

PST-HOPE Workbook

**PROBLEM-SOLVING TREATMENT FOR HOPE:
A Workbook for Veterans with Chronic Pain**

THINGS TO KNOW

Workbook

This workbook was designed especially for Veterans with chronic pain and feelings of hopelessness. In this workbook, you will find contact information and meeting content. We will use this workbook during every meeting, so please make sure to have it available for each meeting.

Structure of Meetings:

This treatment is being conducted at the VA in East Orange, NJ. It consists of 12 meetings to take place through video telehealth. Meeting 1 will last around 2 hours and meetings 2-12 will last around 1 hour.

If You Need to Reschedule:

If you need to reschedule a meeting, please call your individual study provider directly. Contact numbers can be found on the Contact Sheet on page 3.

Confidentiality:

Conversations are confidential. They will not be shared with your friends, family or other people not involved with your treatment. A note will be added to your VA electronic medical record, however, which will be available to your VA providers. There are exceptions to confidentiality when the law mandates us to do so. Under the following circumstance we are required to break confidentiality and contact someone outside the VA and the study team:

- If you are at risk of harming yourself or someone else;
- If a child, elder, or dependent adult is at risk of harm or abuse

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself and/or someone else, please access help right away, either by going to your local emergency room, calling 911, or contacting the numbers listed on the local and national emergency Contact Sheet, found on the next page. Please also talk with your study provider about this. Your safety is important to us and will be continually assessed as part of our practice of standard clinical care.



The Behavioral Health Research Laboratory
Lisa McAndrew, PhD, Principal Investigator

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VA New Jersey Health Care System War Related Illness and Injury Study Center;
and by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).*

CONTACT SHEET

Contacts & National Hotlines: Below please find a list of contacts that are available to call during normal working hours (8:30am-4:30pm). We also have included a list of national hotlines that can be reached at any hour.

Contacts

If you need to contact your study provider or want to reschedule a meeting, please call your provider during normal working hours.

- Your provider is:

973-676-1000, ext.

- The supervising psychologists

are: _____
973-676-1000, ext.

973-676-1000, ext.

Additional Numbers

- Research Coordinators
 - Christina G., 973-676-1000, ext. 202441
 - Nicole A., 973-676-1000, ext. 201167
- War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC)1-800-248-8005
- East Orange, NJ VA after hours Emergency Room..... 973-395-7236

Getting Help/Hotlines

Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-8255, Press 1

Call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention hotline and indicate you are a Veteran (press 1; Veterans Crisis Line). You'll be immediately connected to VA suicide prevention and mental health professionals. Call if you are experiencing emotional distress and need to talk to a professional trained to work with Veterans – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also text the Veterans Crisis Line at 838255 or via confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net

Crisis Text Line : Text HOME to 741741

Identifying Your Local Suicide Prevention

Coordinators:

Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPC):

- _____
- _____
- _____

National Sexual Assault Hotline:

800-656-4673

<https://hotline.rainn.org/online>

National Child Abuse Hotline:

800-424-4453

<https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>

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PST Hope: Session 1

Getting to Know You

Check-in

This is the time we will ask about any potential health or mood changes you may have had in the past week, as well as a safety check-in. This is also a good time to bring up any questions you may have.

Today's Focus

Today we will discuss chronic pain, hopelessness, and brain fog. You will learn how Problem-Solving Treatment can help you, and you will develop a coping plan with your provider.

Chronic Pain and Hopelessness

This workbook was designed especially for Veterans whose chronic pain lowers their quality of life and makes them sometimes wonder if life is worth living. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon. For many people, chronic pain seems like a problem without a solution. You have probably already tried different ways to manage your pain and may not have been satisfied with the result. That's why it can lead us to feel helpless and hopeless. With chronic pain, it can be hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

What is your chronic pain like? Where is it in your body? How intense or frequent is it? What makes it better or worse?

How does your pain affect how you think and feel? Does your pain ever make you feel hopeless or like life is not worth living?

Chronic pain can create problems that often prevent Veterans from living their lives to the fullest. For example, some Veterans tell us that they can no longer work, or that they can't be physically active like they used to. Pain can also impact relationships with family members because they don't understand what you have to go through. It could be that pain is keeping you from doing the activities you want to do, or being the kind of person you want to be for your family, or that pain is getting in the way of enjoying life. This can lead to less motivation and feelings of hopelessness. Sometimes people get so discouraged, they can feel overwhelmed or not know where to start making changes.

Visualization can be a helpful tool in getting started with the problem-solving process.

Visualize what your life might be like if things were to improve.

Why Problem-Solving Treatment (PST) for chronic pain?

Chronic pain can make it more difficult to solve problems. That's because it's harder to think clearly when we are experiencing pain. Pain pulls our attention away from whatever task we are doing. It distracts us, makes it hard to concentrate and slows down the thinking process.

Furthermore, the physiological mechanisms that cause pain – like inflammation, autonomic dysfunction, increases in stress cortisol – may also make it hard to think straight. Many people with chronic pain describe this experience as "**brain fog**." Pain-related brain fog refers to the thinking difficulties that people may experience because of chronic pain. Brain fog can make

us take our eye off the ball and may keep us from figuring out how to make a problem situation better. It can cause tunnel vision that narrows our ability to see multiple options. Veterans with pain also tell us that it takes them more time to come up with solutions as well as to carry them out. This can lead to frustration and disappointment.

Chronic pain doesn't impact your intelligence or how smart you are!

Think of it like a house. Before pain, you were like a strong house. You were able to function well, and solve problems as they came up, just like a sturdy house can weather storms when they come up.



However, chronic pain can eat away at problem-solving skills. Pain-related brain fog is like an attack on the structural integrity of the house, it weakens problem-solving just like water damage will weaken a house's wooden beams.



Double Whammy

Not only does chronic pain make it difficult to think clearly, but pain also dumps a whole bunch of secondary problems and stressors on us as well. We call this a “**double whammy**.” For example, when someone has chronic pain it can be hard to find and a keep a job. This can cause financial stress and cause someone to limit their social activities, which can make them feel isolated. This can all lead to hopelessness, and sometimes despair.

On top of it all, the brain fog makes it hard to tackle the problems that prevent you from doing what you want and need to do.

It's like our house now has a ton of snow on its roof and is hit with hurricane winds. **The house may have been able to handle all of this when it was intact**, but with water damage to structural beams (e.g., chronic pain and brain fog) all this weight adds lots of stress. The house may start to feel like it's crumbling.



Problem-Solving Treatment (PST)

Fortunately, there is a treatment that can help called "Cognitive Rehabilitation." Problem-Solving Treatment is a type of cognitive rehabilitation. In this study you will work with a provider to break down problems into smaller pieces to meet your goals. This treatment won't get rid of brain fog, but will help solve problems despite it.

If we think of our house example, PST can help reinforce the beams of the house to help it withstand problems of wind, snow accumulation, temperature and load. We hope to make the house function better and be able to provide safe shelter to all who live inside. Similarly, we hope to help Veterans reinforce their problem-solving skills so they can overcome obstacles and provide for themselves and their families in a safe and constructive way.



Hopelessness and Crisis: How Problem-Solving Can Help

A crisis is when a person feels like they are breaking under the pressures placed on them. It occurs when the stress placed on someone is greater than the person's resources to manage the stress. These pressures (or stressors) might be around issues of chronic pain, hopelessness about the future, money, housing, isolation, depression and anxiety, or a combination. A crisis situation might result in someone hurting themselves or assaulting someone else. It might result in an impulsive and regrettable behavior. The individual often feels like they have lost control over their life.

Problem solving treatment can help you avoid crises by increasing your problem-solving and coping resources, reducing the demands placed on you, or both.

Coping Plan

A "coping plan" outlines good ways to respond to a stressful situation to avoid, or get out of, a crisis situation. By writing out a coping plan *before* you are in a crisis situation, you will know exactly what to do when you start to feel that the pressures of life are getting greater than your coping resources.

There are Safety/Coping Plan apps that you might want to consider if you like an electronic version. Check out the "**Stanley-Brown Safety Plan**" wherever you get your apps.

We included a "coping plan" form on the next page. Let's fill it out now to identify the warning signs and strategies that might work for you if you are ever at risk of experiencing a crisis.

COPING PLAN

STEP 1: Warning Signs:

1.

2.

3.

STEP 2: Internal Coping Strategies – *Things I can do to take my mind off my problems without needing to contact another person:*

1.

2.

3.

STEP 3: People and Social Settings That Provide Distraction:

1. Name Phone

2. Name Phone

3. Name Phone

STEP 4: People Whom I Can Ask for Help:

1. Name Phone

2. Name Phone

3. Name Phone

STEP 5: Professionals or Agencies I Can Contact During a Crisis:

1. Clinician Phone

Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact

2. Clinician Phone

Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact

3. Local Urgent Care Services

Local Urgent Care Services Address

Local Urgent Care Services Phone

4. VA Suicide Prevention Resource Coordinator Name

VA Suicide Prevention Resource Coordinator Phone

5. VA Suicide Prevention Hotline Phone **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, press 1 for Veterans

STEP 6: Making the Environment Safe:

1.

