

Do One Thing Different

Introduction

The following are eight steps you can follow that will help things go differently. These ideas are based on work by Bill O'Hanlon (possibility therapy) and Scott D. Miller, Ph.D. (solution-focused therapy).

They are presented in worksheet format and were designed for children in a behaviorally disordered middle-school setting. However, they could be modified for older clients or younger clients as well.

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by breaking problem patterns.

Step 1:

Think about the things you do in a problem situation. Change any part you can. Choose to change one thing, such as, the timing, your body patterns (what you do with your body), what you say, the location (where it happens), or the order you do things in.

Examples:

Bill often got angry at his classmates. He would use words to threaten his classmates, he would “get in their face”, he would cuss at them, and his voice would get loud. Bill decided to make things go better by following Step 1.

He decided that when he was mad, he would talk quietly instead of loudly. That helped! He did not feel as mad then and did not get in trouble as much.

Bill decided to change another thing that he did when he got angry. He decided that when he was mad, he would not “get in their face.” That helped too! When he did that, his classmates did not hit him or yell at him so much.

He decided to do one more thing differently. He decided that instead of getting mad at his desk, he would get mad by the teacher’s desk. That helped too! The people he was mad at did not bother him when he was next to the teacher, and, he knew that if he was near the teacher it would be easier for him to control his own behavior.

What will you do?:

Think of a time that things do not go well for you. (a) When does that happen and (b) what part of that problem situation will you do differently now?:

(a) _____

(b) _____

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by finding and using solution patterns.

Step 2:

Think of something that somebody else does that makes the problem better.
Try doing what they do the next time the problem comes up.

OR

Think of something that you have done in the past that made things go better. Try doing that the next time the problem comes up.

Examples:

Bill often got angry at his classmates. Bill noticed that when Tom gets angry, Tom says something really crazy that doesn't make sense. When someone called Tom a bad name, Tom would say something like, "You are just saying that to make me feel good!" or "Ouch! That hurts my funny bone!" Bill decided to try to plan some silly things to say the next time someone made him mad. When he used one of the silly sayings, he actually felt less angry and the other student did not know what to say except, "You're crazy!" And Bill could just ignore that because it was not a threat.

Bill remembered that one time when he got angry he sat at his desk and scribbled and scribbled and scribbled on a piece of paper instead of yelling or threatening and that helped him stay out of trouble and out of a fight. Bill tried it the next time he got mad. It helped!

What will you do?:

Think of something that somebody else does that works to make things go better.
What is the person's name and what do they do that you will try?:

Think of something that you have done in the past that helped make things go better. What did you do that you will do next time?:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by not letting your feelings be your master.

Step 3:

Feelings tell you that you need to do something. Your brain tells you what to do. Understand what your feelings are but do not let them determine your actions; let your brain determine your actions.

Feelings are great advisors but poor masters. (Advisors give information and help you know what you could do. Masters don't give you choices.)

Examples:

Bill often felt frustrated when he couldn't solve a problem.

When he let feelings control his behavior, he threw his books, yelled, or gave up trying to solve his problems.

Then he decided to let his feelings be his advisor instead of his master. He decided to let his feelings give him information without controlling him. Now, when he feels frustrated, he uses that feeling as information that tells him he could:

- ask for help
- skip the question and come back to it later
- take a break and come back to it later
- re-read the directions
- do as much as he could and go on to the next problem
- read a book for help

What will you do?:

Think of a feeling that used to get you into trouble (e.g., anger, sadness, etc.).

What feeling do you want to stop getting you into trouble?:

Think of what information that feeling is telling you. What does the feeling suggest you should do that would help things go better?:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by changing your focus.

Step 4:

Change what you focus on. What you pay attention to will become bigger in your life and you will notice it more and more. To solve a problem, try changing your focus or your perspective.

Examples:

Bill got distracted in class when other students were talking. He would look around the class at everyone who was talking and it seemed like he never got any work done. He decided to change his focus one day. When he stopped looking around the class at the other students and kept looking straight at his paper on his desk, he got a lot more work done!

