

Session 2 Problem-Solving Therapy

- ❖ Problem-Solving Therapy
- ❖ Problem-Solving Orientation and Style
- ❖ Self-Defeating vs. Self-Enhancing Statements
- ❖ Seven Steps to Problem Resolution
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Problem-Solving Therapy

What is Problem-Solving Therapy?

Problem-Solving Therapy (PST) is an evidenced-based intervention to facilitate behavioral changes through a variety of skill training. PST identifies strategies to support people to cope with difficulties in life and take the initiative to solve everyday problems. Using cognitive behavioral theories, effective and successful problem solving skills can lead to optimism, hope, better self-esteem and self-confidence, improved physical and mental health, and positive overall quality of life. Failing to solve the problem effectively might result in depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, substance use/abuse, poor hygiene/health, and could have relationship/marital and financial problems. It might even lead to aggressive thoughts and behaviors towards others.

Why Choose PST ?

PST has been widely used in clinical settings with various populations and has achieved significant results in working with older adults who experience depression. Compared with other therapies such as Reminiscence Therapy, PST has been shown to decrease depressive symptoms among older adults with advanced depression and dementia. PST has shown to decrease suicidal tendencies in older patients with short-term depression. In hospice, the use of PST has shown to improve the patient's quality of life.

While most researches focus on clinical interventions for patients, caregivers have long been a concern of researchers. There is evidence that many caregivers are susceptible to anxiety, yet many overlook the problem and therefore do not receive appropriate interventions. In fact, anxiety disorders can develop into depression or other mental health problems if not identified timely and treated promptly. According to one study, teaching PST to caregivers can help to alleviate anxiety levels in caregiving, build better coping strategies and reduce the likelihood of subsequent mental health symptoms.

We will be learning PST by discussing problem-solving orientation and style, exploring self-defeating vs. self-enhancing statements, and outlining seven steps to problem-resolution.

Problem-Solving Orientation and Style

Problem-solving orientation includes positive and negative views of your situation.

Positive orientation includes:

- ✧ The problem is a challenge, not a threat.
- ✧ The problem is solvable.
- ✧ The problem solution is the result of continuous effort and perseverance.
- ✧ The problem solution requires determination and action.
- ✧ Positive problem solvers have confidence and ability to take action.

Negative orientation includes:

- ✧ The problem is seen as a significant threat to one's daily life.
- ✧ Negative problem solvers lack confidence in their ability to solve problems.
- ✧ When they face the problem, they become frustrated, upset, and avoid to tackle the issue.
- ✧ Inability to regulate the negative emotion reactions can greatly affects the ability to solve problems positively.

Problem-solving style includes avoidance, impulsivity, and rational problem-solving.

It would be the best to use rational problem-solving style to solve the problem, which includes:

- ✧ having a comprehensive and purposeful plan;
- ✧ gathering facts and information targeting a problem;
- ✧ identifying obstacles and setting a realistic problem-solving goal, and;
- ✧ raising possible solutions, weighing advantages and disadvantages of all solutions, and putting forward the most effective one in the process of analysis.

Tip: Analyze the broad issue first and transform it into a series of small problems that can be solved.

Brainstorm

Based on your own experience, answer the following questions :

1. What is your problem-solving orientation? Is it positive or negative?

2. What is your problem-solving style?

3. What is your care recipient's problem-solving orientation ?

4. What is your care recipient's problem-solving style ?

Self-Defeating vs. Self-Enhancing Statements

Before we review the seven steps of Problem-Solving Therapy, this portion identifies the self-defeating and self-enhancing thoughts and statements. When one is engaged in self-defeating thoughts, it is difficult to cope with problem situations rationally. When one concentrates on positive, self-enhancing thoughts, it is easier to have positive problem-solving orientation and avoid the negative, self-defeating thoughts when encountering problems. However, it is possible to replace self-defeating thoughts with self-enhancing thoughts, and increases the likelihood of finding a successful solution.

Please share one example of a self-defeating and one self-enhancing thought from your life experience.

Practice

List some self-enhancing statements to replace the following self-defeating thoughts & statements:

1. Even though I spare no efforts, my care recipient does not appreciate me.
2. I'm not feeling well today. Why do I still have to take care of you?
3. My child has epilepsy and has recently begun to get sick again. I'm not with him today and I'm worried about his situation.
4. I never know why sometimes my care recipient becomes furious. His negative emotions make me very anxious.
5. I wonder if my family thinks I am neglecting them.

