



## EIGHT WAYS TO KEEP A PROBLEM

Loving problems—telling the truth about them and seeing problems as opportunities to gain skills—is a key step toward solving them. Many people, however, are far more skilled at making problems stay in place. They often use the following strategies to keep a problem.

### **Deny it**

Some people respond to a problem by denying that it exists. Not only does the problem continue, it's buried under an additional problem—denial. This makes the problem harder to uncover and more difficult to handle.

When we deny a problem, we navigate our way through life with a blind spot. Then we wonder why we keep bumping into things and getting bruised all the time. Denial helps to ensure that a problem will stay with us.

### **Avoid it**

Even after we acknowledge a problem, we might still avoid it. Avoiding a problem is often nothing more than postponing an inevitable showdown. We might be able to avoid the direct experience of a problem for a while, but we can seldom escape the silent threat it poses.

The energy that it takes to avoid a problem can consume even more time and energy than tackling it head on. Avoiding problems can limit our full participation in life.

### **Resist it**

Another possible response to a problem is to fight the unpleasant emotions associated with it. We can resist. We can struggle. Using will power and sheer determination, we can attempt to overpower our emotions and subdue them.

Sometimes this works. More often, the harder we fight against our emotions, the harder they fight back. Resistance equals persistence. When we attempt to wrestle our emotions out of existence, they often end up winning the match.

### **Fix the blame for it**

When faced with a problem, some people follow a simple rule: Fix the blame fast. Assigning blame helps some people feel better. They can experience self-righteous indignation about the source of the trouble and go to sleep at night with a clear conscience. But when they wake up in the morning, the problem is still there to greet them.

### **Explain it**

To some people, explaining a problem can be as satisfying as solving it. Explanation often takes less work. Never mind that things aren't working. At least there's a good reason for it.

### **Be “right” about it**

The desire to be “right” is a powerful force. Many people choose being right over being happy. These people might be willing to face a problem and even propose a solution. And they might insist that their solution is *the* right one—even if the problem persists.

### **Be resigned about it**

To be resigned means to throw up our hands, shake our heads, turn away, and give up. When a problem is too big, too hard, or too hopeless, we sometimes admit defeat and quit.

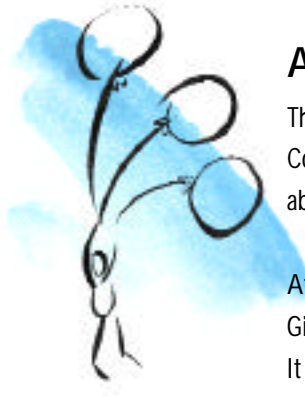
In addition to feeling lousy when we quit, we lose the opportunity to fully explore a variety of possible solutions. When we're resigned, we take on the role of a victim when we could be taking responsibility for action instead.

### **Be a martyr about it**

According to one definition, a martyr is a person who makes a great show of suffering in order to arouse sympathy and gain attention. Meanwhile, the original problem goes unresolved.

If enough sympathy and attention are forthcoming, some people would rather let a problem fester than find a solution. The person who complains about being alone every Saturday night is often avoiding the risk of picking up the phone and asking for a date.





## Ask whether you're holding on to problems

The previous article explained eight strategies that people use to keep problems in place. Consider whether you're using any of these strategies. If you are, then admitting the truth about your behavior can be a step toward getting past the problem.

At first you might be not able to find any examples of these strategies in your own life. Give it some more thought. Ask friends or relatives if they can supply an example for you. It might be useful to keep examining your history or your current circumstances. It's likely that you can find a personal example of each strategy.

Sum up your insights on a separate sheet of paper. For each strategy, note specifically what you did to prolong the problem.

1. Denying a problem
2. Avoiding a problem
3. Resisting a problem
4. Fixing the blame for a problem
5. Explaining a problem
6. Being "right" about a problem
7. Being resigned about a problem
8. Being a martyr about a problem

Follow up by writing about ways you might be holding on to a current problem.