

Summary and Rationale

This lesson provides an overview of problem solving. The conflict cycle and six problem solving skills are introduced. Problem solving skills are tools that, when used in conjunction with social skills and the skill of cognitive selfchange, can change the ways our thinking and acting can get us into trouble, especially in stressful (risky) situations. Subsequent sessions focus on each of the six problem solving skills.

Group members learn each skill by watching the facilitators model it and then practicing it both in the session and by doing homework. Facilitators should help group members to recognize the many common and repeating elements from social skills and cognitive self-change that appear in problem solving.

Concepts and Definitions

The **conflict cycle** is a cycle of thoughts, feelings, actions and consequences that increase and escalate problem situations. The goal of problem solving is to escape the conflict cycle and minimize the negative impact of a particular problem situation. The conflict cycle consists of four parts; the problem; warning signs; actions; and consequences.

The six **problem solving skills** can be used to help us avoid or escape the conflict cycle.

Problem Solving Skills

Skill 1: Stop and Think

- Step 1: Pay attention to your warning signs
 - o Physical reactions
 - Risk thoughts
 - o Risk feelings
- Step 2: Think: Reduce your risk
 - o Be quiet
 - Get space
 - o Calm down

Skill 2: State the Problem

- Step 1: Identify a warning sign
- Step 2: Describe the situation objectively
- Step 3: Identify a risk reaction

Skill 4: Think of Choices and Consequences

- Step 1: Brainstorm choices
- Step 2: Think about consequences
- Step 3: Pick a choice to get to your goal

Skill 5: Make a Plan

- Step 1: Identify who, where and when
- Step 2: Choose key social skills that can help you
- Step 3: Identify *what* you will do or say
- Step 4: Identify *how* you will do and say it
- Step 5: Decide on a thought to get you started

Skill 3: Set a Goal and Gather Information

- Step 1: Identify a positive and realistic goal
- Step 2: Gather information
 - o Facts
 - The other person's thoughts and feelings

Skill 6: Do and Evaluate

- Step 1: Do it
- Step 2: Ask questions
- Step 3: Decide what to do next

Objective – As a result of this lesson the group members will be able to answer questions that help them apply the problem solving skills to a situation.

Major Activities

Activity 1: Homework review Activity 2: Program Organizer Review Activity 3: Overview of Lesson Activity 4: Show clip from The Breakfast Club (on the NIC Thinking for a Change DVD) Activity 5: Apply Conflict Cycle Activity 6: Apply the Six Problem Solving Skills Activity 7: Explain Problem Solving Skill 1 – Stop and Think Activity 8: Explain Skill 2 - State the
Problem
Activity 9: Explain Skill 3 - Set a Goal
and Gather Information
Activity 10: Explain Skill 4 - Think of
Choices and Consequences
Activity 11: Explain Skill 5 - Make a
Plan
Activity 12: Explain Skill 6 - Do and
Evaluate
Activity 13: Wrap-up
Activity 14: Assign homework

Supplements*

Charts – Make before facilitating lesson. (See supplement section or facilitator notes in each lesson for full text of chart page.)

Denoted in lesson plan with this symbol:



C-16-1-Program Organizer Questions C-16-2-Problem Solving Skills and Steps – Bender C-16-3-Step 4: Identify How You Will Do and Say It

Charts/notes on Program Organizer from lessons 1 and 6 Handouts – Make copies before lesson. (See

supplement section of each lesson for camera ready pages.)

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H-16-1–Overview of Problem Solving Skills and Steps H-16-2–Homework Presentation Slides - Make

transparencies if projector is not available. (See supplement section of each lesson for camera ready pages.)

Denoted in lesson plan with this symbol:



P-16-1-Title slide P-16-2-Negotiating Defined P-16-3-Negotiating Skill Steps P-16-4-Homework Review P-16-5-Homework Review, cont. P-16-6–Program Organizer P-16-7-Conflict Cycle P-16-8-Problem Solving Skills P-16-9-Skill 1 P-16-10-Skill 2 P-16-11-Skill 3 P-16-12-Skill 4 P-16-13-Skill 5 P-16-14-Skill 6 P-16-15-Homework

* This lesson requires the viewing of a scene from the Universal Studios movie, "The Breakfast Club."[©] You or your agency will have to rent or buy a copy.

