a plan and think it through carefully.

[Linda]

Plan out the ways you are going to solve the problem. Consider the pros and cons of your approach. Think about obstacles that might get in your way. How can you overcome them? What kind of help might you need? Can you accept that help? Use your resources gathered in getting the facts. Did they change your options, add to your options, or even take some of your options away? How will your plan affect your family and those around you? Get support for your plan from everyone you can. But don't be afraid if not everyone agrees with your plan; understand their viewpoint if they are an important part of your team.

[Narrator]

Step 4: Carry out your plan.

[Linda]

Approach your plan with the attitude that it can work. Carry out whatever steps you can on your own. This doesn't mean that you have to play the "strong, silent type" who doesn't need anybody's help—in fact, by all means, seek the help of other people. But as you carry out your plan to a successful completion, you will feel more confident, more optimistic, and more in control of your situation. And once you have carried out the first three steps, you are more likely to want to keep your plan moving.

[Linda]

This doesn't mean that you might not feel depressed, discouraged, or sad at times -- but it helps to move forward and do your normal daily activities as much as physically possible. If you cannot do this, if you feel too depressed or discouraged -- seek help and support immediately. Depression is a common problem during cancer, but help is available. Problems are harder to solve when you are struggling with depression. Here are some signs to watch for that may mean you have become depressed:

- Feeling helpless and hopeless.
- Losing interest in your usual activities.
- Being unable to concentrate.
- Feeling very sad.
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Not wanting to be with family and friends.

[Linda]

If any of these symptoms last for longer than two weeks, talk with your doctor. If symptoms continue, ask your doctor to refer you to a counselor who works with people facing cancer. And please, don't wait. Aside from making you feel miserable, depression can actually interfere with the healing process, which is the last thing you need during treatment.

[Narrator]

Step 5: Check your plan as you go and adjust it as needed.

[Linda]

Set small goals as you move forward. Keep records of how your plan is going. Review your progress. Does something need adjusting? Have you found some new information? Have you found more resources? Have your circumstances changed? Think about these things, make any changes you think necessary, and keep going. You can only solve the problems facing you one step at a time.

[Narrator]

To help you learn this skill, listen to the following three case examples. They will show you how the problem solving process works. Try the exercises and think over the questions provided to help you practice these skills. Let's begin.

## Tom, 27 years old

[Narrator]

Tom is 27 years old and comes from Georgia. He has just been diagnosed with testicular cancer. He has been married for two years.

[Tom]

Before my diagnosis, my wife, Mary, and I were making plans to begin our family. After I got my diagnosis, I went to my doctor's office to choose the date for my treatment. As we were talking, he mentioned that, after the treatment, I will probably be sterile -- that I would not be able to have children. This is the first time I heard anything about this. I can't believe it -- just when I think I have one problem beat, another problem jumps up at me. So, I tell my doctor that I'm going to need some time to think about this. I've got to talk this over with Mary.

[Narrator]

As he follows the five steps for problem solving, let's see how Tom handles the problem. Step 1 -- he has said what the problem is: treatment for his cancer will probably make it impossible to have children. This completely changes the plans they made to start a family. When Tom goes home and discusses it with Mary, they are careful not to take any action before they really think it through. They ask themselves a number of questions to look at this problem from several different angles: How does Tom see the problem? How does Mary see it? What are their goals? Do they each have different goals? How important are the issues related to the problem and/or their goals? Are there other circumstances, like expectations from each of their families or aspects of their religious beliefs, that could affect the way they see the problem and their goal?

[Narrator]

Let's look at Step 2. Get the Facts. After feeling that they have talked about what the problem is, Tom and Mary meet with the doctor to find out about their options and other treatments. They go prepared with a list of questions and take notes during the visit. Tom brings a small tape recorder and tapes what the doctor says. Tom and Mary also look for other experts and sources for information. Tom gets on the Internet. Mary goes to the bookstore and to the Patient Education Department at the hospital. They ask to speak with a social worker who is able to provide resources. The social worker also tells them about a support group that might be helpful. Do you know of any other sources of information for Tom and Mary? They now have a lot of information on several options, including sperm banking, adoption, and treatment alternatives, so they are ready for Step 3 -- create a plan and think it through carefully.