2.

Life Values

The purpose of this study is help you have more effective problem-solving skills to overcome the challenges of chronic pain, instill hope, and ultimately attain your life values. When you have chronic pain, it is common to feel hopeless and have thoughts like “What’s the point in living?” Being clear about what you value in life can provide a guide for how to overcome that hopelessness. What life values do you have for yourself? What do you want your life to stand for? Some Veterans tell us that their life values are related to positive family relationships, being productive, or being healthy and physically active.

What are your life values?

Hope Toolbox

It can be very difficult to work towards your life values when you feel hopeless about your future. A “hope toolbox” is a helpful way to remind you of some good ideas about how to change your thinking from *worries* to *hope*. It focuses on things that you can do on your own to feel better and take your mind off of problems and worries.

A hope toolbox can be a *physical box*. Some people use a cardboard shoebox, candy tin, or wooden box. Or it can be a *virtual box* using an app. Either way, its purpose is the same. It is a way to provide access to a wide variety of ways to bring back a greater sense of hope.

On the next page is a copy of a **Hope Toolbox** that has already been filled out as an example. Hope toolboxes list possible strategies that people can use to become more hopeful. Please put a check next to any strategy that you think might help you stay hopeful. After identifying the strategies, you would go about collecting the items and then put them in the box - along with the actual form. Using the app is the same process, except you would have digital versions of the items. Your hope toolbox will grow and change as you find new effective strategies.

There is a blank **Hope Toolbox** in the appendix that is labeled **Handout 1**. As we continue with PST-Hope, please add strategies that might work for you to the Hope Toolbox in the appendix. By the time we have finished all 12 weeks, you could have a powerful tool that will remind you of ways to tap into hope.



HOPE TOOLBOX

Problem-Orientation Strategies

Get the app “Virtual Hope Box” from
National Center for Telehealth & Technology

Things to REMIND ME of the good things in my life and reasons to live. Place objects in the Hope Box. For example:

- Pictures of family, friends, pets, loved ones
- Letters from loved ones
- Accomplishments (e.g., diploma, certificates, awards)
- Spiritual items
- Names (or tokens) of organizations that are important to me

Things to DISTRACT ME from negative thoughts when they come up. Write activities on paper and place inside. For example:

- Take a walk; change the environment
- Listen to music; include a CD
- Call someone; person’s name and number
- Go out for coffee; include a café gift card
- Play a game or puzzle; include the puzzle
- Visit the park; indicate which park
- Do a hobby activity
- Watch a movie, TV
- Exercise, bike ride, or stretch
- Play with my pet; include a pet toy
- Help someone who needs it
- Be in nature

Things to INSPIRE ME to see life from a different perspective. Write reminders on paper and place inside. For example:

- Affirmations
- Bible verses or spiritual texts
- Quotations
- Things loved one have said to me
- Hopes for the future
- Reminders of past triumphs over adversity
- Photos or videos of those who inspire me

Things to RELAX ME when I am stressed or burdened. Write on a piece of paper the names of relaxing activities that I can do and place inside:

For example:

- Deep breathing exercise
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Guided imagery – Beach, Forest, Country
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Take a bath; include special soaps or scents
- Use aromatherapy
- Special food (e.g., tea, chocolate)
- Massager

Things to HELP ME COPE when I have a problem. Place paper copies of coping strategies inside. For example:

- Problem-Solving handouts
- Contact info for supportive friend, family or professional
- Crisis Number card, magnet, bracelet
- Replace negative self-talk with positive
 - Step-by-step: I can do this
 - Am I using all-or-nothing thinking?
 - I am needed and valuable
 - It takes longer but I can still do it
 - Is there another way to look at it?
 - **HALT!** when **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, **T**ired
 - Do I need to use **Acceptance** or **Change**?

Meeting 1 Summary:

- Chronic pain can create problems that often prevent Veterans from living their lives to the fullest.
- Brain fog, a common part of chronic pain, makes it more difficult to solve the problems caused by your pain.
- Chronic pain and brain fog can lead to feelings of hopelessness about the future.
- PST teaches skills to help you better solve problems by breaking them down into smaller pieces, and can help you overcome feelings of hopelessness.
- This may help you achieve your goals and live a life that is in line with your values.

Home Assignment:

- Look at the blank **Hope Box** in the appendix, and think of strategies that might be meaningful to you to add to it. You can create an actual (or virtual) hope toolbox by gathering the items and ideas you picked. We'll check in next week to see how that went.
- Look at the **Coping Plan** we started today and see if you want to make any tweaks or changes.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 2

Problem Orientation: Introduction

Check-in

This is the time we will ask about any potential health or mood changes you may have had in the past week, as well as a safety check-in. This is also a good time to bring up any questions you may have.

Reviewing Home Practice

Remember the practice exercises are in place to help you learn these new skills. It takes practice and time to learn any new skill. This is the time to review what this process was like for you. It is not just about whether you were able to do or not do something. It is about helping you break down the steps of the practice exercise and address any difficulties you may have had.

- What kinds of things did you add to your Hope Box?
- Did you make any changes to the Coping Plan?

Review of Last Week

Last week we talked about:

- The ways in which chronic pain – and the secondary problems that pain brings – typically make problem-solving skills more difficult.
- We also introduced Problem-Solving Treatment as a way to address the “brain fog” that chronic pain can bring.

Today's Focus

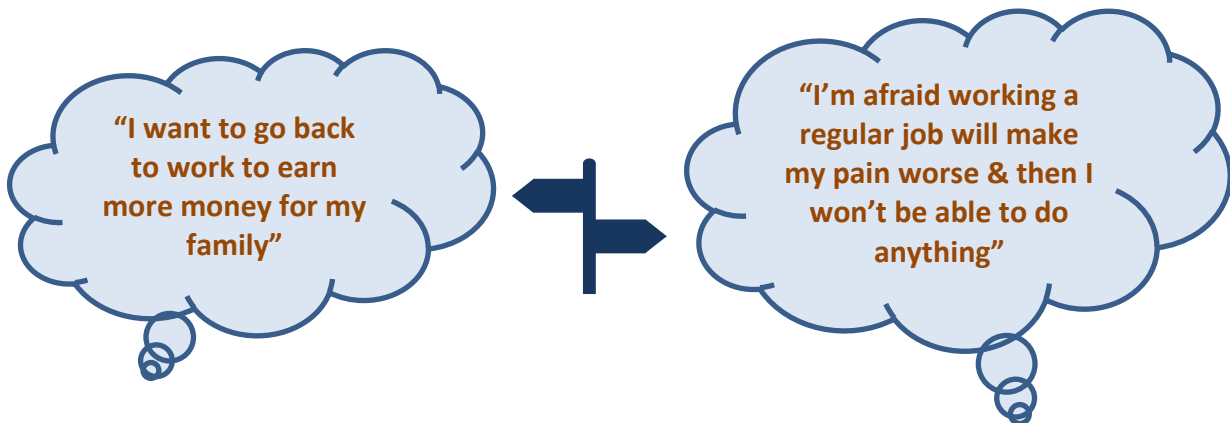
The focus of today's meeting will be to introduce the first component of *PST: PROBLEM ORIENTATION*.

Today, let's start by asking: you how would you define the term "problem."

How we are using the term "problem"

In any given day we come across a lot of problems. Problems can be big or small, new or familiar. There are 3 types of problems we will talk about:

(1) Some problems are conflicts between 2 of our own goals



(2) Some problems are conflicts between our goal and someone else's



(3) Some problems are when our original plan is blocked, and we can't think of any other options



Problem-Solving Treatment (PST)

PST was designed to help people become more successful in solving problems. This could be particularly helpful to people with chronic pain because pain-related brain fog and stress make problem-solving more difficult .

PST is made up of two main components:

1. Problem Orientation – a person’s thoughts and feelings when in a problem situation.
2. Using a Planful Problem-Solving Style –the logical and analytical breaking down of problems into 5 manageable steps.

The next three meetings will be focused on the first component, Problem Orientation.