Equipment	Supplies
 Easel (chart stand) 	 Chart paper
 Projector to show presentation slides 	 Markers
 Projection screen or suitable surface 	 Masking tape
 Television and DVD player, or ability to play a DVD through the projector using 	 Copies of participant handouts
a PC/laptop w/speakers	 DVD of <i>The Breakfast Club</i>[©] movie (Universal Studios, 1985)

Activity 1: Homework Review

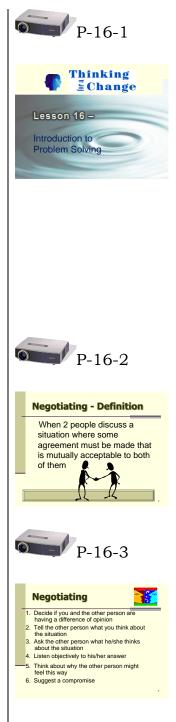
Welcome back to another session of **Thinking for A Change**. In the last lesson we learned about using the social skill of **negotiating**.

Today we are going to begin to learn another set of skills, and these are about problem solving. As we will see, being good at problem solving means we will need to use all that we have learned and practiced about social skills and cognitive self-change.

Before we talk more about problem solving, let's briefly review the last skill we learned, **negotiating**. Remember that skill was about two people discussing a situation where some agreement must be made that is mutually acceptable to both parties.

Who would like to review the steps of **negotiating** for us?

(Answer: Decide if you and the other person are having a difference of opinion; Tell the other person what you think about the situation; Ask the other person what he/she thinks about the situation; Listen objectively to his/her answer; Think about why the other person might feel this way; Suggest a compromise.)



Have volunteers read the steps of the skill. You may wish to have individuals take turns Your homework was to practice using the **negotiating** skill.

Take out your homework reports and let's quickly review.

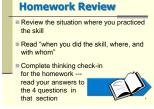
Who would like to begin?

Activity 2: Program Organizer Review

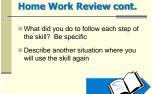
Now that we have finished learning about social skills, I want to show you our program organizer again.

reading a step of the skill and saying whether it is a thinking step or an action step.









Display the program organizer and give the group a few moments to study it.



As we look at the program organizer for the third time, here are some of the things you have noted about it.

Looking at the program organizer this time, take a minute to talk with your partner and answer:

- What kinds of new learning or observations do you have?
- What are some of your thoughts or feelings?

Let's hear some of your ideas.



A

Either display the chart paper with the comments from the first 2 program organizer discussions (lesson 1, activity 6; and lesson 9, activity 8), or read some of the comments that were saved.

Have your group pair off.

H 16-1-Program Organizer Questions

Have a discussion with the group about the program organizer, soliciting responses to

Activity 3: Overview of Lesson

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, today we begin a new section of the program. It's called problem solving. Problem solving is a set of skills we can use to deal with many different stressful situations.

To begin, we're going to look at how ways of responding to problems can actually make things worse. This is called the conflict cycle.

Let's look at an example of a situation where the problem goes from bad to worse.

Activity 4: Show Film Clip - The Breakfast Club

How many of you have ever seen *The Breakfast Club?*

The Breakfast Club is considered by some to be a classic movie about challenges of the teenage years. In this scene you will see a variety of teens spending their Saturday at school doing a the questions raised.

Post all comments on chart paper or record on paper for later use. **Save this chart/these**

notes for future use.

You (your agency) will need to either purchase or rent a copy of *The Breakfast Club*[©] (Universal Studios, 1985) for this detention. There is the athlete, the really smart kid, the prom queen, an off-beat girl and then there is our main character, Bender, who is out to fight authority. Bender comes into conflict with the assistant principal, Mr. Vernon, who is in charge of the detention.

Mr. Vernon has laid out two rules for the students in the Saturday library detention. They are not to talk and not get out of their chairs. So, what do you think they've been doing?

(Example answer: Talking, getting out of chairs.)

Mr. Vernon is trying to monitor their behavior from a distance. He's tightened a screw in the door to keep the door propped open so he doesn't have to stay in the library to supervise them.

We will now view a scene from the movie. It shows a growing conflict between Bender, the student, and Mr. Vernon, the assistant principal. Focus on Bender as you watch. When the scene is over, we will analyze what happened with Bender.

