

PRIORITISING

Sometimes there seems to be a flood of things to be done all at once: some may be urgent, some important, while some can perhaps be left until later.

How do you decide:

- What is really important?
- What needs to be done urgently?

How do you draw up a plan of action or a time-plan to cope with all you have to do?

When you are working with other people, it is important that you have similar priorities, or at least know what each others' priorities are, otherwise you may all be working in completely different areas and your objectives won't be met.

In this section there is a series of activities designed to help you to think about how people set their priorities.

You can use these *Activities* to:

- help you to think through events in your own life
- recognise how you can prioritise different demands made on you
- help you to reach decisions by weighing up the importance of individual tasks





Activity 1

Opening up the community centre

Sarah is a volunteer at a local community centre and it is her responsibility to open the centre for the evening youth club. She arrives at 7.15 and the club is due to begin at 7.30. This evening they are expecting a visit from a local councillor who is a member of the management committee, as the club has applied for a grant to employ a part time youth worker. The councillor is due to arrive at 7.30 to meet the group, before attending a committee meeting.

When Sarah unlocks the door she finds:

- water coming in through the ceiling, probably from a frozen or leaking pipe
- there are two club members arguing outside which looks as if it is getting serious
- her partner phones saying she must return home urgently
- she finds a note saying that the management committee papers were not sent out to 3 members and they will need to be copied before the meeting
- she is asked to move her car to allow the councillor to get into the car park, but she appears to have mislaid her keys

What are Sarah's priorities? Discuss her predicament, try to put her actions into order and decide how she should deal with them. Decide which activities are really important, which ones could be done a little later and which ones could be done by someone else.

Activity 2

Going out to a meeting

Anna is about to leave her house to go to a meeting. She is the chairperson of the committee and really has to leave the house now if she is to get there on time. But:

- the babysitter has not arrived
- the washing machine is leaking across the floor
- Jamie is hungry and wants to know how to cook pizza
- Anna realises that she has left her papers for the meeting at a friend's house
- a neighbour rings the doorbell to complain about the loud music coming from Jamie's bedroom
- her elderly mother telephones to say that she has just slipped on the garden path and is feeling dizzy

Which activities are most important? What should Anna do first? Can you put all Anna's activities into order of priority?





Activity 3

Busy day at work

Stuart works at a Family Centre and on Monday morning he finds that he has a series of conflicting demands:

- a client wants to see him straight away, complaining that the organisation is uncaring, doesn't listen, a waste of time
- his boss wants to see him for half an hour about some urgent business as she will be out for the rest of the day
- Stuart has to finish a report for the council and it is due in today at 12.00
- the receptionist hasn't arrived yet and the telephone keeps ringing
- there's a pile of post to be opened
- one creche worker has telephoned to say that her child is ill and she won't be in today. Stuart will have to contact an emergency worker as the creche cannot run if it is understaffed
- Stuart's computer seems to be playing up and the council report is on the hard disk

Which activities are most important? What should Stuart do first? Can he ask someone else to take on some of his workload? How should he deal with all these demands and what priority should he give them?

Evaluation Questions

How did you decide on which were the most important/least important priorities?
Did everyone in your group agree?



What have you learned?

Do priorities change depending on circumstances? Give some examples from your own experience.

What did you learn from these *Activities* that you could use when planning your own priorities?