Problem Orientation

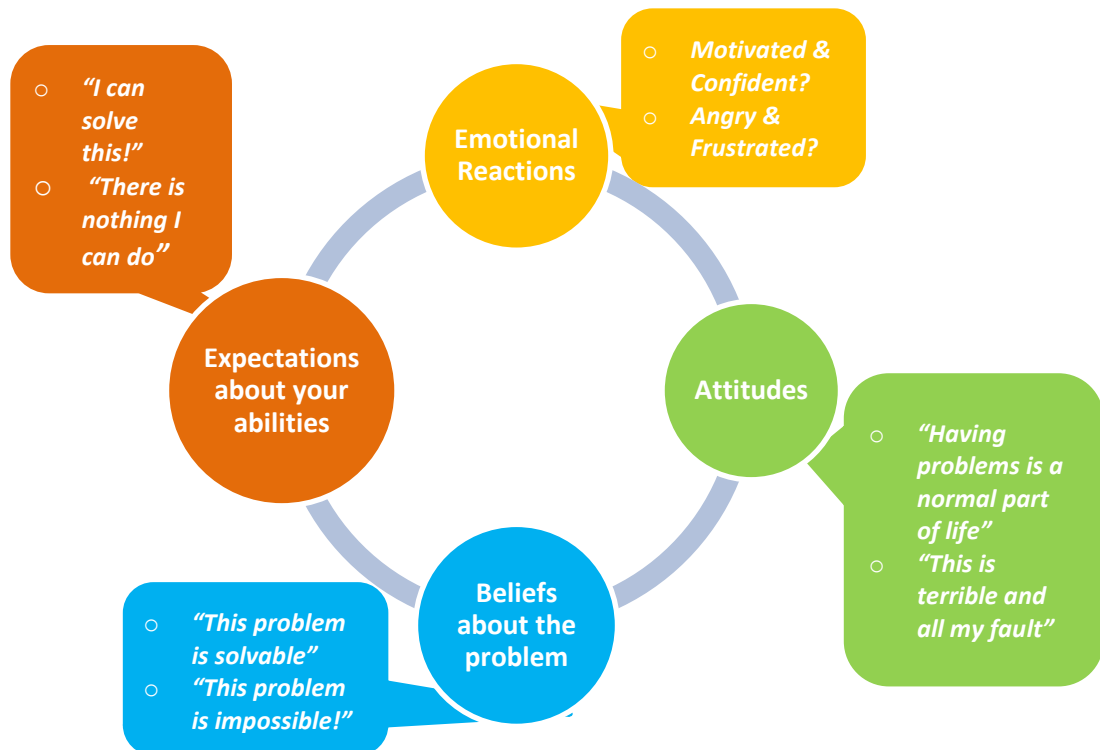
This refers to the *attitudes, beliefs and expectations* that a person has about a problem, & how he/she *reacts emotionally* to a problem.

What kind of **relationship** we have with problems will contribute to how successful we’ll be in solving them. Sometimes we might feel threatened by the problem (a negative problem orientation), but other times we might see it as challenge that we are up to meet (a positive problem orientation).

By discussing problem-orientation, you will be able to better monitor your problem orientation and use strategies to move from the negative and towards the positive.

Identifying a Person’s Problem Orientation

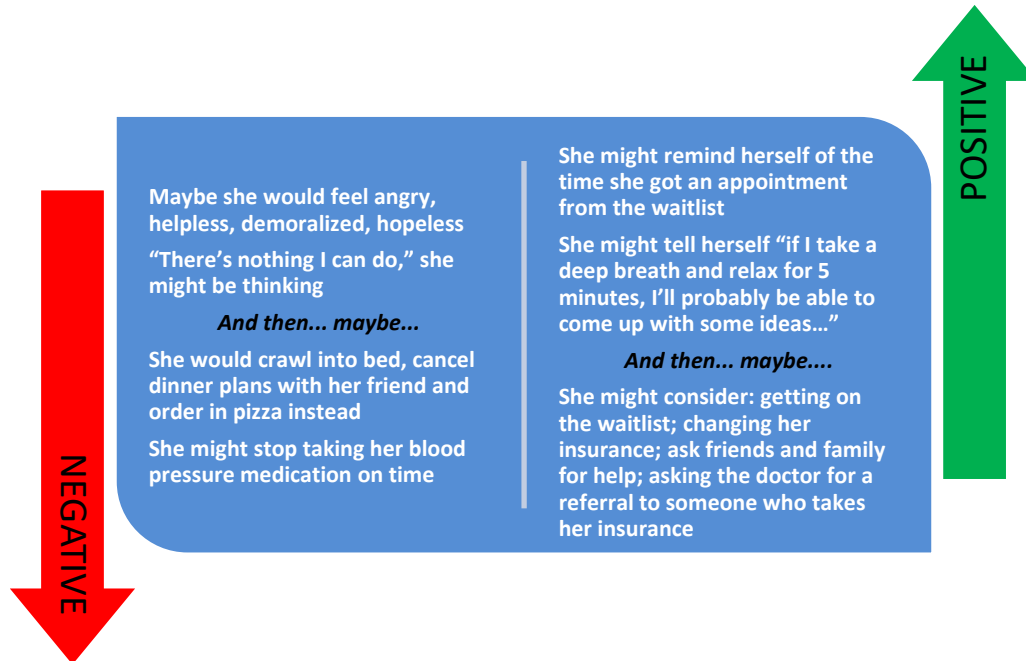
When faced with a problem, the way someone typically responds is called their “Problem Orientation,” and it is made up of a person’s **Emotional Reactions, Attitudes, Beliefs and Expectations.**



Let's take Jane as an example.

Jane is feeling hopeful because she heard about a pain management doctor who successfully treats people with similar symptoms, but it turns out the doctor doesn't have an opening for 9 months and doesn't take her insurance.

- If her problem orientation was negative how do you think she would respond?
- If her problem orientation was positive, how might things be different?



The Continuum

We talk about a "negative" or "positive" problem orientation, but it actually exists on a continuum. A problem orientation can be extremely positive, very positive, or just a little positive. The same is true for a negative problem orientation.

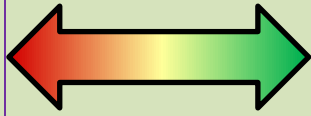


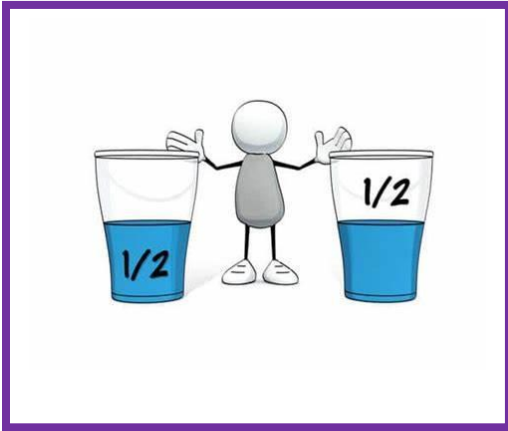
- My problems feel like threats
- My problems feel unsolvable
- I am uncertain about my ability to cope with problems
- When negative emotions arise, it is difficult for me to manage them and I become easily frustrated

- My problems are challenges
- My problems are solvable
- I can cope with problems
- I am willing to accept that solving problems requires time and effort
- I understand negative feelings are part of the process & can even be helpful in coping

What does your Problem Orientation look like?

The statements below all describe a very positive problem orientation. Rate how much you agree/disagree with each one using a 1-10 scale. *(Adapted from Rocky Mountain MIRECC.)*

Rate your Problem Orientation		Disagree	Agree
<i>Please circle the number that represents how much you agree with the statements below.</i>			
		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
1	I view problems as challenges or opportunities for positive change.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2	When faced with a problem, I remind myself of past successes in dealing with similar problems.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3	I am willing to commit myself to solving problems when they occur.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4	I have confidence in my ability to solve most problems.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5	I believe if I put in the necessary time and effort, I can make some improvement to the problem situation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6	The first thing I usually do when I have to deal with a problem is take a deep breath to relax.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7	I believe most problems have a solution, (although it may not always be easy to find!)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8	I make sure to use encouraging self-talk when working on a difficult problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
9	Problems are a normal part of life; so when I have a problem it is just a sign that I am human – <i>not</i> that I messed up.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10	My instinct is not to avoid problems or make impulsive decisions about them, but to use a methodical approach.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
TOTAL SCORE			



Problem Orientation Can Change

A person's problem orientation can also change over time. Many Veterans tell us that in their lives before chronic pain, they had a very positive problem orientation (e.g., my problems are *challenges*, my problems are *solvable*, I *can cope* with problems). But now, living with chronic pain, it has become more difficult to remain hopeful and optimistic about their ability to address problems – particularly around managing pain.

How has chronic pain affected your problem orientation?

When I'm in pain I'm more likely to...		Agree	Disagree
1	... get frustrated by problems easily		
2	... think negatively about my chances for making things better		
3	... give up sooner		
4	... get irritated and say or do something that makes the problem worse		
5	... use all-or-nothing thinking & negative self-talk		

It is also true that someone's problem orientation can be very positive in one life area, and negative in another. For example, someone might be very confident about their ability to solve problems at work, but feel completely inadequate when trying to motivate their moody teenager.

A negative problem orientation can keep us from finding a solution to the problem. It can also create secondary problems.

