



SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
INSTITUTE

TOOLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE



PLANNING TOOL

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSE

A worksheet to help you analyse the social or environmental problem you're looking to address.

THIS PLANNING TOOL WILL HELP YOU TO:

- ✓ LOOK DEEPLY AT THE SOCIAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM YOU WANT TO SOLVE
- ✓ IDENTIFY THE MOST OBVIOUS SYMPTOMS OF THE PROBLEM
- ✓ DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE SYMPTOMS OF THE PROBLEM AND THEIR ROOT CAUSES
- ✓ EXPLORE HOW BEST TO RESPOND TO THE PROBLEM AND ITS VARIOUS CAUSES
- ✓ COMMUNICATE THE PROBLEM WITH CLARITY TO POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS

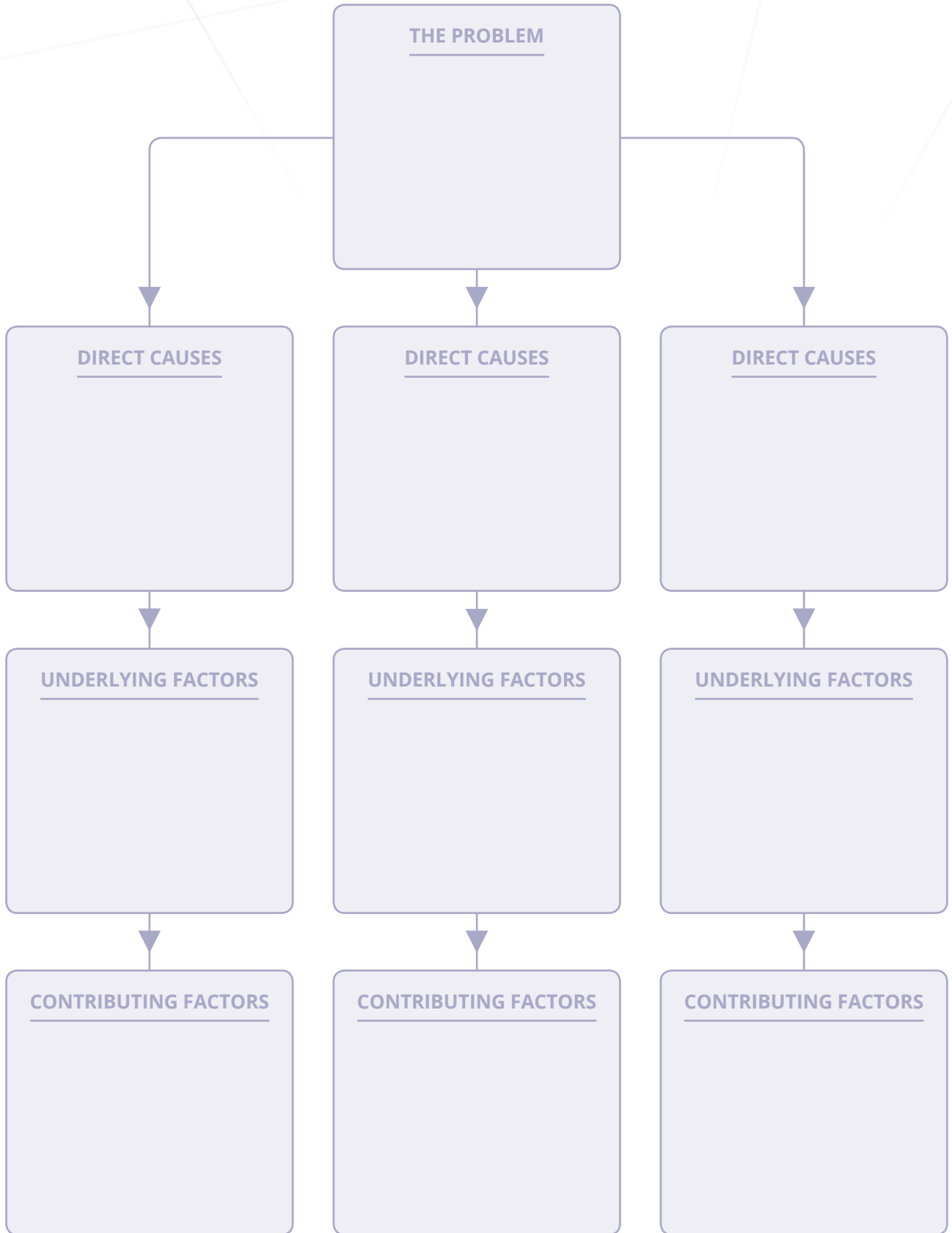


ABOUT THE TOOL

This tool will help you better understand the social or environmental problem you're trying to solve. When you've identified a problem, how can you be sure it's THE root of the problem, or simply a symptom of a problem?

It's necessary to work with others to address both the root of the problem and its symptoms. While developing long-term solutions is essential, it's also important to deal with the immediate consequences affecting people around the world today.

It's important that you're clear on what issue you're addressing and you understand what other causes and symptoms are associated.





HOW TO USE IT

Write the problem your project, campaign or enterprise is working to address at the top of the diagram.

Next, ask yourself: "why is this problem happening?"

Then, ask "why?" again to identify some of the underlying causes that lie behind the symptoms you have come up with.

And finally ask "why?" once more to see if there are any further factors contributing to the causes you have identified.

That's A LOT to take in, so here's an example to help:

The **PROBLEM** you are working on could be homelessness.

One **DIRECT CAUSE** of homelessness could be an alcohol addiction.

However, we know it's not just the substance that is causing the addiction; it could be previous life circumstances, like childhood abuse. Childhood abuse could be the **UNDERLYING FACTOR** related to homelessness.