[Tom]

We decided to write down our options with the pros and cons for each one. Then, we could choose the one that we think would be best to meet our goal of starting a family. We were also careful to think about the steps we would need to take for each option, the resources we would need, and problems we could face. We considered each option on its own and talked about how it could affect us and our families, and the other parts of our plan. Like the idea of sperm banking, where sperm are stored so that they would be available for in vitro fertilization later on, in case I am sterile after treatment. We asked a lot of questions, like: what steps would we have to take to store sperm and then do in vitro fertilization? Where would we have it done? What would Mary and I have to do to make this work? How successful is this approach? How do each of us feel about it? What does it cost? And, will our insurance cover it?

[Narrator]

Now, they are ready for Step 4 -- carrying out the plan. Feeling confident with their plan and with the support of their doctor, family, friends, and new-found support group, Tom and Mary set out on the plan they have chosen. As they do so, they will need to take Step 5, as well -- that's checking the plan along the way. Tom, Mary, and their doctor track their progress as they move forward. What questions might they ask themselves to measure their progress? Here are several possible questions to consider: Did this particular step in the plan go as they thought it would? Are there issues and factors they did not anticipate? Do they need to change the plan? Should they change their goals? Do they need more information? Do they need more resources?

[Narrator]

After asking any or all of these questions, they may need to make some changes in their plan. They might need to take other steps, either together or individually. As you can see, this approach to solving their problems could create a better outcome. Tom and Mary feel involved throughout the process. They feel they have regained some control. In the end, Tom and Mary are happy with their results.

## Ellen, 42 years old: Part I

[Narrator]

Let's hear from another cancer survivor. Ellen is 42 years old, and comes from London. She is the single mother of two daughters, who are 14 and 16. Her ex-husband has not called or seen them since their divorce, and he provides no financial support for the children.

[Ellen]

I was sitting in my cancer-doctor's office -- she had just told me that I have ovarian cancer and that treatment should begin as soon as possible. I remember bursting out crying -- I was overwhelmed. How could this be happening to me? How am I going to handle treatment and still be able to work and take care of my kids? Everyone depends on me!

[Ellen]

I told my doctor that I wasn't ready to tell my daughters about my cancer -- they would be scared that I was going to die, and I was too scared to talk about it with them at that time. I needed some time to let the news sink in. A million questions ran through my mind, but I couldn't put them into words. My doctor suggested that I take a few days to think about my condition and to make an appointment to come back and talk with her within the week. She suggested that I might want to bring someone along with me at that appointment. She was right when she said, "It's hard to remember everything I say or that you want to ask especially, in the beginning. Having someone along can help."

[Narrator]

Let's look at how Ellen uses the five steps approach to work on solving her problem. First step -- she has to say what the problem is.

[Ellen]

The one problem I had right away was, how to tell my family, friends, and co-workers about my cancer? But, my bigger problem was figuring out how I would be able to take care of my girls if I have to stop working or work less during my chemotherapy. Sure, it's a lot to think about, but I realized, I've already faced a lot of big problems in my life. I've survived a messy divorce, raised two wonderful girls, and had to work to support us all for many years. I won't say it's been easy, but we made it... and the tough times actually brought my girls and me closer together. When the crisis first hits you, you feel too overwhelmed to act -- that's only natural. But, when you can look at your problems and identify the most important one to work on first, you realize you can do it, you can solve that problem, and the other ones, too.

[Narrator]

As you think about Ellen's problem, does it remind you of crises you have faced in the past? What worked, and what didn't work for you in solving these problems? What do you see as Ellen's problem? If Ellen sees herself as the family caretaker, how hard will it be for her to ask for and get help?

[Narrator]

As Ellen prepares for Step 2 -- getting the facts -- she knows that her situation is serious and she hopes that treatment will help. She knows that she needs more information.

[Ellen]

After I got my diagnosis, I went home and thought about what the doctor told me. I also wrote down every question that came to mind. There was so much I needed to find out. I had to face the fact that, since I was so used to being the one to take care of everyone else, it was going to be hard for me to think about asking other people for help.

[Ellen]

I was also very worried about how to tell my girls and my parents about what was happening. I didn't want to scare them, but I also needed them to understand how serious my illness is and that I would need their help to get through the treatment. Since I have always taken care of everyone else, it's hard thinking about how I would need them to help me. I also wondered how they would react to the news and how they would deal with my not being able to do everything for them as I did in the past. I want my daughters to have as normal a life as possible in school and with their other activities. And, I was worried that other people at work would have to take over some of my duties and that they might begin to resent the extra work. Who should I tell at work and what should I tell them?