For example:

Victor had an appointment at the pain management clinic. The appointment had been scheduled and then rescheduled for a later time. When the appointment finally came, he had to wait for an hour. By the time he was called back to see the doctor, he was frustrated at the long wait and even worse, his back was aching from sitting so long. He was so angry that he gave the nurse a piece of his mind. When the doctor came in, it was hard to concentrate on the visit, Victor was still so angry. Later, he was embarrassed that he was not able to stay calm. He also realized that he forgot to ask important questions because he was in pain and fed up.

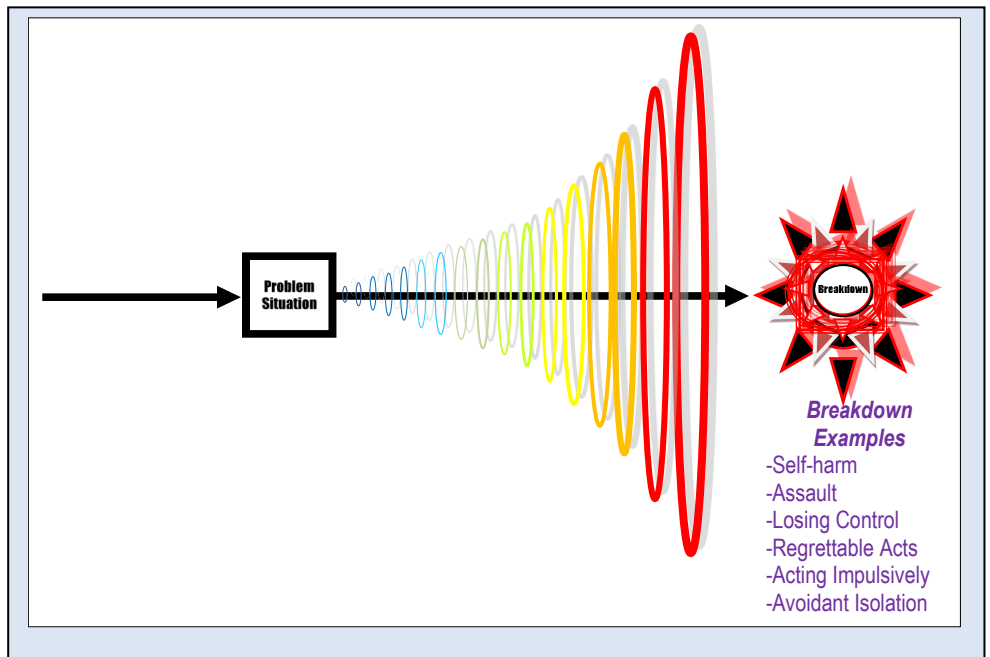
What happens when you encounter a problem?

Problem situations can destabilize us. If we aren't able to reconnect with our problem-solving confidence, things can spin out of control. It becomes difficult both to focus and to be flexible. We wind up making decisions that are more of a **reaction** than a planned **response**.

The graphic below illustrates a common occurrence:

1. You're going along and everything is okay.
2. All of a sudden, you hit a problem situation. Something isn't working out the way you were expecting and you're not sure how to fix this problem.
3. You react. Maybe an emotion takes over. Anger, frustration. Maybe you have a self-blaming attitude. "How could I have let this happen?!" Maybe you hold the belief that the problem is not fixable. Or maybe your expectation is that your pain makes it impossible for you to do anything to make the situation better.

The spiraling waves symbolize how quickly these reactions can amplify to



the point we feel out of control. This type of reaction results in a very negative problem orientation which makes it so hard to focus energy on figuring out how to solve the problem.

4. If you can't regain control over the situation you might be headed for a crisis or a problem-solving breakdown. This happens when problem-solving skills shut down and the person's behavior is no longer directed by goals, but only by anger, frustration, sadness, confusion, etc.

It can feel like the bus is driving us, instead of us doing the driving!

Monitoring and managing problem orientation keeps us from having this kind of breakdown. For people with chronic pain, it is *especially* important to replace a negative problem orientation with a positive one. Negative problem orientation creates stress and tension that we carry in our bodies. And that makes pain worse.

Are you an *innie* or an *outie*?

When people experience a problem-solving breakdown, for some people that breakdown is turned inwards; for others it is directed outwards.

How about for you? When you get frustrated by a problem, do you turn the negativity inwards or outwards?

What coping strategies work best for you?

What's next?

Over the next few weeks, you will learn more about:

- How to recognize the signs that your problem orientation is turning negative, and how to bring it back to the positive side.
- The logical steps used to **S-O-L-V-E** problems in a planful way.
- How to prevent a problem-solving breakdown and/or respond when there is one.

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 2 Summary:

- Identified three categories of problems.
- Discussed “problem orientation,” or one’s thoughts and feelings in a problem situation.
- Discussed that problem orientation exists on a continuum from positive to negative and is often affected by pain.
- Positive problem orientation is a key component to effective problem solving.

Home Assignment:

- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 3

Problem Orientation: Red Flags

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

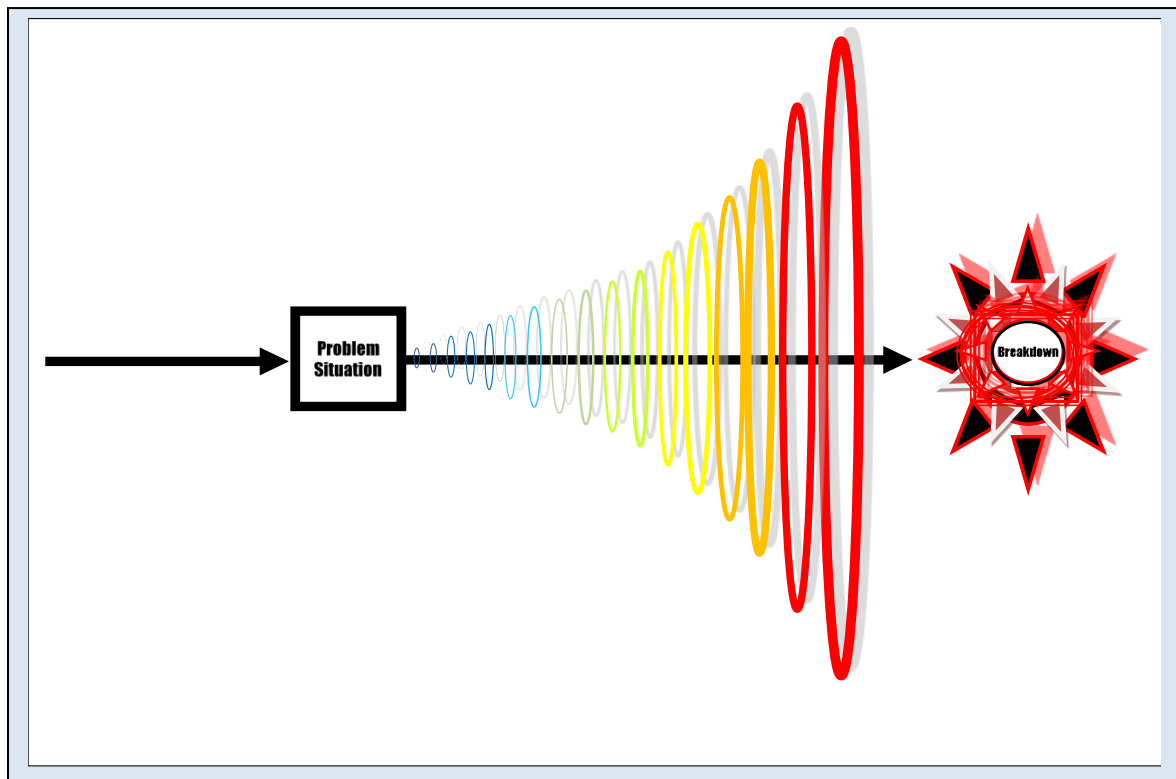
Last week we introduced the term “Problem Orientation.” This refers to someone’s mindset when they are in a problem situation. This includes their emotional reactions, how much confidence they have in their abilities to deal with the situation, their expectations that the problem is fixable, and their understanding that solutions take a commitment of time and effort to be successful.

Today’s Focus

The focus of today’s meeting will be to identify “Red Flags” which are warning signs that our problem orientation needs an adjustment. There are three types of red flags: personal style pitfalls, problematic contexts, and early warning signs.

In-Meeting Exercise A:

Last week we discussed what can happen when people run into a problem.



Very often, instead of **responding** in a clear and rational way, an emotion can take over and you might find that you are **reacting** emotionally in a way that is not helpful.

