

THE 5 WHYS

The 5 Whys protocol will help dig even deeper into the potential root causes and connect to our problem statement.

Using the 5 Whys, conduct a deep dialogue around processes surrounding the identified problems and gaps.

(See the examples below on how to use the 5 Whys process.)

Example 1: Problem statement: Discipline referrals are increasing

Why 1: Why do we have so many discipline referrals?

Because a lot of students act inappropriately.

Why 2: Why do they act inappropriately?

Because they don't know the rules.

Why 3: Why don't they know the rules?

Because we haven't explained and enforced the rules consistently.

Why 4: Why haven't we explained and enforced the rules consistently?

Because we haven't agreed on a common set of expectations.

Why 5: Why haven't we agreed on common expectations?

Because we haven't spent time together defining our philosophy. (Source: The handbook for SMART School Teams: Conzemius and O'Neill, 2002)



Example 2: Problem statement: Teacher turnover rates are consistently high

Why 1: Why is teacher turnover so high?

Because many teachers feel this job is too hard.

Why 2: Why do they feel this job is too hard?

Because they don't feel supported in the classroom.

Why 3: Why don't they feel supported in the classroom?

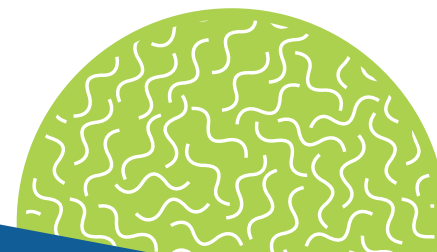
Because they don't have a mentor teacher to turn to for support.


Why 4: Why don't they have a mentor teacher to turn to for support?

Because the campus has not implemented a mentoring program to assist struggling teachers.

Why 5: Why hasn't the campus implemented a mentoring program to assist struggling teachers?

Because we had concerns about time and resources.





Note: At this point, the needs assessment team would want to discuss how time and resources are currently allocated and prioritized. It is a possibility that a mentoring program is a high priority and needs to be considered.

Example 3: Problem statement: The wrong materials for training courses have been delivered to training venues on several occasions.

Why 1: Why did this happen?

The person packing and dispatching them for delivery made some mistakes. She was packing materials for three different courses at the time, was in a hurry and didn't notice. (Symptom)

Why 2: Why was it overlooked?

She's quite new to the job and there hadn't been enough time for training. (Symptom)

Why 3: Why was a new person doing this job without apparent back up?

The person who used to do that job had left and everyone else was busy also. And there is nothing written down, such as a checklist of materials to pack, nor any procedure. (Symptom)

Why 4: Why is there no procedure or guideline?

We've just had so many new staff lately (turnover has been very high) that there has been no time for training or writing procedures. (Symptom)

Why is that? Root Causes:

There is no effective training system in place. And no priority or importance has been placed on having some basic documentation in place: writing down essential information to make sure that things are done consistently, despite changes of personnel.

Note: The 5 Whys is often done by restating the previous answer as a question. Example 3 illustrates that this does not always have to be the case. The intent is to ask questions that will reveal the true causal factors.

Tips for Step 5:

Avoid treating the symptom rather than the problem.

Keep problem statements factual.

Remember that schools are complex systems. Continue to ask "Why?"

Avoid passing judgment and focus on how to address the root causes.

Develop collective ownership of the identified gaps and problems.

Five is not the magic number for 5 Why's analysis; there may be a need to dig further and ask more questions.