Activity 5: Apply Conflict Cycle

Let's talk about what happened in the film clip

Preview the movie before the lesson begins so that you have it cued up at the appropriate place – the conflict between Mr. Vernon and Bender over the missing screw from the library door.

Show clip, beginning with Bender taking the screw out of the door, stopping after Mr. Vernon exits the library and takes a deep breath.



by using the "conflict cycle."

Problem

The conflict cycle begins with a problem, which is shown in the top circle.

If we asked Bender to describe the problem what do you think he would say?

(Example answers: Mr. Vernon hates me. Mr. Vernon is a jerk. He was out to get me.)

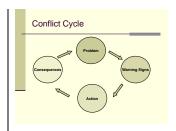
Warning Signs

Being in a problem situation leads to three kinds of warning signs in our body that let us know we are having a problem. These warning signs are: Physical reactions; thoughts; and feelings.

What physical reactions do you think Bender might be experiencing in this confrontation?

(Example answers: Fast heart beat, tight stomach, or tense muscles.)

What thoughts do you think might be going through Bender's head?



Point to circle labeled Problem.

Answers to this question may vary – the goal is to get a non-objective description of the situation.

Point to circle labeled Warning Signs.

Accept all reasonable answers.

(Example answers: "He can't do this to me." "I'll show him.")

What emotional feelings do you think Bender was having in this situation?

(Example answers: Challenged, frustrated, angry, etc.)

Action and Consequences

If a person does not use new thinking, these internal experiences can lead directly to emotional or impulsive actions.

Mr. Vernon is telling Bender to be quiet. Bender's response is to keep mouthing off to Mr. Vernon.

Each time Bender says something (an action), Mr. Vernon provides a consequence which is another Saturday detention.

That takes us back to the top of the conflict cycle.

Bender now has more problems than when he started. He lost the confrontation, and he has more detentions.

Bender and Mr. Vernon went through the conflict cycle 5 or more times depending on who was counting.

Each time Bender mouthed off to Mr. Vernon

Point to circle labeled Action and then the circle labeled Consequences.

Point to the circle labeled Problem.

Point to the appropriate circle as

he got another detention.

Bender's risk thoughts and feelings led him to keep responding and getting more detentions. In the end, Bender did stop talking, but only after turning one detention into 8 detentions.

One important key to solving problems is to be able to use our head rather than let our feelings take over.

We all have habits and impulses that get us into trouble. It is possible to stop the conflict cycle between thoughts and feeling and actions. Doing so will let us make choices about our thoughts and actions instead of letting risk thoughts and feelings take over.

This puts us in control of our thinking and actions. It gives us power and lets us decide what we will do, rather than just reacting based on our emotional feelings.

Mr. Vernon knew how to push Bender's buttons to get him to react so he would get into more trouble. The goal of problem solving is to stop the conflict cycle.

We want problems to be handled in a way that ends up with fewer rather than more problems.

Let's use the problem solving skills to explore

Point to the arrow between the feelings and thoughts and the actions circle to show where we can stop and think. what Bender could have done to stop the conflict cycle.

We want Bender to be in control of his thinking.

We want Bender to decide the outcome rather than react to Mr. Vernon's challenge to stop talking.

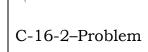
Activity 6: Apply the Six Problem Solving Skills

Let's apply the problem solving skills to the last chance Bender had to not get more detentions. That was when Mr. Vernon stood in front of Bender and said, "The next screw that falls out is going to be you." Bender said under his breath, "Eat my shorts." Mr. Vernon said, "What did you say?" This was Bender's last chance to avoid more detentions.

What Bender did was to sit back, make eye contact and in a loud voice say, "Eat my shorts." Well, we all know where that led to. We shall now examine what might have happened if Bender had had some problem solving skills "in his pockets."

Here is a chart that shows the problem solving skills and steps. We're going to fill it out from Bender's point of view, imagining what might Remember the foundation of **Thinking for a Change**: Thinking controls our behavior.

Briefly demonstrate this final interaction (or show that interaction from the DVD).



have happened if he had thought things out before acting, rather than reacting emotionally, as he did.

This is just going to be a quick overview of each of the skills. We'll go into much more detail of each of them in the coming lessons.