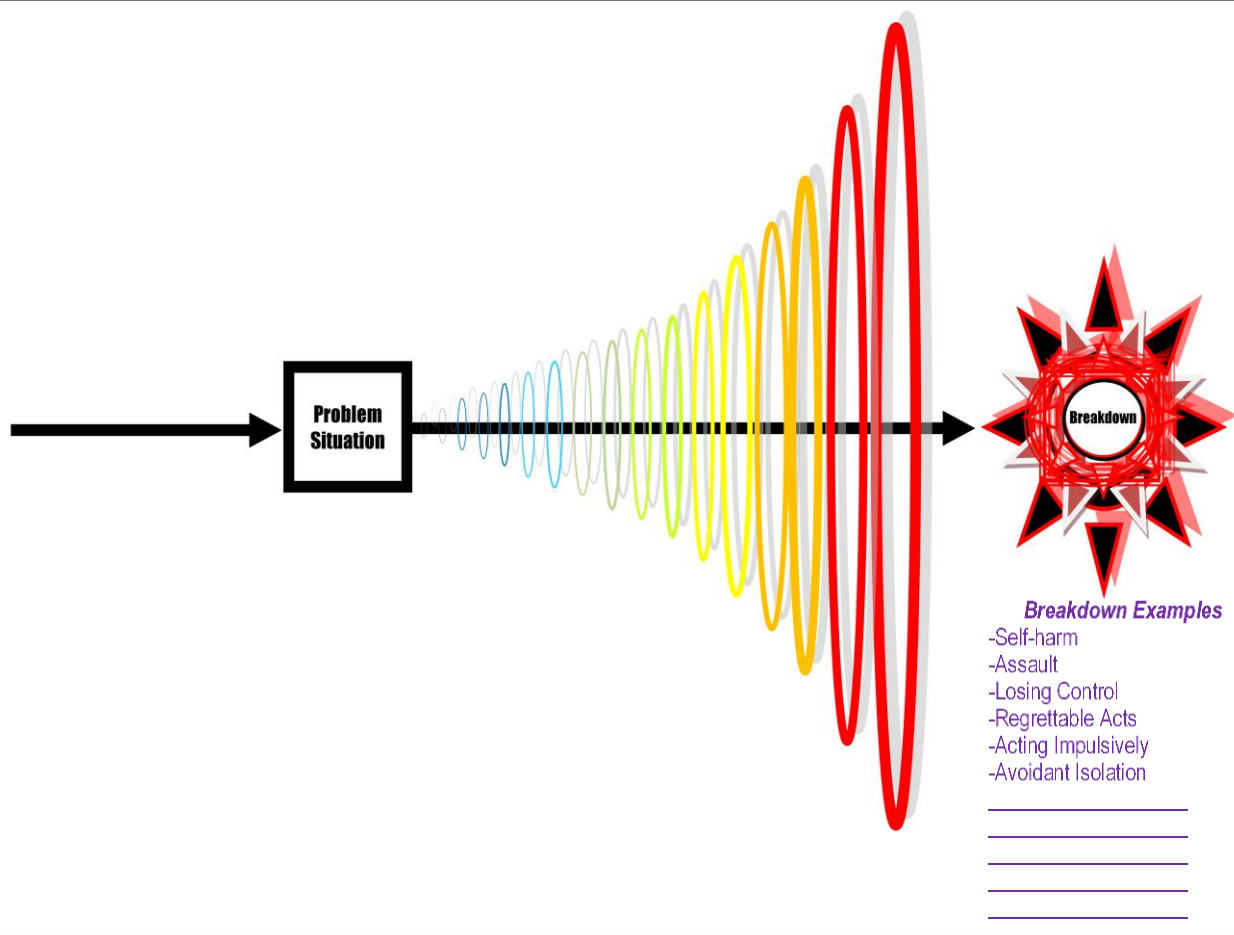
Feelings like anger, frustration, sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, loneliness, despair are common reactions to problems that people can have.

One of the goals of the PST treatment

On the next page is an exercise titled "Monitoring Problem Orientation I." It is designed to help you become more aware of the ways in which you respond to problems. Let's fill out this exercise together now.

Think about a problem you have had recently (or in the past), and we will talk about what you notice about your problem orientation.

Monitoring Problem Orientation I



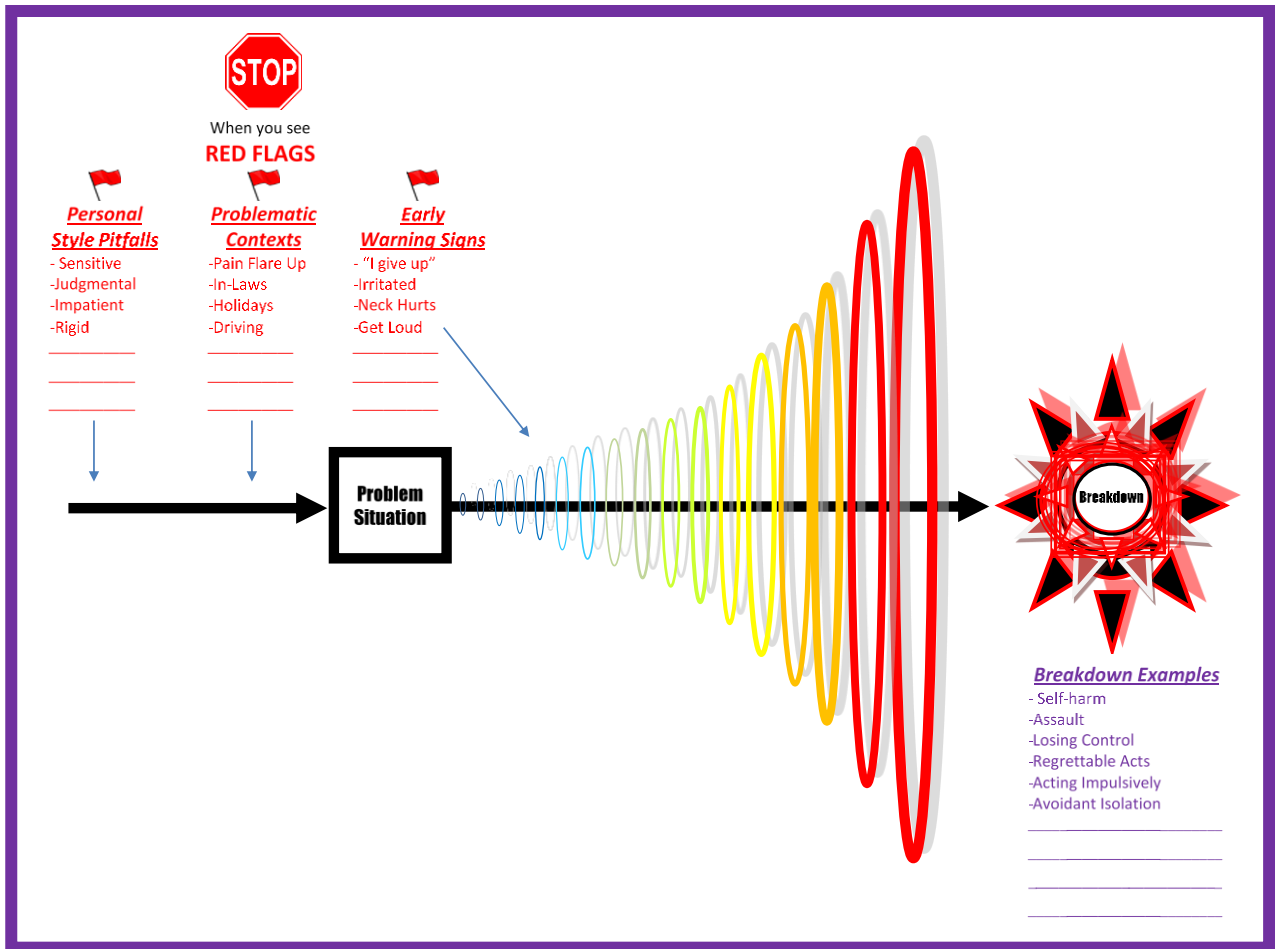
Monitoring Problem Orientation I:

What was the problem: _____

When did it happen: _____

What was my emotional reaction: _____

Was my problem orientation positive, negative, in between: _____



Red Flags

There are 3 types of red flags and each occurs at a different point in time. The **first one** happens earliest – way before the problem even emerges; the **second one** is closer to the problem onset – when we know from past experience that a problem *could be happening* soon; and the **third one** occurs right after the problem happens – this is when we are in the blue/green zone .

- 1) **Personal Style Pitfalls:** These **red flags** are those aspects of personality that we carry with us. They are inside us whether or not we are experiencing a problem. We call them "pitfalls" because sometimes even a good part of our personality can become unhelpful.

When we know our personal style pitfalls we are able to **de-escalate**. "Maybe he wasn't meaning to be rude, maybe the issue is that I'm impatient – let me just stop and breathe."

