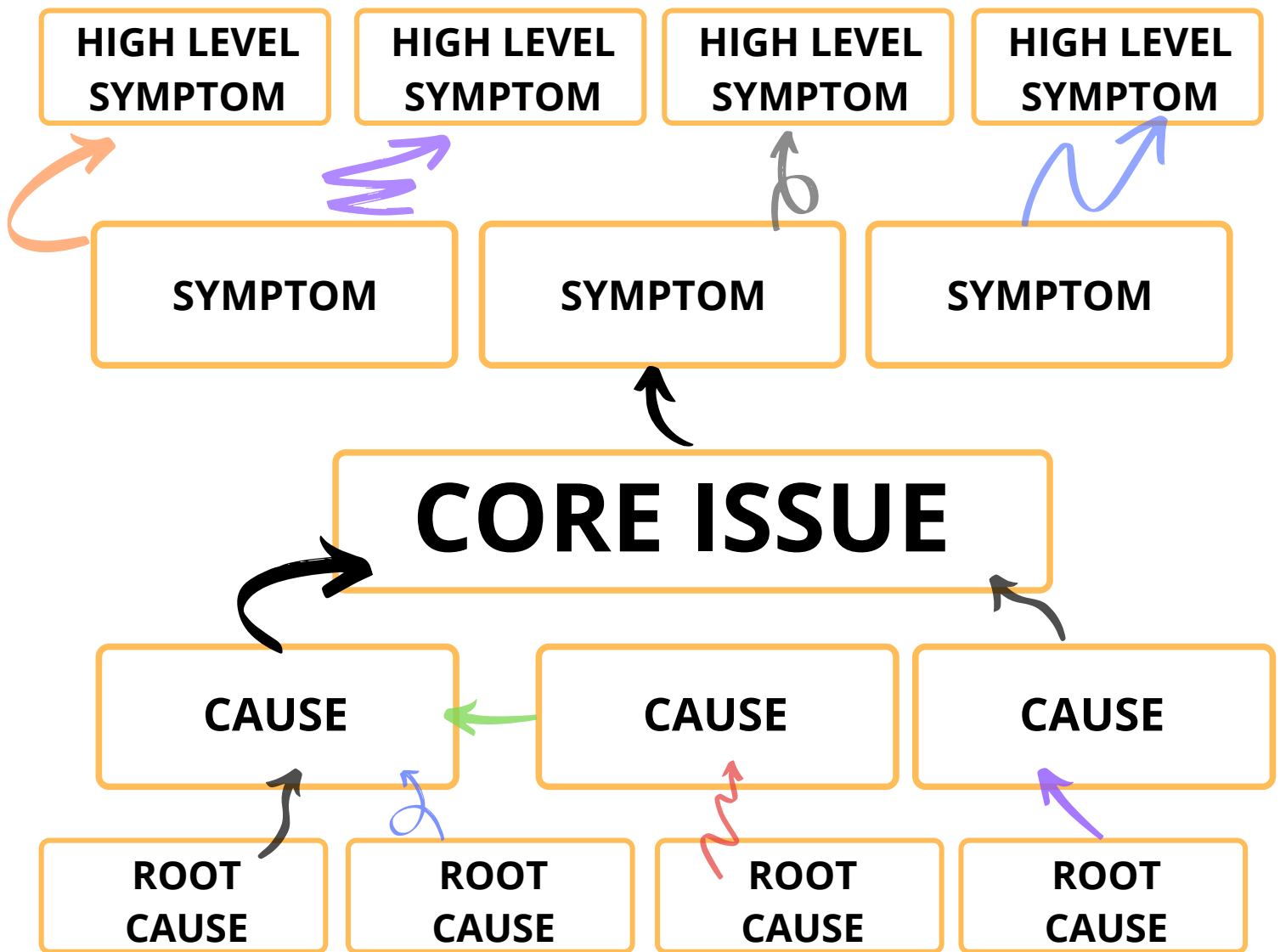


# Identify Root Causes with a Problem Tree

The objective of using a problem tree is to develop a deep 360° understanding of your core issue while defining causes and root causes.



Whenever possible\*, avoid merely treating symptoms, as the root cause will remain and problems will persist and grow.