Seven Steps to Problem Resolution

There are seven steps to solve a problem:

Step 1: Identifying the Problem

Step 2: Setting the Goal

Step 3: Brainstorming Options

Step 4: Weighing the Pros and Cons

Step 5: Selecting the Best Option(s)

Step 6: Creating an Action Plan

Step 7: Evaluating the Outcome

In this section, we will be using two case studies to practice seven steps to problem resolution.

Case Study 1:

Grandma Wang, aged 80, has been living in a senior apartment. After her spouse passed away three years ago, her 42-year-old daughter, Fang, moved to the apartment to take care of her. Grandma Wang has been suffering from a variety of chronic diseases and mental health issues, including hypertension, heart disease, high cholesterol, insomnia, and minor depression following her widowhood. Fang is not married. Due to Fang's low education level and personality issues, she has not been able to find a suitable job. Grandma Wang feels deeply guilty about it and views herself

as a burden on Fang's life. Recently, Grandma Wang's mood is very low, because Fang has been spending more time taking care of stray animals than to care for her. Fang's mood is not very stable either, and from time to time she would say harsh words to Grandma Wang, which were caused by trivial things. Grandma Wang, therefore, felt stressed at home, often hiding in her own room.

Fang felt wronged after learning of her mother's feelings. She has been taking care of her parents since her father got sick many years ago, and therefore lost the chance of continuing education and meeting a soulmate. Compared to two of her sisters who have successful careers and happy families, Fang expressed that she was disappointed with her life. She spares no efforts in caring for Grandma Wang. However, because of her own health conditions and financial distress caused by unemployment, she is also under great pressure. Feeding stray animals is a means of relieving the pressure. She felt sad that sometimes Grandma Wang did not seem to appreciate her efforts. Recently, she seems very alienated and seldom communicates with her daughter -- After returning from ADHC where she attends center activities five days a week, Grandma Wang would lock herself in her own room. Fang tried to communicate with Grandma Wang, but Grandma Wang interacted minimally with her which irritated Fang even more. Both Grandma Wang and Fang do not understand what to do to improve the situation.

Case Study 2 :

Ms. Ma, aged 68, immigrated to the United States with her husband about 10 years ago. Both she and her 80-year-old husband have been suffering from various diseases and hearing problems. In addition, her husband relies on a wheelchair to move. Ms. Ma also suffers from mental health issues such as depression and insomnia. The couple live in an apartment in Los Angeles and receive monthly pension checks to cover their daily expenses. They have a son who is married and lives in New York. He calls his parents every week and visits them twice a year. In addition, Ms. Ma needs to care for her 30-year-old daughter, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. Her daughter receives some services from the state's regional center, and has been working in a rehabilitation job center for the past three years, gaining a small amount of income in addition to her SSI benefits. Because Ms. Ma is the primary caregiver for her husband and daughter, she feels exhausted, both physically and mentally. At the same time, she receives limited support and resources to support her caregiving duties. She is concerned that the lives of her husband and daughter will be greatly affected once she is not able to continue to take on the caregiving role.

Before starting, we would like to review a brief checklist and ask yourself to reflect on any experiences over the past two weeks. If you are able to implement PST steps accordingly and PST is working well, some of these symptoms should start to improve. This is a way of tracking your progress, making sure you are on the right track.

Practice

CHECK IN: Over the past two weeks

Date:

1. On a scale of one to ten, with one being no problem at all, and ten being a big problem, how would you rate your ability to sleep?

No difficulty sleeping Sleep is a big problem
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. How is your interest level? Do you have hobbies or activities that engage your interest?

Very low interest level Very high interest level
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Do you have feelings of guilt?

No problems with guilt I always feel guilty
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. How is your energy level?

I have lots of energy I have no energy
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. How is your concentration? Are you able to focus on reading, your job, or other tasks?

It's easy for me to concentrate It's very difficult to concentrate
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. How is your appetite?

Not at all a problem I eat way too much/little
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. How is your mood? Have you been feeling anxious, sad, and/or distressed?

I feel good all the time I feel sad/anxious/distressed all the time
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Let's now talk about seven steps to problem resolution.

Step 1: Identifying the Problem

A “problem” could be:

- ✧ a single unpleasant or undesirable event
- ✧ a series of ongoing unpleasant or undesirable events
- ✧ a deep and complex issue that interferes with caregiving

Look at five elements when identifying the problem :

- ✧ Who is involved?
- ✧ What happens that lets you know it is a problem?
- ✧ When does this occur the most?
- ✧ Where does this occur the most?
- ✧ How have you tried in the past to solve the problem?