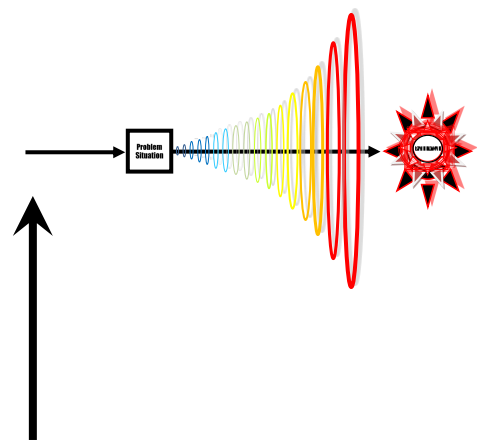
For example:

Let's say Pete knows 2 of his personal style pitfalls are that he is both **short-tempered** and **perfectionistic**. He is at the pharmacy to pick up medication, but they can't find his medicine. He can see that they have a very inefficient system which he finds very unprofessional. *"I can teach them how to organize things much better,"* he thinks. He lets out a sigh. When he catches sight of the pharmacist rolling his eyes, Pete just about loses it. He thinks, *"You're criticizing me for sighing?! You guys are the bozos. Learn to do your job!!"* He was just about to say out loud what he had been thinking when he remembered his personal style pitfall red flags. He has learned to hold his horses when he finds himself critical of others whom he sees as not up to his standard of **perfect**. *"This could be on me,"* he thinks, *"I haven't really been waiting that long. I need to be more flexible & just breathe. I'll count to 10 before I do anything else."*

By knowing his personal style pitfalls, he was able to avoid creating a new problem – getting into an argument with the pharmacist. Also, he was able to calm himself down which made waiting for his meds a lot easier.

Examples of **personal style pitfalls** include:

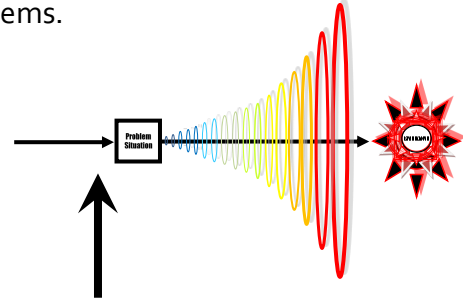
- **Perfectionism**
- **Being judgmental**
- **Short tempered**
- **Competitive**
- **Overly generous**
- **Impatient**
- **Impulsive**
- _____
- _____
- _____



These red flags are the ones we are able to notice first, because they are always with us. They are furthest away from the problem. What are your Personal Style Pitfalls?

2) **Problematic Contexts:** These **red flags** occur next. Notice the arrow is closer to the “problem situation.” These are situations, people, places or things that you know from experience can develop into problems.

These types of red flags can be seen closer to the problem, but still **before** the problem actually happens. Problematic contexts alert us that a problem **could** happen soon.



Forewarned is forearmed.

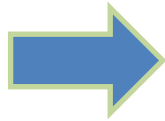
Examples of **problematic contexts** include:

- Loss, sadness
- When pain flares up
- PTSD triggers (e.g., crowds)
- Driving, traffic
- A particular person who gets under your skin
- Financial stress
- Holiday time
- Under a deadline
- Medical appointments
- _____
- _____
- _____

What are some **problematic contexts** that you know from experience can predict a possible problem?

3) **Early Warning Signs:** These **red flags** are the last to emerge. If you miss the personal style pitfall and problematic context red flags, don’t worry, there is still time to take control of your reaction. Enter the “**Early Warning Signs!**” These early warning signs take place **after** the problem situation happens.

Early Warning Signs
might look like
one of these



- You are worried about an upcoming work deadline
- You have negative thoughts, e.g., “This will never work out for me”
- You throw something or yell
- You are sad, angry, frustrated (but not yet depressed, enraged or hopeless.)
- Your skin feels clammy
- Jaw and neck tension
- You’re cursing more than usual

These early warning signs indicate that you might be headed for the red zone, but you are *not there yet*. You are still in the blue/green zone. There is still time to take a step back, take control over your thoughts, actions and feelings. The sooner you notice the early warning signs and use a hope box/problem orientation strategy, the better!

In general, early warning signs come in four forms:

1. Things I might say:

- "The world would be better off without me"
- "Things will never get better"
- _____

2. Behaviors I might do:

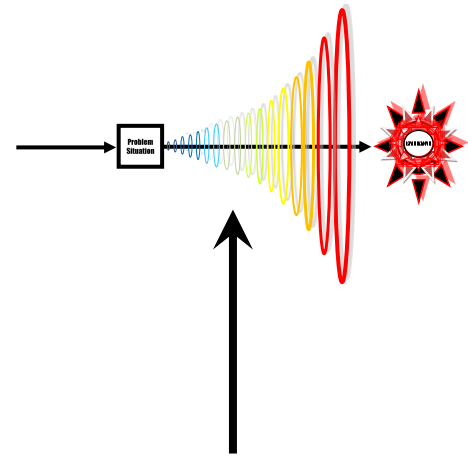
- Fidget, raise my voice, curse
- Stay in bed all day
- _____

3. Early emotions I might have:

- Irritated (not yet enraged)
- Sad (not yet depressed)
- _____

4. Sensations I might experience:

- Pain, muscle tension, sweating
- Lightheadedness, face flushes
- _____



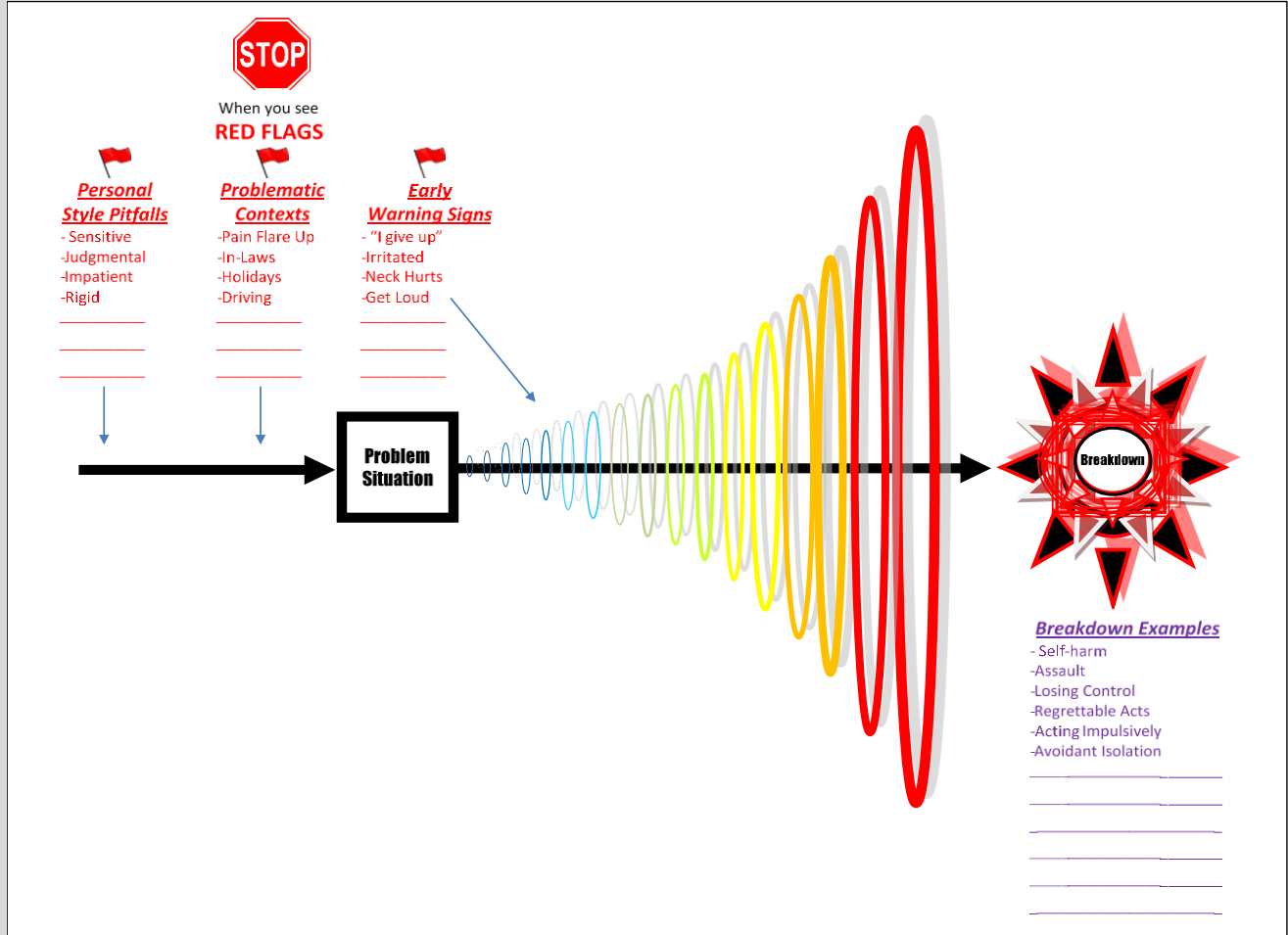
What early warning signs have you noticed that you have? Are you able to notice them **before** you get to the red zone?

