PROBLEM SOLVING

FOR

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH

CANCER
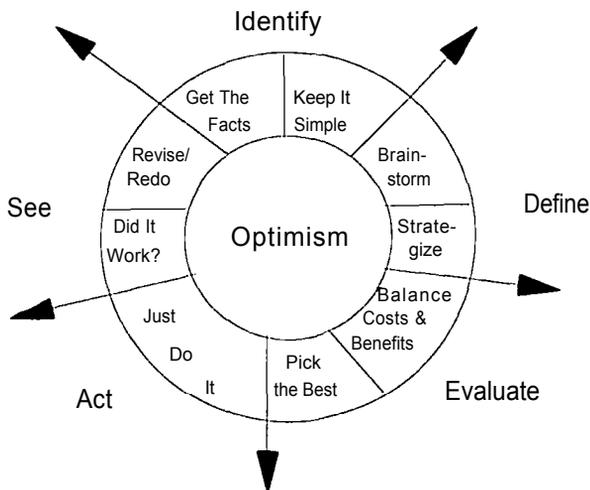
USING

BRIGHT

I D E A S

Dear Parent:

Having a child with cancer puts a tremendous emotional, physical, and financial strain on families.

To help you cope with the many decisions and problems you are facing, we have developed a 6-step system called **Bright IDEAS.**

We believe you will find it useful for solving problems related to your child's cancer as well as everyday problems at home or work.

- the cancer treatment team

The Bright IDEAS System
For Problem-Solving

Identify

Get The Facts | Keep It Simple

Revise/ Redo | Brain- storm

See

Did It Work? | Optimism | Strate- gize

Define

Just | Balance Costs & Benefits

Do | Pick the Best

It

Act

Evaluate

I dentify the problem
D efine your options
E valuate your options
A ct
S ee if it worked

Step #1 in this system is adopting the frame of mind that you believe and understand that you CAN cope successfully. We call this **OPTIMISM.** It is the most important tool you will use to make the system work for you. It is so important that we have put it in the center of the **IDEAS** system and we use the word **"bright"** (intelligent, clever, auspicious, promising) to remind you of the positive outlook that is essential for effective problem solving.

Identify the Problem

Step #2 is to **identify** a solvable problem. Almost any problem, no matter how major it may look at first, is solvable if we break it down into small parts. We then need to decide exactly what has to happen to make each small part work better. After we solve one small part, we begin to work on another part. After we have solved two or three parts, the overall problem usually is taken care of. Throughout this booklet, we are going to use the example of "poor communication" between you and your child's doctor to show how a big problem can be solved by working step by step on smaller problems.

Let's start with the term "poor communication." What does this really mean? Let's say you make the following list: 1) The doctor doesn't talk with me each day when
   my child is in the hospital.
   2) The doctor uses medical terms I can't
      understand.
   3) The doctor doesn't call me with test results when
      my child is an outpatient.

All three of these smaller problems add up to "poor communication." Listing them separately helps you figure out what the doctor needs to do differently to make communication better.

Define your Options

Step #3 is to figure out is what you need to do to make changes happen! That is, you need to **define** your options.

Let's take "the doctor doesn't talk with me each day when my child is in the hospital."

Now make a list about why this might be so. For example,
1) The doctor visits my child before I get to the hospital in the morning and after I leave in the afternoon.
2) The doctor has lots of patients to see and only stops in my child's room for 2 minutes.
3) The doctor has the nurse tell me but I want the doctor to tell me.

Let's take #1 again: "The doctor visits before I arrive or after I leave."

Define your options or solutions:
1) Come earlier/leave later.
2) Ask the doctor when it would be convenient to meet at another time of the day and where.
3) Ask the doctor when it would be convenient to talk about my child's care over the phone.

Think of other options you can define.

Evaluate your Options

Step #4 is **evaluate** the options listed above and decide which is best for you. Most importantly, you have to decide what the **barriers** are, that is, what things would stop you from doing 1), 2) or 3). Are they things you can change without more trouble than its worth. This is a *cost-benefit analysis* — is the cost (what you have to change) worth the benefit (talking with your child's doctor each day for, say, 10-15 minutes)? Based on the costs and benefits, you should rank the best choice as #1 and so on.

Let's start with option #1 "Come earlier/go later". Let's say your barriers are that you have two other children who are in school and you can't leave the house until 8:30 a.m. (the doctor makes rounds at 7:30 a.m.). You also have to be home to supervise at 3 p.m. (the doctor rounds at 4 p.m.). Furthermore, your husband leaves for work at 7:30 a.m. and returns home at 5 p.m. He has no vacation or sick time left and a baby-sitter in the afternoon from 3 to 5 p.m. would cost you at least $5.00/day. Given all the other costs you have to pay, you want to avoid adding an afternoon babysitter. You would also like to be home for your other children.

Let's go to option #2. You could make yourself available anytime between 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Because you know the doctor sometimes has emergencies or other duties, you could offer to be in your child's room between 11:30 and 1 p.m. each day. This would mean eating lunch early or late and not being able to leave the hospital room until after the doctor's visit.

Let's go to option #3. You could offer the same suggestion as in #2 but the doctor could call rather than come to your child's room. The barriers are the same as #2 but, in addition, you would not see the doctor face-to-face, which you feel is important to you.

Of the three options you decide that #2 would be best: adjusting your lunch time is not a problem, you will not have to pay for a sitter, you can be home with your two other children before and after school, and you will be able to actually meet with the doctor. On your own you decide to do one more thing: keep a small notepad in your purse so you can write down questions you, your husband, or other family members have so you can make the most of the 10-15 minutes with the doctor. You and the doctor agree to the plan.

Act On Your Plan

To accomplish Step #5, you start to **act** on your plan the next day and for two days the plan works well. On the third day the doctor has an emergency and you get word from the nurses that the meeting has to be canceled.

See if it worked

Step #6 helps you see whether the plan is working well or if you need to make some changes. You can decide that 1) two days out of three is O.K. and you will just save your questions; 2) it would be all right for the doctor to call if a visit is impossible; 3) you could go to the clinic rather than wait at your child's bedside; or someone else (for example, the nurse) can talk with you. You decide that daily contact with the doctor is essential. You and the doctor discuss calling as an option to visiting. You both agree that talking on the phone is preferable to either skipping a meeting, your going to the clinic which is busy and not very private, or having someone else answer your questions. You revise the plan and try again. Over the next week you are satisfied that seeing the doctor almost every day and talking on the phone occasionally meet your needs for information and "communication."

As you have worked on this part of the plan, perhaps you have already asked the doctor to explain words you don't understand. If not, what are your options for doing so? Which option is best? How are you and the doctor going to carry it out? How will you know if it's working? What will you do if it's not?

The enclosed sample worksheet *(pages 7 & 8)* summarizes the problems the parent discussed in this booklet was facing. Use the blank worksheet *(pages 9 & 10)* as a guide to **I**dentify the problem, **D**efine your options, **E**valuate your options (and pick the best), **A**ct on your plan, and **S**ee if it worked.

We will provide copies of the worksheets, but please feel free to make lots of copies of the worksheets to use yourself or share with members of your family.

SAMPLE WORK SHEET

The following is a completed worksheet as an example.

Step 1: A **BRIGHT** beginning: The problem can be solved and I can do it!

Step 2 - Identify the Problem

A. Describe the overall problem: Poor communication with the doctor

Specific Problem #1: The doctor doesn't talk with me each day when my child is in the hospital.
Specific Problem #2: The doctor uses medical terms I don't understand.
Specific Problem #3: The doctor doesn't call me with test results when my child is an outpatient.

B. Choose a specific problem part and analyze it. __#1__

Why did I choose this problem? My husband and family ask me questions I can't answer and I'm worried we're not doing the right thing or making the right decisions.
Where does the problem occur? In the hospital
Who else is involved as part of the problem? The doctor.
Why does the problem occur? Doctor makes rounds when I can't be at the hospital. Doctor is busy.
How do I respond and feel when the problem occurs? Annoyed, frustrated, and "in the dark" about my child's medical care.
*How **optimistic** am I about solving this problem?*

     Not at all   Very
       1   2   3 | 4 | 5

Step 3 - Define options Step 4 - Evaluate options

Possible Solution	Barriers	Rank Choices
Solution #1: Come earlier/leave later	Need to take care of two other kids; $5.00/day for a baby-sitter	❏
Solution #2: Make yourself available	Eat lunch early or late	❏
Solution #3: Ask the doctor for his/her convenient time to talk over the phone	Eat lunch early or late; Miss face-to-face interaction with the doctor	❏

Step 5 - Act (what you will do)
The doctor and I will talk at lunch time. (I also will write down my questions.)

Step 6 - See if it worked
Results: It worked for 2 days; third day the doctor had an emergency and we didn't meet.

How satisfied am I with the result?

Not at all				*Very*
1	2	3	4	5

Alternative Solution If Not Satisfied with the Result:
I will ask the doctor to call me at my child's room if a visit is impossible.

WORK SHEET EXAMPLE

Step 1: A **BRIGHT** beginning: The problem can be solved and I can do it!

Step 2: Identify the Problem

A: Describe the overall problem:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Problem Part #1:

Problem Part #2:

Problem Part #3:

B: Choose a specific problem part and analyze it. #____

Why *did I choose this problem?*

Where *does the problem occur?*

Who *else is involved as part of the problem?*

Why *does the problem occur?*

How *do I respond and feel when the problem occurs?*

How **optimistic** *am I about solving this problem?*

> *Not at all*   *Very*
>   1   2   3   4   5

Step 3 - Define options   **Step 4 - Evaluate options**

Possible Solution	Barriers	Rank Choices
Solution #1:		❐
Solution #2:		❐
Solution #3:		❐

Step 5 - Act (describe what you will do) _____

_____

_____

_____

Step 6 - See if it worked
Results:

　　　How satisfied am I with the result?
　　　　　　Not at all　　　　　　　*Very*
　　　　　　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

　　　Alternative Solution If _Not_ Satisfied with the Result:

　　　_____

　　　_____

　　　_____

Designed by Pam DeMocker