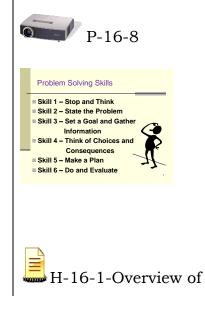
We are now going to go through the problem solving skills one at a time and apply them to Bender's situation. You can follow along on your handout. Solving Skills & Steps – Bender (See supplement for example)

Make C-16-1 before the session.

This is just an introduction to problem solving. Keep a brisk pace.

Write in key information as you discuss each step.

You will use this information later to help you model the problem solving steps.



Activity 7: Explain Problem Solving Skill 1 – Stop and Think

Stop and think is our first problem solving skill.

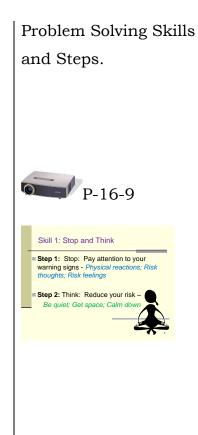
Let's look at how we can apply the stop and think skill to Bender's situation.

Remember we are looking at the few seconds between Bender saying, "Eat my shorts." under his breath and Mr. Vernon saying "What did you say?", and Bender's next move. This is the last chance Bender had to deal differently with the conflict.

Step 1: Stop: Pay Attention to Your Warning Signs

When using **stop and think**, our first step is to pay attention to our individual warning signs. These warning signs tell us we are having a problem.

• One warning sign is the physical reactions we have that tell us we are having a problem. Examples of physical



reactions are a fast heart beat, feeling hot or a tight stomach.

- Risk thoughts are a second warning sign.
- Our risk feelings or emotions are a third warning sign.

Turn to a group member sitting near you and identify two physical reactions, two risk thoughts and two risk feelings you think Bender might be having when Mr. Vernon was confronting him.

What physical reactions do you think Bender was having?

(Example answers: Heart pounding, headache, dry throat

What risk thoughts do you think Bender was having?

(Example answers: "I hate him." "He can't call me out.")

What was a risk feeling he was having?

(Example answers: Anger, embarrassment.)

These physical reactions, thoughts and feelings are warning signs that Bender is in a problem situation and about to lose control. We have learned to recognize these warning signs Give group members one or two minutes to discuss.

After giving the group time to discuss, ask each question. Write one or two ideas group members give you in the appropriate place on the chart. throughout this program, haven't we?

Step 2: Think: Reduce Your Risk

These signs can be used to trigger thinking, rather than an emotional response. They can tell us to stop and think.

In our next lesson we will dig more deeply into problem solving skill 1: **stop and think**. Then we will learn and practice ways to reduce our risk by doing things like: Be quiet; get space; and calm down.

Activity 8: Explain Skill 2 - State the Problem

The next skill in problem solving is **state the problem**. To do this we identify key information that helps us think about the problem. We can do this by describing the problem in one or two sentences that include three pieces of information.

Step 1: Identify a Warning Sign

Begin with the word "I." Even if we didn't start the problem we want to clearly identify what is important for us to think about. Starting with the word I can help us do that.

Begin by identifying one of our warning signs a physical reaction, risk thought or a risk



feeling that warns us we are having a problem.

Let's apply this to Bender. How about, "I feel angry"? That is certainly a clear warning sign.

Step 2: Describe the Situation Objectively

Next you describe what happened. We want to describe the problem as objectively as possible something like the situation description in a thinking report. This is where we describe what was said or done.

How about, "because Mr. Vernon told me he would give me detentions if I kept talking"?

Step 3: Identify a Risk Reaction

The third part is to identify a risk reaction. A risk reaction is what we could do to react emotionally or impulsively that could make the problem worse. This is important because the purpose of problem solving is to use thinking to avoid emotional reactions which can lead to more trouble. For Bender, his risk reaction was to "keep mouthing off." This caused Bender more problems.

Okay, we have applied two problem solving skills, **stop and think** and **state the problem**, to this situation. Let's move on to skill 3: **set a goal and gather information**. Write this statement on the chart.

Write this statement on the chart.

Write this statement on the chart.

Activity 9: Explain Skill 3 - Set a Goal and Gather Information

The first thing we do in this problem solving skill is to identify our goal.

Step 1: Identify and Set a Positive and Realistic Goal

Our goal is what we want to happen.

Let's make this Bender's goal – "I want no more detentions, but I don't want to look weak."