Remember, the sooner you notice a red flag, the more successful you will be in using strategies to regain control of your problem orientation.

Practice

Please fill out the "Monitoring Problem Orientation II" form on the next page at home. To fill out the form, over the next week, please notice what kind of reactions you have to problems you encounter. You will also get good sense of your own **red flags**.

Home Assignment: Monitoring Problem Orientation II



Problem Orientation Monitoring II:

What was the problem: _____

When did it happen: _____

Did I notice any **RED FLAGS**: _____

Personal Style Pitfalls: _____

Problematic Contexts: _____

Warning Signs: _____

What was my emotional reaction: _____

Was my problem orientation positive, negative, in between: _____

Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities

Activities that may be worth adding to your day

PRACTICE A COPING STRATEGY

- Meditating
- Yoga
- Eating a good, healthy meal
- Exercising
- Taking a walk or going hiking
- Connecting with a friend
- Stretching exercises
- Learn about tai chi – (YouTube)
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Challenge negative thoughts daily
- Massage
- Use stationery bike
- Spend time socializing with Veterans
- Take warm bath before bed
- Practice 2 new relaxation techniques
- Aromatherapy
- Listen to music
- Use a problem-solving worksheet
- Use guided meditation
- Go to a Veteran's group
- Mindfully eat a healthy snack
- Complete a sudoku or photo puzzle
- Look at a happy memory photo
- Call someone I haven't spoken to in a while
- Paint a peaceful scene
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ADD A POSITIVE ACTIVITY

- Playing a musical instrument
- Playing with children or grandchildren
- Working on machines (cars, bikes, etc.)
- Riding a bike or motorcycle
- Going out for coffee
- Taking a picture
- Eating out
- Doing a favor for someone
- Bird watching
- Watching a sunrise or sunset
- Going to a religious service/ceremony
- Spending time with friends
- Listening to the sounds of nature
- Volunteering
- Golfing
- Going to the beach
- Doing art work
- Studying religious or spiritual readings
- Painting, woodworking, or other craft
- Going to a sports event
- Listening to music
- Boating/fishing
- Giving a compliment
- Camping
- Solving a problem, crossword, etc.
- Going on a picnic
- Walking a dog
- Going to a party
- Cooking or baking
- Taking a trip
- Visiting others
- Bowling
- Gardening or yard work
- Going on a date
- Sitting in the sun
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Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 3 Summary:

- This week we discussed red flags, which are signs that we are beginning to get upset and our problem orientation is turning negative.
- There are 3 types of red flags:
 - Personal Style Pitfalls
 - Problematic Contexts
 - Early Warning Signs

Home Assignment:

- Complete Monitoring Problem Orientation II exercise.
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 4

Problem Orientation:

Management Strategies

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Monitoring Problem Orientation II
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we discussed **red flags**. These are signs that we might soon encounter a problem, or are already in a problem situation. Knowing our red flags gives us an opportunity to pick some strategies so we can manage the problem situation with skill. A big part of this is keeping our problem orientation positive!

There are 3 types of red flags:

- Personal Style Pitfalls
- Problematic Contexts
- Early Warning Signs



Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be on introducing Problem Orientation strategies that can be used to keep ourselves calm and our problem orientation positive. You will learn how to identify and use self-talk strategies, behavioral strategies, and self-soothing strategies.

Problem Orientation – Management Strategies

Problem Orientation Strategies are skills you can use to avoid having a *problem* turn into a *breakdown* of coping skills.

The way to do that is:

- Know your red flags so they can alert you to 
- Then, have a list of strategies so you can  and use them to calm down and cope.

Chronic pain, depression, and hopelessness can make it difficult to see the solutions that are available. Using these **strategies** can help increase hope. They can help you coach yourself through the problem so that you can stay out of the red zone and avert a coping breakdown. The goal is to respond sooner rather than later, because the sooner you prepare for and anticipate a possible breakdown, the more likely your efforts will be successful.

It helps to have a **Toolbox**, or series of cognitive, behavioral, and self-soothing strategies at hand – you never know when you might need your wrench or tape measure!

For example:

Brian's wife had a family reunion coming up and he was getting really nervous. The event was pretty far away, and he was worried that such a long car ride would make his chronic pain even worse. Plus, he generally did not enjoy spending time with his wife's family. He found them to be inconsiderate and dismissive of his pain, which makes him feel even more hopeless about his situation. At the same time, Brian wanted to be supportive towards his wife, and wished he could have a better relationship with her family.

*He recognized his red flags. His **personal style pitfalls** of being somewhat short-tempered and very sensitive interfered with his ability to connect with them and enjoy himself. He also knew that his pain was a **problematic context** making situations more difficult. Rather than skip the trip and argue with his wife, he used **problem orientation strategies** instead: He used positive **self-talk** to remind himself to breathe and think of how he appreciates his wife. That cleared his head and he decided to plan in rest breaks, pack heating pads, and have the option of staying at a motel at the halfway point if needed. Seeing his red flags – before his trip even started – helped him use strategies to calm down. That allowed him to think clearly and plan for ways to make the trip easier.*

Your **Personal Problem Orientation Strategy Toolbox**, on the next page, is a list of options to consider using in order to help manage your problem orientation and nudge it towards the positive side. As you look at the toolbox, ask yourself:

- Which strategies might work for you?
- What additional tools would be helpful to *add* to your toolbox?
- What *obstacles* do you anticipate in using these tools?

Then use the blank form in the appendix, **Handout 2: Problem Orientation Toolbox**, to make your personalized list of problem orientation strategies that could work for you.





(Example)

PROBLEM ORIENTATION TOOLBOX

COGNITIVE / SELF-TALK STRATEGIES

- “It may take me longer, but I can still do it”
- “Let it go, this will pass”
- “Is there another way to look at this situation? What am I missing?”
- “What would *Bobby* do?”
- “I’ve solved issues like this before”
- “When I am **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely or **T**ired – **HALT!**”
- “My perceptions may be distorted – Look for the evidence”
- “Take it step by step; I can do this”
- “Problems are part of life for everyone.”
- “Am I using all-or-nothing thinking?”
- “Is this a situation requiring *acceptance* or *change*?”
-

BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES / THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Leave the scene, walk away
- Count to 10
- Distract myself (e.g., watch a movie, listen to music, call a friend, play with the dog)
- Use a worksheet
- Prayer
- Journal
- Go outdoors, be in nature
- Go to a Veterans’ group (e.g., VFW, VA, etc.)
- Exercise or stretch
- Go for a bike ride
- Call a support person
- Do something self-loving (e.g., eat a healthy meal, say something kind to myself)
- Help someone else who is need
-
-

SELF-SOOTHING / BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery: Beach, Forest, Country road
- Engage senses (e.g., aromatherapy, splash face with cold water, take warm bath)
- Massage neck and shoulders
- Meditation
- Make a cup of aromatic tea, or have a special comforting food
-
-

Pain and Problem Orientation

People who experience pain face additional challenges in managing problem orientation. For example, pain can make you look at problems through a more negative lens. Problems may seem more hopeless or difficult to solve when you are in pain. Because of this, adding pain management strategies to the toolbox is an idea worth considering! See **Handout 3** in the appendix for a list of **Pain Management Strategies** you may want to consider adding to your toolbox.

Acceptance

Using the strategies above can help you manage what is within your control. However, what about those things that are not within your control? This is where acceptance plays an important role. Acceptance means understanding that there are some things that you may not be able to do much about.