People used to really get on Sam’s nerves. They would throw things at him, trip him, call him names, and do all sorts of mean things. Whenever they did, Sam would yell at them and threaten to beat them up if they did not stop. One day, he decided that he was focusing too much on what other kids were doing. He decided to focus on his favorite song whenever someone did something mean to him. When another student said something mean, instead of focusing on the mean words, he focused on his song. When another student hit him with a paper wad, he focused on his song. At first, the kids just tried harder to get him upset. But, when they found out they couldn’t make Sam yell at them, they got tired of doing things that had no results. Sam did not get upset so much and he felt better at school!

What will you do?:

Think of something that you are focusing on too much. What gets you into trouble when you focus on it?:

Think of something that you will focus on instead. What will you focus on that will not get you into trouble?:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

**How to make things go better by
thinking about how things will be better in the future.**

Step 5:

Imagine a future time when you are not having the problem you are having right now. Work backwards to figure out what you could do now to make that future come true.

Examples:

Bill was having trouble with his teachers and the other students at his school. In order to solve his problem, he thought about what he wanted things to be like in the future. He imagined that he would be getting along with his teachers and the other students. Bill worked backwards then to figure out what he would have done to get to that point. He figured he would probably be talking respectfully to his teachers, following directions, and using friendly words with the other students. He decided to try just one of those things. It made a big difference and things got better by just changing one thing! He couldn't change how the teachers talked to him by flipping a switch, but when he changed how he was talking to the teachers they changed the way they talked to him!

What will you do?:

Think of what will be different for you in the future when things are going better.

How will things be different?:

Think of one thing that you would be doing differently before things could go better in the future. What one thing will you do differently?:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by talking about times you did well.

Step 6:

Sometimes people with problems talk about what other people are doing that makes them have the problem and they talk about why it is not possible to do better.

Change your story. Talk about times when the problem was not happening and what you were doing when the problem was not happening. Control what you can control; you can't control the other person, but you can change what you are doing and that might change what the other people are doing.

Examples:

Bill used to talk about how all the kids in his class picked on him and made him angry. He frequently got into fights. Whenever the principal or teacher asked him why he got into fights, he would talk about what the other students did to him to “make him angry”.

Then Bill changed his story. He stopped talking about what other students did to him that made him angry. Instead, he talked to himself and to his teachers about times when students picked on him and he just walked away. He talked about times when students tried to get him to be angry and he just smiled as if they had said something nice to him instead. And soon he found he was not getting into fights anymore!

What will you do?:

Think of a time when you were not having the problem that is bothering you.

Tell about that time:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by focusing on God or a Higher Power.

Step 7:

If you believe in God or a Higher Power, focus on God to get things to go better. When you truly are focused on God or you are truly asking God to help you do what you need to do, things will often go better for you.

Examples:

Bill used to have a big problem getting angry when people messed with him. But, when he starting focusing on his God and letting his God fill his mind, Bill found out that he couldn't get angry at the same time he was focusing on his God.

What will you do?:

Do you believe in God or a Higher Power? Tell how you will get help from your God to make things go better:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Do One Thing Different

How to make things go better by using action talk.

Step 8:

Use action talk to get things to go better. Action talk sticks to the facts. Action talk only talks about things you can see. Action talk does not talk about what you believe the other person was thinking or feeling because we do not know that.

When you make a complaint, talk about the action that you do not like.
When you make a request, talk about what action you want the person to do.
When you praise someone, talk about what action you liked.

Examples:

Action Talk—Use This	Angry Talk—Do Not Use This
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I feel angry when you talk while I am talking.”• “I am upset right now. Could we talk about this later?”• “Thank you for waiting to talk until I was finished.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “You interrupt me just to make me mad! Stop it!”• “You’re so stupid! I’m not talking to you any more.”• “Wow. You actually let me finish a sentence!”

What will you do?:

Make a complaint about someone cheating at a game using action talk:

Make a request for someone to play fairly using action talk:

Thank someone for doing what you asked using action talk:
