

17.10 SkillBuilder: Problem solving and decision making

17.10.1 Tell me

Problem solving and decision making involve working collaboratively in groups, negotiating and using teamwork to solve an issue and develop a plan for action. In order to do this successfully, you will need to do the following:

- Listen actively to the views of every member of the group.
- Display empathy for others' views. This means that you have an appreciation for the feelings of others and respect their right to an opinion, even if it is different from your own.
- Negotiate to resolve differences of opinion.
- Arrive at a conclusion in a democratic manner. This can mean having a vote among members of the group, or arriving at a consensus where everyone agrees to change their views slightly until reaching a conclusion that everyone agrees with.

These steps are summarised in figure 1.

FIGURE 1 The problem-solving and decision-making process

Permissions
clearance
pending



17.10.2 Show me

So how does this process work in practice? Consider this example: In Australia everyone over 18 years of age can vote, but it is the responsibility of young people to register to vote when they turn 18. It has been estimated that as many as 30 per cent of Australians aged 18 to 21 have not registered, and so are missing out on voting.

Now form into discussion groups to consider the following key points:

1. Why are so many young people not bothering to register?
2. Should we be encouraging more young people to register?
3. What are some of the ways in which we can encourage all 18-year-olds to register?
4. What plan of action could we devise to achieve greater levels of registration?

Members of the group can take it in turns to keep notes. For each discussion point, you should use the following procedure:

- Give each person a chance to express his or her opinion on the discussion point being considered. The key points of the opinion should be written down.
- Do not permit any argument or disagreement until everyone has expressed an opinion on that discussion point.
- Once everyone's opinions on the discussion point have been shared and written down, read out the opinions and discuss them to determine whether or not everyone is in agreement.
- If there is disagreement, allow those on each side of the argument the opportunity to put their point of view to convince the majority.
- Seek the maximum level of agreement on each point discussed by allowing people to make some changes to their opinions to accommodate the views of others.

In devising a plan of action for discussion point 4, all possible ways of encouraging 18-year-olds to vote should be collated into a series of steps that you believe will achieve the final result.

17.10.3 Let me do it

Complete the following activities to practise this skill.

17.10 ACTIVITIES

Use the steps modelled in **FIGURE 1** to consider the following issue: Voting in Australia is compulsory for all those over 18 years of age, and has been since the early 1920s. It was a decision of the parliament at the time and is not written into the Constitution. In many other countries, such as the United States and Great Britain, voting is optional. In Australia, you can be fined for not voting. Would it be fairer and more democratic for Australia to move to optional voting?

Discussion points could include:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory voting, both for individuals and for our society as a whole?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of optional voting, both for individuals and for our society as a whole?
3. If a change were to be considered, what are some of the ways you might convince others to support the change?
4. If you do not wish to change, how do you convince others to support the current system?
5. Develop a plan of action to put your ideas into practice.

DISCUSS

Were you able to make a decision in a democratic manner in your group? Discuss if anyone accepted the responsibility of group leader and, if so, how well they supported other members of your group.