**Solving for a root cause is the surest path to sustainable life-changing impacts.**

\*Check out this post to understand empowerment vs. relief.

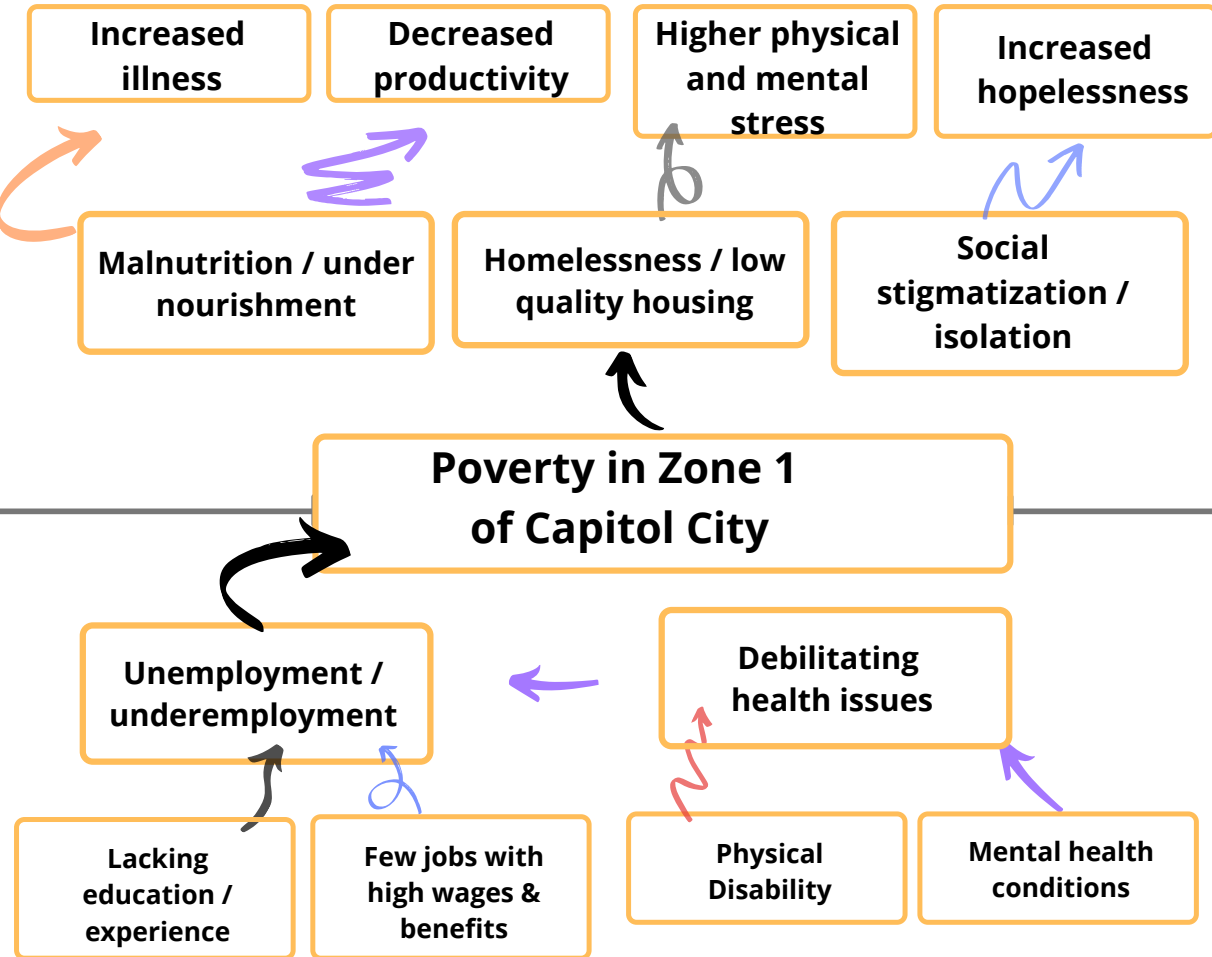
# Identify Root Causes with a Problem Tree

**This example maps the complex multifaceted issue of poverty.**

The contributing factors / causes are employment and health, while the symptoms show up in nutrition, housing, and education.