It is necessary to distinguish between what you do and do not have control over. If the problem is overly simplistic with a solution that is obvious to you, you can move directly to step 6. However, when this happens, explore whether this is reflective of a larger problem.

Practice

Identifying the Problem

1. What problem(s) can you identify in case study 1 ?

2. What problem(s) can you identify in case study 2 ?

Step 2: Setting the Goal

Guidelines for a good PST goal include:

- ✧ It is owned by you.
- ✧ It is meaningful to you.
- ✧ It is specific (not general), clear, and stated in behavioral terms.
- ✧ It is attainable and realistic.
- ✧ It can be broken into steps, if necessary.
- ✧ It can be met in a timeframe that is acceptable to you.
- ✧ The best strategy to achieve the goal is the action of the caregiver, not others.
- ✧ If the problem is an interpersonal one, the goal should be set from both parties in order to reach the best positive outcome.

Practice

Identifying the Problem and Setting the Goal

What are the problems to be solved in the following statements? What goals can be set?

1. My spouse does not understand my caregiving job and we fight often.

Problem:

Goal:

2. I am sad and depressed but I have to endure the care recipient's temper.

Problem:

Goal:

3. I have diabetes, but my daily work is very busy and I have no time to care for my own health conditions.

Problem:

Goal:

4. My parents need someone to take care of them, and thus I want to quit my job. However, I will have no steady income, which would be a huge issue.

Problem:

Goal:

After setting the goal(s), you will need to choose an attainable one. Defining the problem helps you choose an attainable goal and identify obstacles toward achieving that goal.

Practice

Setting the Goal

1. What goals can be set for the problem(s) in case study 1 ?

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

2. What goals can be set for the problem(s) in case study 2 ?

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

Step 3: Brainstorming Options

What are problem-solving options?

- ✧ They are different ideas/plans that you positively respond to the identified goal(s).
- ✧ Through this brainstorming process, you explore all possibilities to address the situation until it is no longer a problem.

Guidelines for brainstorming include:

- ✧ Once a goal is set, try your best to come up with a series of options to solve the problem.
- ✧ The options should come from you instead of other people.
- ✧ Quantity yields quality, the more the better.
- ✧ Do not evaluate the options during brainstorming.
- ✧ If you have difficulty generating options, ask yourself “What option wouldn’t work?” or “What ideas would ____ (e.g. your family or friend) do if they were in your situation?”. These questions will help you expand and create more options.

Practice

Brainstorming Options

1. What could be some goals and options for solving the problem(s) in case study 1 ?

| | |
|----------|------------|
| Goal 1 : | Option 1 : |
| Goal 2 : | Option 2 : |
| Goal 3 : | Option 3 : |

2. What could be some goals and options for solving the problem(s) in case study 2 ?

| | |
|----------|------------|
| Goal 1 : | Option 1 : |
| Goal 2 : | Option 2 : |
| Goal 3 : | Option 3 : |

Step 4: Weighing the Pros and Cons

Guidelines for weighing the pros and cons include:

- ✧ You will evaluate the pros and cons of every proposed option.
- ✧ Consider time, money, involvement of others, short vs. long-term effects, benefits for self and others etc.
- ✧ Ask yourself openly the following questions throughout this process: “What are the advantages of this option?” “What are the disadvantages of this option?” “What resources would I need?”

Practice

Weighing the Pros and Cons

1. What are the pros and cons for options you came up with for case study 1 ?

| | Pros | Cons |
|----------|------|------|
| Option 1 | | |
| Option 2 | | |
| Option 3 | | |

2. What are the pros and cons for options you came up with for case study 2 ?

| | Pros | Cons |
|----------|------|------|
| Option 1 | | |
| Option 2 | | |
| Option 3 | | |

Step 5: Selecting the Best Options

Guidelines for selecting the best options include:

- ✧ You will select the best option to implement.
- ✧ Take your time with this process, do not rush to make premature decision/selection.
- ✧ You can list the pros of each option, compare with the cons, and then choose the option with the highest number of pros.

- ✧ If you get stuck, you can weigh the significance and rank each pro and con one option at a time. When necessary, consult with professionals (e.g., a social worker, nurse) and ask for assistance.