[Ellen]

It occurred to me that the only way to start answering these worries was to find out what to expect during treatment. So, I wrote down a whole list of questions for my doctor, like: How would chemotherapy help me? What would happen if I decided not to have it? How often would my treatments be scheduled? Where would I have to go to get my treatments? How is the chemotherapy given and who will give it to me? How would I feel after each treatment? If I had bad side effects, what could I take to help me feel better? How long would it take before I would know if the treatment was helping? And, is there someone who can help me work through all my concerns, about myself, my daughters, and our finances?

## Ellen, 42 years old: Part II

[Narrator]

Ellen is now prepared to talk with her doctor to answer these questions and take Step 3 --creating her plan of action.

[Ellen]

The first part of my plan was to ask a friend to come with me to my doctor's appointment, to write down the doctor's answers to each of my questions. That way, I wouldn't have to try to remember everything, which I knew would be impossible. I also asked my friend to remind me if I was forgetting to ask any of my questions -- I wanted to make the most of this visit.

[Ellen]

The next part of the plan was to figure out who I should tell about my condition and when I should tell them. I really felt the need to tell my daughters and parents about my cancer as soon as I could, because I need to be honest with them and also because I was hopeful that treatment would help. But, I decided that I needed more time and information before talking to my closest friends at work and to my supervisor.

[Narrator]

What else do you think Ellen needs to know before she talks to people at work? Let's hear how Ellen takes Step 4 -- carrying out her plan.

[Ellen]

At the next meeting with my doctor, I told her what I was most worried about. I also asked her how other patients handle such a tough situation. I wanted to know if there was someone I could talk to who could help me figure out how much to say to my family, friends, and people at work. My doctor introduced me to a nurse and a social worker who are part of my cancer care team. They told me that they are both there to help with any concerns that I might have. They also told me about a support group for women with ovarian cancer. They said that many women find the group a good place to get not just information, but also support from people who have gone through what I was about to begin. At first, I didn't like the idea of the support group, of talking about my problems with a group of women I didn't even know. The social worker was a big help in learning how to help my daughters.

[Ellen]

Well, on the first day of chemotherapy, I met another woman who was being treated for ovarian cancer. I guess we had so much in common, that I found it very easy to talk with her. She told me that she attends a support group and finds it really quite helpful. So, I thought I would give it a try. This was an important step for me. I was so used to trying to handle everything myself. But, getting more information was a big part of my plan, so I would do what I had to do to make my plan work.

[Narrator]

By breaking her problem down into smaller parts, Ellen feels that she can handle it. As she works through her plan, Ellen is taking Step 5, which is checking the plan as you go along and adjusting it when needed.

[Ellen]

I found it helpful to make a list of what might or might not work for me as I faced each new challenge. I used the meetings with my social worker and my support group as safe places to talk about my concerns, and also to test out my problem-solving skills. I learned a lot about what works and what doesn't work from other women who were in my situation.

[Narrator]

In light of Ellen's experience, think about the following questions. Does Ellen now feel more comfortable asking for help when she needs it? Do you think Ellen feels more comfortable now talking to her children, friends, and co-workers? Do you think these people feel they can talk to Ellen about their hopes and concerns? How will what Ellen learns help her with future issues?

[Ellen]

It certainly has become easier to talk to my girls and to ask for help when I'm not feeling well. As I have gotten further into treatment, other issues have come up. I know that I may have to rethink parts of my plan. That's OK -- I feel like I'm better able to handle whatever might come my way now.

## Evelina, 64 years old

[Narrator]

The third cancer survivor we will hear from is Evelina. She is a 64-year-old woman from the Philippines.

[Evelina]

I had come to the United States to visit my brother and to stay for a while. I had not seen him for about 10 years. A couple of months before I was to return home, I started feeling tired all the time. My brother, who is a doctor, told me that I looked pale and drawn. He insisted that I get a checkup before going home to the Philippines. He made an appointment for me to see a doctor he knows.

[Evelina]

My physical exam showed a lump in my right breast. When the doctor asked me about it, I said, yes, I had felt that for about a year, but I thought it would go away. Of course, I did think that maybe it might be something that could get worse. The doctor suggested some more tests, including a biopsy. Well, the results showed that I had breast cancer. After some more tests, the doctor tells me that I need surgery, and maybe chemotherapy, too.