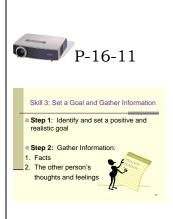
If he had had time to think about the situation, he could have decided that what he really wanted was not to have to spend more Saturdays in school in detention, rather than what he did which was to mouth off and get more detentions.

This goal statement also does not have Bender hurting anyone. This is important because if our goal is to hurt someone, we usually end up with more problems.

Now that he has a goal, he can identify what he knows about the situation. This can help him figure out what to do.

Step 2: Gather Information

Facts - When we gather information we need to



Write Bender's Goal on the chart: "I want no more detentions, but I don't want to look weak."

sort the facts from the opinions.	
Facts are objective – they simply state the information that anyone watching the situation would know. Focusing on facts helps us to think about the situation objectively.	
Here are three facts about the situation.	
1. Bender took the screw. Why is this fact important?	
(Example answer: This started the confrontation.)	
2. The scene between Bender and Mr. Vernon is in front of other students. Why is this fact important?	
(Example answer: This can affect what Bender does, if he cares how he looks in front of the other students.)	
3. Mr. Vernon is the assistant principal. Why is this fact important?	
(Example answer: Mr. Vernon is the person in authority. It is his job to enforce rules. He probably won't back down.)	
The Other Person's Thoughts and Feelings –	
Another important thing to think about is what	
the other person might be thinking and feeling.	
We know that their thoughts and feelings will	

National Institute of Corrections

Thinking for a Change

Introduction to Problem Solving

Write the facts on the chart.

affect what they will do in the situation.

What are two thoughts you think Mr. Vernon had?

(Example answers: I can't let Bender get away with this. I've got him now.)

What are two feelings Mr. Vernon might have had?

(Example answers: Frustrated, angry.)

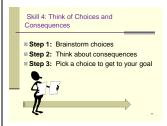
Activity 10: Explain Skill 4 - Think of Choices and Consequences

The skill of **think of choices and consequences** is a crucial problem solving skill. The more choices we can think of, the better chance we have of coming up with something that will get us to our goal.

Let's replay the confrontation between Bender and Mr. Vernon and stop at the last chance Bender had to keep from getting more detentions. That was when Mr. Vernon stood in front of Bender and said, "The next screw that falls out is going to be you." Bender said under his breath, "Eat my shorts." Mr. Vernon said, "What did you say?" Note one or two thoughts in the appropriate place on the chart.

Note one or two feelings in the appropriate place on the chart.





Briefly demonstrate this final interaction (or show that interaction from the DVD).

Step 1: Brainstorm Choices

Let's brainstorm 10 different actions that Bender could take in this tough situation. In brainstorming, any ideas are fine.

Step 2: Think About Consequences

Once we come up with possible actions we then consider the consequences of the actions. Consequences can be either good or bad.

Let's pick three of our choices and discuss possible consequences.

Step 3: Pick a Choice to Get to Your Goal

Now comes a challenging part. We have to

If the group gets stuck or off track, redirect by asking them to identify social skills Bender could use.

Write down every idea in the appropriate place on the chart.

Lead the group members through a discussion about possible consequences for 3 of their choices.

You do not need to write anything more than a "+" or "-" on the chart for consequences. identify which action or actions that we brainstormed have the best chance of getting Bender to his goal.

Remember Bender's goal is, "I want no more detentions, but I don't want to look weak in front of the other students."

We also want to think about what we know about Bender. We need to pick a choice that we think Bender is able to do.

First, let me read the choices you brainstormed and we will cross off any that won't help him reach his goal.

The next thing we do is think about which action or actions Bender can pull off that will help him reach his goal of not getting more detentions and not looking weak.

Let's look at the choices that are left. Which ones might help him use his strengths?

It is now time for you, as a group, to decide on the action Bender should take to reach his goal while not hurting anyone. I'm going to read through the list once and then ask you to vote for the action you think is Bender's best choice. Read each of the 10 choices and ask the group to identify the ones that won't get Bender to his goal.

Cross those off.

If the group disagrees on one or more actions, or is unsure do not cross it off.

Lead the group in a brief discussion of which choices might work best for Bender.

Read through the list as a final review of the choices.

Read through the

Activity 11: Explain Skill 5 - Make a Plan

The fifth problem solving skill is to **make a plan**. Let's apply this skill to Bender's situation.