Practice

Selecting the Best Option(s)

1. Which option(s) would you select for case study 1? Why?

2. Which option(s) would you select for case study 2? Why?

Step 6: Creating an Action Plan:

Guidelines for creating an action plan include:

- ✧ Specific steps are helpful when creating your action plan. Ask yourself “What are the specific actions I will take?” “When?” “Who will be involved?”
- ✧ Make sure you have the ability and opportunity to fully implement the plan. “Are there potential barriers/challenges that you need to consider?” “What are the possible strategies that could address these potential barriers/challenges?”
- ✧ The outcome may vary, but it’s important to know that your effort to implement the action plan leads you closer toward your stated goal.
- ✧ If it is not going as well as you expect, it might be essential to revisit the list of options and select another.

Practice

Creating Action Plans

1. Create the action plan(s) for the best option you raised for case study 1:

| | Who is involved ? | Supports needed? | When? |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| Action 1 | | | |
| Action 2 | | | |
| Action 3 | | | |

2. Create the action plan(s) for the best option you raised for case study 2:

| | Who is involved ? | Supports needed? | When? |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| Action 1 | | | |
| Action 2 | | | |
| Action 3 | | | |

Now, think about your recent situations and problem(s) that need to be solved, and fill out the following form.

PST Practice Worksheet-Homework

1. Review your symptoms over the past two weeks (Briefly assess or use the check in form on p. 7):

2. Problem selected:

3. An attainable goal for this week:

4. Brainstorming options:

| | Pros | Cons |
|----------|------|------|
| Option 1 | | |
| Option 2 | | |
| Option 3 | | |
| Option 4 | | |

5. Option selected:

6. Action plan:

| | Who is involved? | Supports needed? | When? |
|----------|------------------|------------------|-------|
| Action 1 | | | |
| Action 2 | | | |
| Action 3 | | | |
| Action 4 | | | |

Step 7: Evaluating the Outcome

What you need to do when evaluating the outcome:

- ✧ If things went as planned, you have successfully learned the PST, and ready to move on to another problem and another goal.
- ✧ If things didn't go as well, consider what worked, what didn't work, and where to go from here.
- ✧ The important thing is that all your efforts are to be commended.

Tip: In the process of using this form, if necessary, you can seek professional guidance and assistance. Under the guidance of professionals, you can re-visit the treatment process of PST.

Health Exercise 2 : Ten Hand Exercises

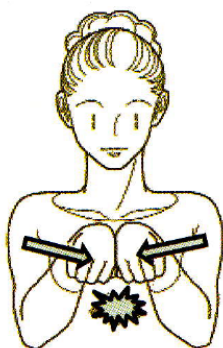
Let's continue leaning the BMS exercises.

Ten Hand Exercises

Introduction: It is commonly stated in Chinese medical knowledge that “hands control Qi and it is the type of Yang.” There are six main blood channels that go through our hands. As such, the health benefit of “ten exercises” arises from the stimulation caused by patting hands against one another. This stimulation can strengthen the blood channels, resulting in increased blood flow. From the perspective of western medicine, peripheral nerves in the hands (more than 1.5 million) connect the brain with the organs in the body. The ten hand exercises take advantages of the stimulation to different channels and nerves through crucial acupressure points in the body to bring health benefits. After the exercises, blood can flow freely and thus soothe the whole body. It would also be comfortable to use warm palms to rub your face several times. Based on the principle of End State in Qi Gong, one will achieve good effects by rubbing ill body parts repetitively, such as rubbing the low back when experiencing pain in that area.

Exercises instructions:

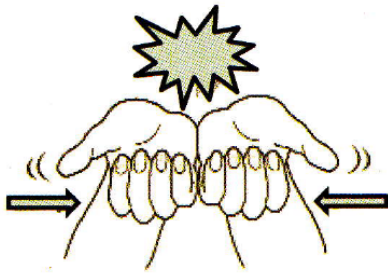
First exercise:



Extend both hands forward with slightly bent elbows, and place your palms facing downward. Bend your thumbs inwards, steadily and horizontally hit your hands against each other 36 times.

Note: The main channel hit is the Yangming Large Intestine Channel of Hand, and the main acupuncture point affected is LI4 (hegu). This exercise mainly assists in prevention and treatment of facial diseases, such as blurred vision, rhinitis, toothache, headache, and prevention of colds.

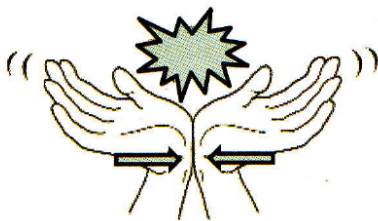
Second exercise



Extend both hands forward with slightly bent elbows, and place your palms facing upwards. Steadily and horizontally hit your hands against each other 36 times.