**Symptoms**

**Causes**



In this instance, debilitating health issues is a cause of unemployment; that cause has its own series of causes, which may in turn have their own root causes.

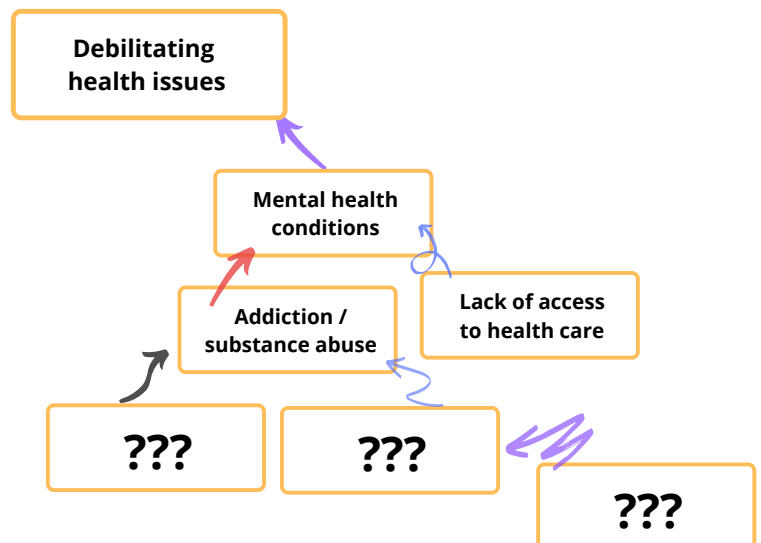


Continue asking,

**Why?**

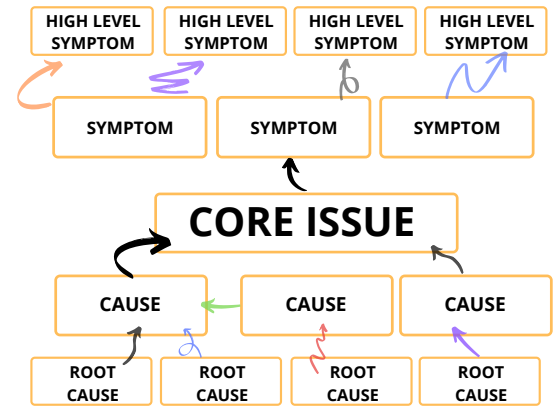
**What is the cause of this?**

Build and develop your root cause analysis skills with this post on the **"5 Whys" technique**.



# Identify Root Causes with a Problem Tree

This exercise works best  
**after you've selected a core issue**  
to narrow your focus on.



## Step 1: Brainstorm CAUSES

Give each person 1-2 minutes to brainstorm at least 5 things they think might be causing the core issue at hand.

Share and discuss as a group writing or projecting the list on the board.

As a group, narrow the list down to 2 to 3 "direct causes."

## Step 2: Brainstorm ROOT CAUSES

From your list of 2-3 direct causes,  
give each person 1-2 minutes to brainstorm potential root causes.

For each direct cause, discuss the potential root causes.

Share and discuss as a group,

- Have we reached the real root causes? How do we know?
- Which root causes are we most interested in? Why?

## Step 3: Brainstorm

### SYMPTOMS

Give each person 1-2 minutes to brainstorm at least 5 things they think are symptoms or effects of the core issue.

Share and discuss as a group writing or projecting the list on the board.

As a group, narrow the list down to 2 to 3 "direct symptoms."

## Step 4: Brainstorm

### HIGH LEVEL SYMPTOMS

From your list of 2-3 direct symptoms, give each person 1-2 minutes to brainstorm potential high level symptoms.

## Step 5: Fill Out Your Problem Tree

Now that your team has worked through the various causes and effects, fill out the blank problem tree below.

## Step 6: Prioritize Root Causes

As a team, determine which root cause(s) you want to deepen your understanding and research towards.

This step is leading towards the goal of **clearly articulating the problem you want to solve.**

# Identify Root Causes with a Problem Tree

The objective of using a problem tree is to develop a deep 360° understanding of a core issue while fully defining potential causes and root causes.