Step 1: Identify Who, Where and When

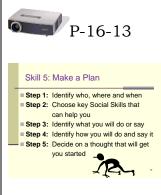
The first step is to identify who, where and when.

The "who" means, who is involved. That is Bender and Mr. Vernon with the other students watching.

The "where" is in the library.

The "when" is right now, with Mr. Vernon in

list another time and ask group members to raise their hands for the choice they think is best. Write down the number of votes next to each choice. Circle the choice with the most votes.



Bender's face.

Step 2:: Choose Key Social Skills that Can Help You

We have learned a lot of social skills in this program. Think back on the social skills we have learned.

What are one or two social skills that Bender could use in this situation?

(Example answers: Listening, understanding the feelings of others, dealing with anger)

Step 3: Identify What You'll Do or Say

In skill 4, we decided that Bender will...

What does he specifically need to do and say to carry this out?

Step 4: Identify How You Will Do and Say It

This is important to think about. Bender does not want to look weak, but he also wants the conflict to stop.

The following questions can help you identify how Bender should do and say what we have Write group members' responses on the chart.

Be prepared to name the 9 social skills.

Lead a discussion based on the choice in skill 4 and write basics on the chart.

C-16-3-Step 4: Identify How You

planned.

- a. What should Bender do with his body?
- b. What should he do with his eyes?
- c. What should he do with his hands?
- d. If he says something, how should he say it?

Step 5: Decide on a Thought to Get You Going

We know that thinking controls behavior. This means that Bender can use thinking to help him pull off his plan.

What is a thought he can use that will help him stay in control and not react to Mr. Vernon?

Turn to your partner and answer this question.

Okay! Bender now has a plan.

Activity 12: Explain Skill 6 - Do and Evaluate

Now that we have made the plan, it is time to do it. We put the plan into action, and then we evaluate how it worked out for everyone. Give group members 2 minutes to discuss their ideas for (a-d) in pairs. Call on different pairs for each piece of information. Fill in this information on the Bender's chart.

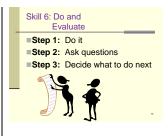
Give pairs a minute to decide on thoughts Bender can have. Call on two different pairs to get ideas and write the information on the chart.



Evaluate means taking time to think about what we did, how it worked, and use the experience to keep getting better at problem solving.

Step 1: Do It

Once we have a plan, we put it into action. So, we use the plan we have developed together and see if we can make it work for Bender.



Model the problem solving skills.

One co-facilitator plays Bender the other plays Mr. Vernon. Do the following:

- Mr. Vernon says: "The next screw that falls out is you."
- Bender mumbles: "Eat my shorts."
- Mr. Vernon demands: "What did you say?" (Stand with your finger pointing at Bender and

"freeze").

- Bender quickly models skills 1 through 4, using the information on the chart you have just developed with participants.
 Point to your head to show that you are thinking.
- Next Bender should follow the plan developed in skill 5, and do it.
- The cofacilitator
 playing Mr.
 Vernon should
 say a few angry
 things, then
 turn and walk
 away.

Step 2: Ask Questions

There are many questions we can ask ourselves to evaluate our plan and what we did. Let's use one question in this situation – Am I closer to my goal? Let's look back at Bender's goal. His goal was, "I want no more detentions, but I don't want to look weak."

How did Bender do in getting closer to his goal?

(Example answers: He got no more detention; maybe he looked okay to some of the students but not okay to some others.)

Step 3: Decide What to do Next

The last part of evaluating is deciding what to do next. Let's imagine that Mr. Vernon has now left the room. What is next for Bender? The modeling display should show Bender not getting more detentions. The group may have varying opinions over whether he looked weak or not.

Encourage a discussion. The goal is for group members to share their ideas, not for them to reach

agreement.

Activity 13: Wrap-up

We have quickly worked through all six of the problem solving skills using an example of a very difficult situation with an authority figure. Once you learn these skills you can use them in all types of situations. We will spend at least one session on each of the problem solving skills and let you get some good practice working with these skills.

Activity 14: Assign Homework

For the next session:

- Watch for situations where you have some type of conflict with another person. A situation where something happens that you do not like, a situation where you could use problem solving skills.
- Describe the situation and identify your warning signs: physical reactions, risk thoughts and risk feelings.