Note: The main channel hit is the Taiyang Small Intestine Channel of Hand and the main acupuncture point is SI3 (houxi). This exercise mainly treats severe pains in the head and neck, relaxes the muscles in the neck and prevents bone spurs and degeneration of bones.

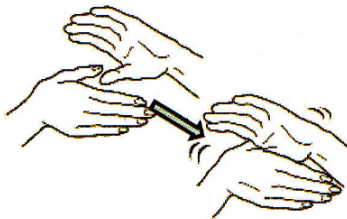
Third exercise



Place both palms facing upwards and hit your wrists against each other 36 times.

Note: The main channels affected are the Shaoyin Heart Channel of Hand and Jueyin Pericardium Channel of Hand, and the main acupuncture point affected is PC7 (daling). This exercise mainly treats and prevents heart disease and chest tightness, and relieves tense emotions.

Fourth exercise



Face both palms downwards and spread your thumbs ninety degrees apart from your index fingers. Hit the intersections of the index fingers and thumbs against each other 36 times.

Note: The Yangming Large Intestine Channel of Hand runs through this area. This exercise mainly treats gastrointestinal disease and constipation.

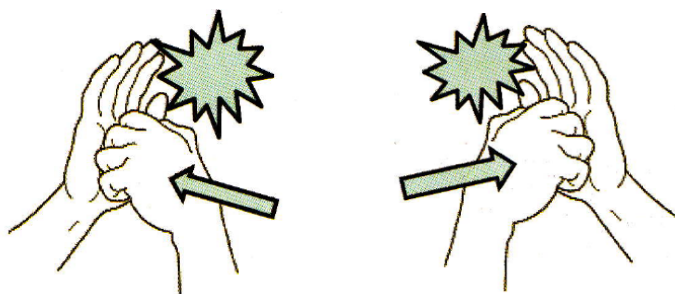
Fifth exercise



Spread your fingers apart. Slide your fingers of one hand into the space between your fingers in the other hand, and hit each end for 36 times.

Notes: The main acupuncture point affected is EX-UE9 (baxie). This exercise mainly treats and prevents disease related to peripheral circulation.

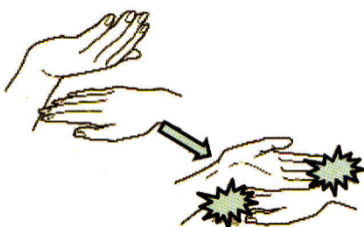
Sixth and seventh exercises



Form a tight fist with your left hand, extend your right palm and face it towards your left fist. Hit your fist against your palm 36 times; Form a tight fist with your right hand, extend your left palm and face it towards your right fist. Hit your fist against your palm 36 times.

Note: The main channels affected by the sixth and seventh exercise are also the Shaoyin Heart Channel of Hand and the Jueyin Pericardium Channel of Hand, and the main acupuncture point affected is PC8 (laogong). These exercises mainly eliminate fatigue and increase alertness.

Eighth exercise



Face your right palm upwards, and your left palm downwards. Hit the backs of your hands against each other 36 times.

Note: the main channel affected is the Shaoyang Sanjiao Channel of Hand, and the main acupuncture points affected are TE4/SJ4 (yangchi). This exercise mainly regulates the functionality of the organs, and treats and prevents diabetes.

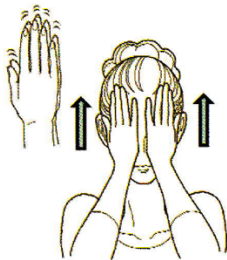
Ninth exercise



Use the index fingers and thumbs of both hands to pull each ear downwards 36 times.

Note: there are many acupuncture points on the earlobes. This exercise mainly improves the blood circulation of eyes, face, and brain.

Tenth exercise



Rub and circle up both palms for six passes until they are warm, and then lightly place your palms over each eye. Turn your eyes to the left and right six times. Then, rub your palms against each other and repeat these steps for a total of six times.

Note: This exercise uses principle of Qi Gong to regulate the Qi in the eyes. This mainly treats myopia, presbyopia, and blurred vision.

References :

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2. Wan, H.Y. (2017). *Caring for body, mind, and spirit: A caregivers' handbook of exercises of body-mind-spirit model in health* [關愛身心靈：身心靈活動實務手冊]. Hong Kong: The Department of Social Work and Social Administration/ Center on Behavior Health, Hong Kong University.