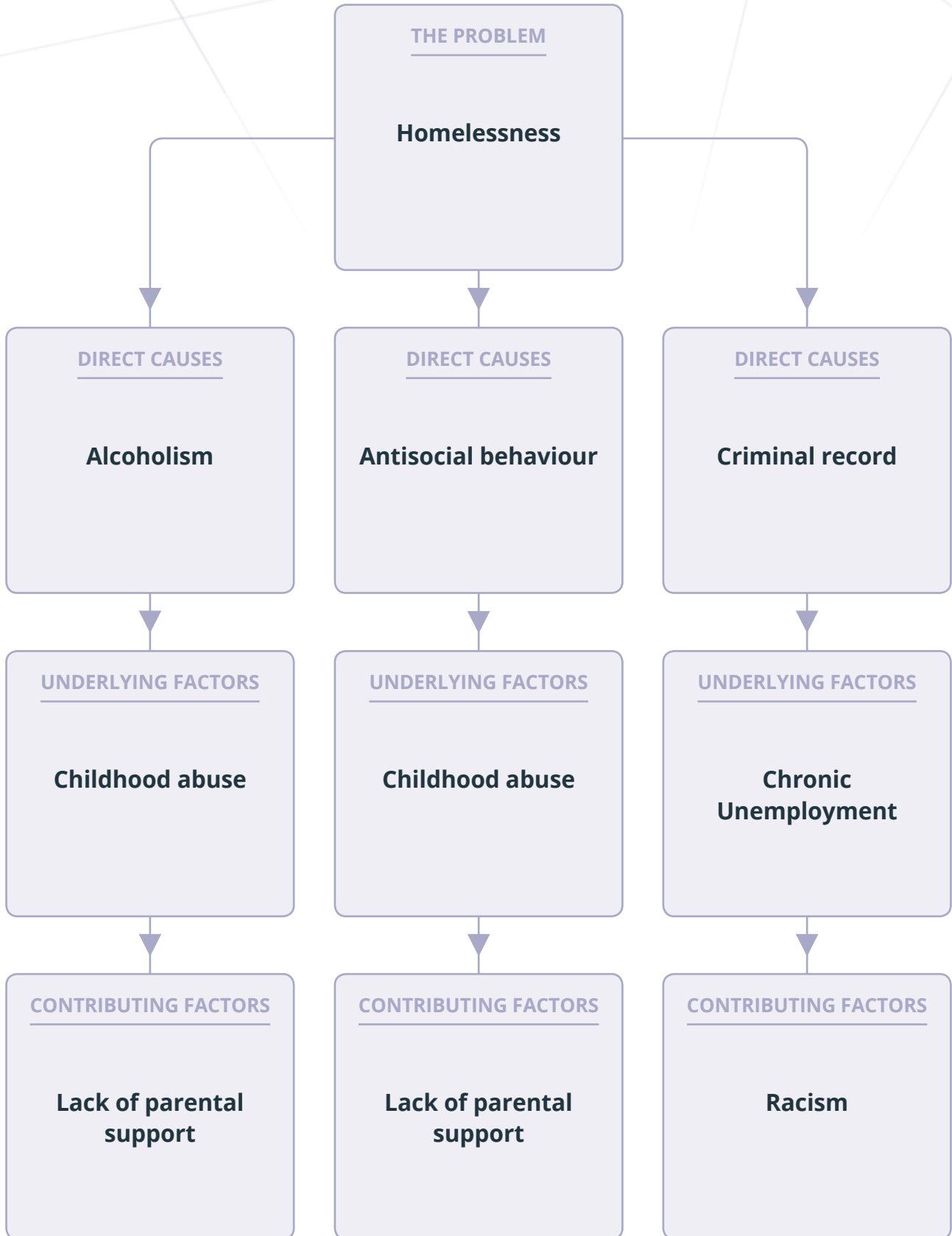
And the **CONTRIBUTING FACTOR** or cause of childhood abuse could be lack of parenting support.

This exercise helps you get to the bottom of the problem you're passionate about tackling. Is the problem you've identified the right thing to work on (meaning where you can have the most impact), or is there something else causing the problem that's more important and impactful to address?

There is no right or wrong answer. You need to choose where to focus your energy, based on your knowledge, skills, location and other considerations.



WORKED EXAMPLE





FURTHER GUIDANCE

When preparing a Cause Analysis, there are a number of main considerations.

Working on source, not symptom

The essence of the Cause Analysis exercise is to understand what the root causes. Think about this as being like finding and extinguishing the source of the fire, instead of repeatedly putting out lots of small fires.

Focusing on evidence

The cause analysis is performed most effectively when accomplished through a systematic process with conclusions backed up by evidence.

There is usually more than one root cause for a problem or event as will become apparent with exploration and evidence.

The focus of investigation and analysis through problem identification is WHY the event occurred, and not who contributed. Focusing on evidence doesn't let it get personal.

5 why's analysis

A way to explore the root cause of an issue is to ask yourself "why?" repeatedly. Once answering one round of "why" questioning, use the answer you've discovered to ask "why" again. Like a child annoyingly questioning their parents repeatedly, ask why to every answer you come up with in this process. Through this repeated line of questioning, you can continue to drill deeper into the source of the issue.

Nothing beats getting moving

One could spend hours and weeks thinking and analyzing all possible causes to the problem identified. You'll learn the most trying and succeeding (or failing) to tackle the problem you've identified. Don't get stuck in "analysis paralysis"; at the end of the day you have to make a decision and move forward with it, and you'll learn as you go!

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