[Narrator]

Sometimes, taking Step 1 in problem-solving -- saying what the problem is -- is not so easy. Listen to how Evelina talks about her beliefs, what her brother, Manuel, thinks, and how her sister-in-law, Letty is really the one who helps take the first step in solving the problem.

[Evelina]

After my diagnosis, I wanted to go home to the Philippines and start faith healing, not this chemotherapy. Yes, I will have surgery, but, no, I won't even talk about the chemotherapy. You see, I am a devout Catholic, I attend mass every day. I get great comfort from spiritual support. I made a group of friends here who pray for my physical healing. During mass, the beautiful music and praying my rosary lift my spirits every day. I also have heard from my friends back home about faith healing. That is what I wanted, to go home and see a faith healer.

[Evelina]

But, Manuel was trained as a doctor in the Philippines. He doesn't even want to hear about my wish to return home. He wants me to be treated here, with surgery and chemotherapy. He is my older brother and I know he feels responsible for seeing that I get good treatment. But, the more he talks about the treatment here, the more I want to go home. It has been stressful around the house.

[Evelina]

I know Manuel wants the best for me, but he doesn't respect my wishes. I want to have more Filipino food, like rice and chicken porridge, and warm ginger-root tea from back home. They make me feel more comfortable. American food is just too different. I know, Manuel's children think this is a little strange. But, you know, I am afraid of what's happening to me, afraid to have chemotherapy. I worry that this chemotherapy will kill me. I told Manuel I would rather die from cancer than from the side effects of treatment. From what I know about chemotherapy, it sounds worse than dying. To me, I believe "bahala na," which means "what will be, will be." If it is my time to die, it should be at home in the Philippines -- not here in the United States, and not from the chemotherapy.

[Evelina]

While Manuel and I are arguing about this for a couple of weeks, Letty, my sister-in-law, was listening the whole time. She didn't seem to take sides. She could understand what I was saying, but she also trusts Manuel's opinions. She talks to us both one day, and says that the real problem is that we are fighting with each other about what to do. Why don't we talk to other people and see if what they say can help us decide what to do. She had thought this out and said it so calmly that Manuel and I both knew she was right. Let's give it a chance.

[Narrator]

So, Letty helped start the problem-solving process by saying clearly what the problem is, and she got Manuel and Evelina to agree to take Step 2 and get the facts that are related to the problem.

[Evelina]

Letty asked me if I would like to have the parish priest come and talk with both Manuel and me. She also thought about asking a Filipina friend with cancer to talk with me about her own cancer. This woman is like me, and she is willing to help. We have the same spiritual beliefs. She also tells me about her own experiences with chemotherapy. She is very good to talk with, and I feel comfortable talking honestly with her. So, I ask her many questions about cancer, chemotherapy, faith healing, and hope -- questions I couldn't ask anyone else.

[Narrator]

Now, Step 3 -- creating a plan of action.

[Evelina]

Over the next few weeks, I realized that I was not going to die from my cancer soon. I started to feel less afraid of chemotherapy. I was ready to talk about the best treatments for me. I decided to have surgery, and maybe the chemotherapy. Then, I will return home after the treatment is done. For now, I have found a faith healer in the community. I will continue to attend Mass every day, and the Priest has agreed to see me regularly for spiritual counseling. These plans make me much happier.

[Narrator]

Manuel and Letty help Evelina with Step 4 -- carrying out the plan. They do so by helping her with her chemotherapy treatments, and helping her with her faith healer and special foods that she requires for her faith healing. They also work well together in Step 5, which is checking the plan as they go along and adjusting it as needed. Though there are times of frustration for all of them, they learn to share their feelings and work together on the agreed upon plan. As the treatment progresses, all of them will need to re-evaluate and possibly change some of their plans and goals. Other problems may arise for which they will need to again look at these problem solving steps and work on a new plan or some additional steps in the process of Evelina's treatment.

## Conclusion

[Narrator]

In summary, remember that you have been solving problems every day of your life. With understanding and practice, you can solve problems that are related to your cancer. To begin with, you must understand the importance of problem-solving in your cancer experience. Then you can identify skills you need for problem-solving. Finally, by using the five-step process covered in this program, you can begin to make progress in your situation. As you do, you will build confidence in your abilities and improve your healing process.

This is the end of Program Four in the Cancer Survival Toolbox, entitled Solving Problems. Please continue on to Program Five, entitled Negotiating to learn more about negotiating skills and how they can help you.