

Problem management

Listing problems (Exploration)

- Introduce the aim of open discussion to sort out the problems
- Ask the client to name any concerns and express empathy
- The first step of Managing Problems involves reviewing these concerns, asking if the client has other concerns and deciding whether these are solvable problems, unsolvable problems or unimportant problems.
- Discuss with the client first which problems are important but also solvable; in other words, can the client have any control or influence over the problem, or even just part of it?
- Provide the genuine affirmation can improve clients 'sense of well-being. Through affirmation the counselor communicates understanding of an empathy for the client's struggle.
- Affirmation is best when focused on something the client has done or stated.
 - If your client is feeling very hopeless, they may think that none of their problems can be solved, so you may have to tell them why you think a problem is actually solvable. Unsolvable problems are those that you cannot change or have any influence or control over, such as living in a slum.
 - But sometimes there are parts of an unsolvable problem that can be changed. This usually relates to the client's view of the problem. For example, someone with cancer may not be able to change their illness but there might be things to help with their pain or with problems relating to accessing medical treatments.
- Finally, you should list any problems that the client may see as not important. Tell your client that Managing Problems is a strategy that can be used to fix or change the solvable problems.

Choose a problem (Identification)

- The second step of Managing Problems is to choose which problem the client would like to focus on.
- It does not have to be the same problem as mentioned in the assessment. We would recommend that the client chooses an easier problem first. This will give them the opportunity to experience early success in the intervention.
- However, you should try, at some time during the intervention, to tackle a bigger or more difficult problem with your client. This is because it may be more challenging for them to properly use Managing Problems without your support.
- However, as with other decisions, you should discuss this with your supervisor – as this may not be an appropriate decision to make with some clients who feel very hopeless.

Clarification of problems

- Next step is to clarify the problem as specifically as you can.
- Assess the desire to solve the problem and explore the abilities of the clients. (willingness to change)
- At this point, it is important to decide which parts of the problem are practical in nature and suitable for managing problems. The defined problem should also contain elements that can be influenced or controlled.
- A client might say that “feeling worthless” is a problem they want to change. But this problem is too big and vague. You need to help the client make it more specific and practical.
- To do this, you might ask some of the following questions (which can also be used with other examples).
 - When is this a problem for you? In what situations does this problem happen?
 - What does this problem look like? If I were to watch you when this problem happened, what would I see, what would you look like, what would you be doing or not doing?

- How would your life (e.g. daily living) be different if you did not experience this problem?
- Clarifying the problem can be the most challenging step for a counselor. It is an important step to do well, as it sets up how you will teach the rest of the strategy.

Brainstorm (Action)

- Once the problem is defined, you should encourage the client to brainstorm or think of as many solutions or ideas as possible that may solve or change this problem, or part of it.
- Consider that possible solutions may also include existing strengths, resources or support the client already has.

This is not giving advice

- Many clients will need some help with brainstorming solutions, particularly if they are feeling excessively hopeless.
- The counselor may guide the client by suggesting general ideas that can help them think of more specific solutions.
 - For example, for a client who is feeling overwhelmingly stressed about a taboo issue in their life (e.g. a history of sexual assault), you might encourage them to think about talking about this problem with someone they trust. This would be a preferred method of encouraging brainstorming as opposed to telling the client to talk with a specific person, such as their mother, about the problem.
- The aim is to help the client come up with their own ideas.

Be aware of personal values

- This is also a time when you need to be careful that you are not allowing your own personal values to interfere.
 - For example, you may disagree with the values associated with the possible solutions your client is considering (e.g. talking with a specific religious leader, cheating to complete a work-related task, refusing to

help someone else), you might want to suggest a solution that is based on your own value system and not the client's.

- It is very important to put aside your personal values and help the client to make decisions based on their own personal values and beliefs.
- Be reassured that this is difficult to do for all kinds of counselors.
- However, it is very important for you to respect your clients and not take issue with their values.

 SOLVABLE PROBLEMS Reduce fighting with my husband, improve my low mood	 UNSOLVABLE PROBLEMS Get my husband a job and reduce my husband's anger
CHOOSE A SOLVABLE PROBLEM?	Fighting with my husband each day
DEFINE THE PROBLEM	I would like to reduce the number of arguments I have with my husband. We fight daily at the moment.
POSSIBLE WAYS OF MANAGING THE PROBLEM (How can I solve or reduce the problem?)	• Do nothing – wait for him to get a job and see if it will improve. • Tell him he needs to see a community elder for help. • Tell him to try harder to look for a job. • I could look for a way to make money. • Talk with my friends about the problems – ask for their advice. • Ask my mother for advice. • Tell my husband I am not happy. • Leave him.
HELPFUL SOLUTIONS	• Talk with my friends about the problem. Talk with Anne (a trusted friend) about the problem. She has had a similar problem with her husband and is more likely to understand the situation. • Ask my mother for advice. Only briefly mention the problem and ask what she would do. • Tell my husband I am not happy.
PLAN (How to apply the solution you have chosen)	Tuesday: Visit Anne (trusted friend) at 10am after taking the children to school. Talk with her about the problem of fighting with my husband. Thursday: When visiting my mother, mention to her that I have been having some problems with my husband. Ask her what she would do in my situation. Saturday morning: Husband will be home. Mention to him that I have been feeling very unhappy because we have been fighting a lot. Wait for his response.

REVIEW (After the plan has been completed)	• Anne was very supportive. Although she did not have any new advice, speaking to her helped. I felt better afterwards and my mood improved a little. We also talked about other things that gave me a break from feeling sad all the time. • My mother said that I need to talk with my husband but be understanding of his frustration and not to blame him for losing his job. She helped me practise how I would talk to him, so I felt more confident. • I spoke to my husband the same evening because I felt confident about approaching him. He agreed with me, but we are still not sure what to do about it. • We still had two big fights this week, but this is less than before and we were better at discussing the problems afterwards because of the previous conversation we had had.
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