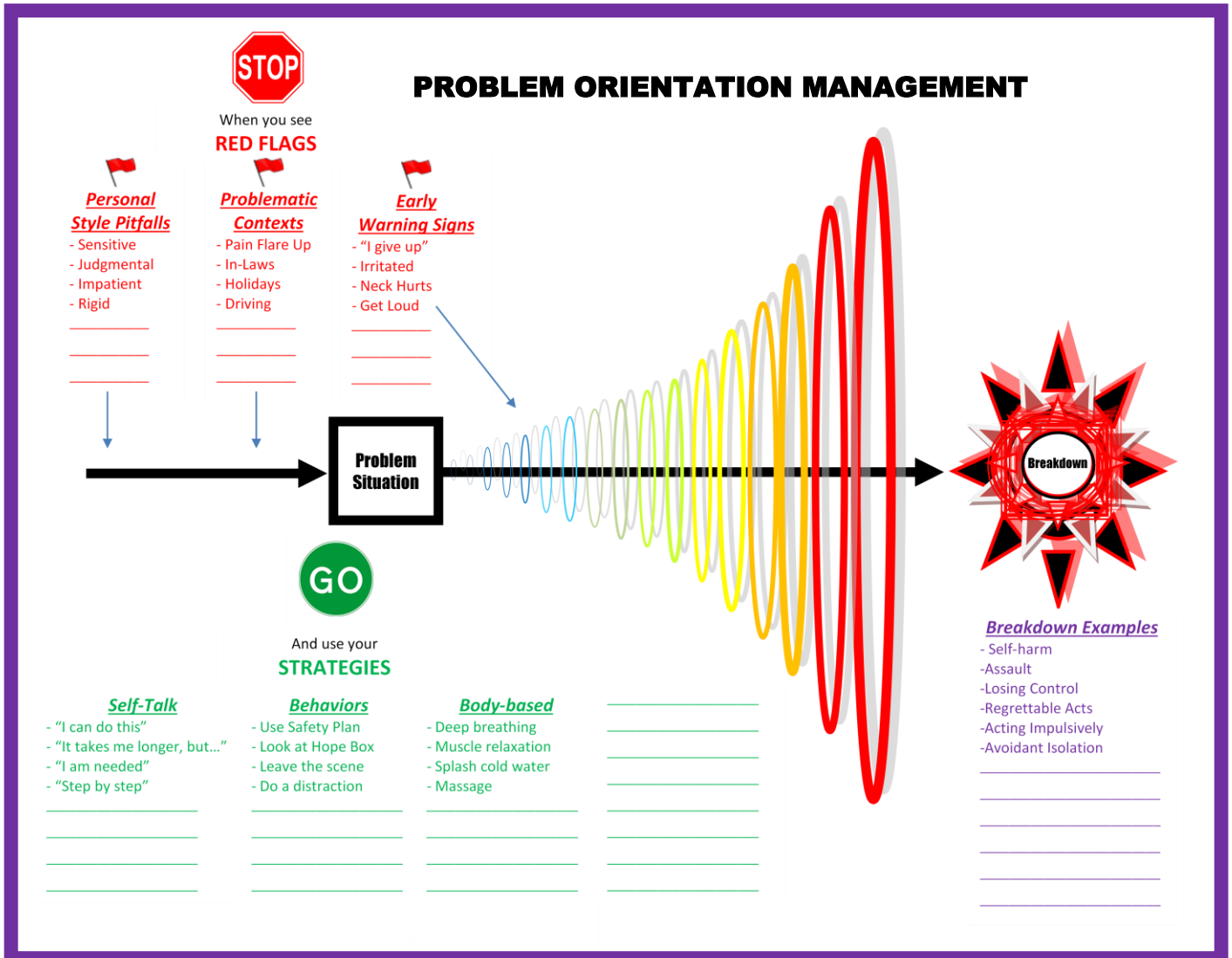
What does acceptance mean to you? _____

What are some things in your life that are not within your control? _____

What is the cost of continuing to fight against these things that are not within your control? _____

What would it be like to accept these experiences? _____

Handout 4:

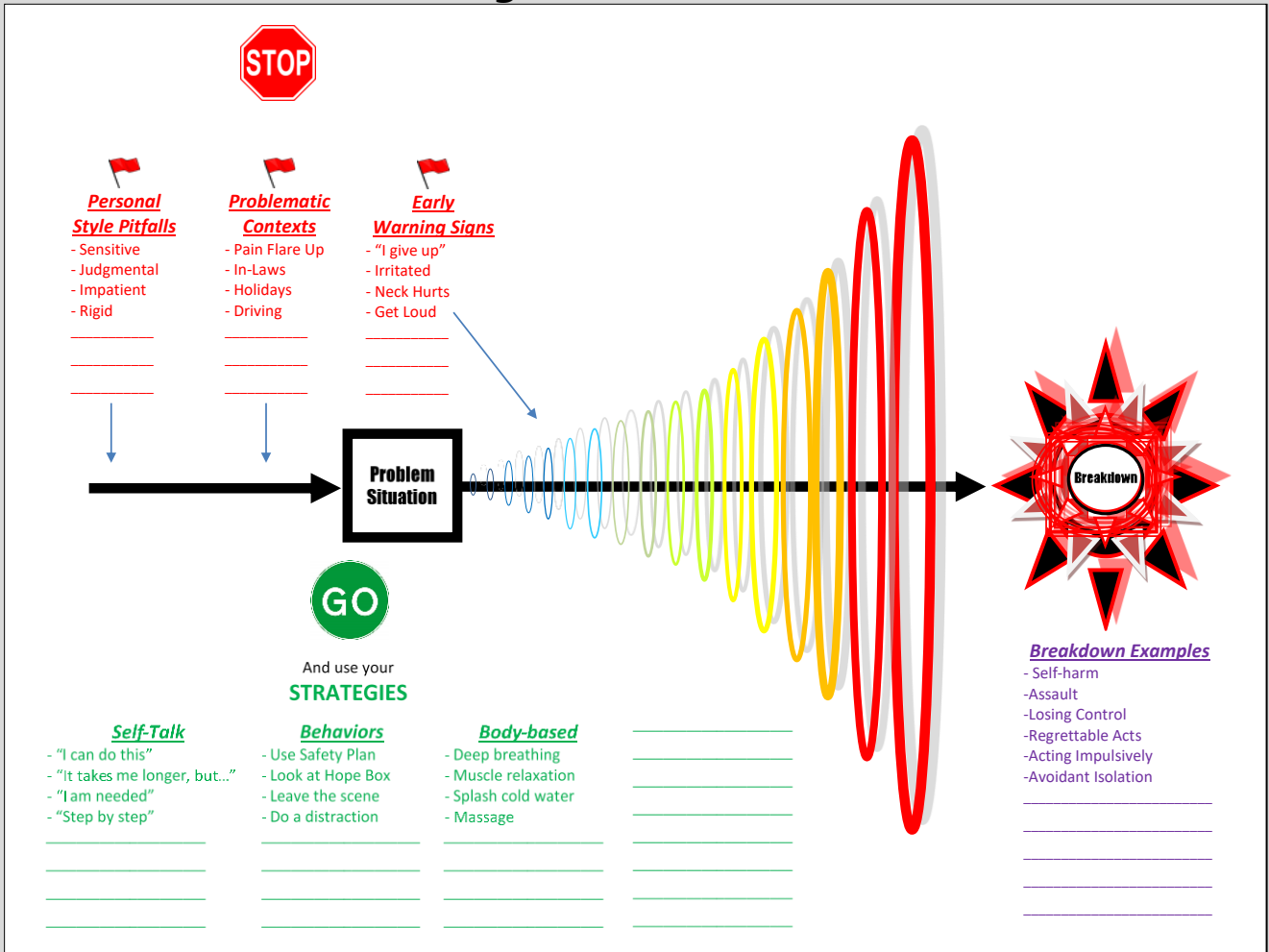


Practice

Please fill out the "Monitoring Problem Orientation III" form on the next page. To fill out the form, over the next week:

- Identify what the problem was.
- Notice what kind of reactions you had to the problem.
- Were you able to notice your **red flags**?
- What was your problem orientation like?
- Which **Strategies** from the Problem Orientation Toolbox helped keep you positive and in control?

Home Assignment: Monitoring Problem Orientation III



Problem Orientation Monitoring III:

What was the problem: _____

When did it happen: _____

Did I notice any **RED FLAGS**: _____

Personal Style Pitfalls: _____

Problematic Contexts: _____

Warning Signs: _____

What was my emotional reaction: _____

Was my problem orientation positive, negative, in between: _____

Which Hope Toolbox Problem Orientation strategies helped: _____

Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities

Activities that may be worth adding to your day

PRACTICE A COPING STRATEGY

- Meditating
- Yoga
- Eating a good, healthy meal
- Exercising
- Taking a walk or going hiking
- Connecting with a friend
- Stretching exercises
- Learn about tai chi – (YouTube)
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Challenge negative thoughts daily
- Massage
- Use stationery bike
- Spend time socializing with Veterans
- Take warm bath before bed
- Practice 2 new relaxation techniques
- Aromatherapy
- Listen to music
- Use a problem-solving worksheet
- Use guided meditation
- Go to a Veteran's group
- Mindfully eat a healthy snack
- Complete a sudoku or photo puzzle
- Look at a happy memory photo
- Call someone I haven't spoken to in a while
- Paint a peaceful scene
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ADD A POSITIVE ACTIVITY

- Playing a musical instrument
- Playing with children or grandchildren
- Working on machines (cars, bikes, etc.)
- Riding a bike or motorcycle
- Going out for coffee
- Taking a picture
- Eating out
- Doing a favor for someone
- Bird watching
- Watching a sunrise or sunset
- Going to a religious service/ceremony
- Spending time with friends
- Listening to the sounds of nature
- Volunteering
- Golfing
- Going to the beach
- Doing art work
- Studying religious or spiritual readings
- Painting, woodworking, or other craft
- Going to a sports event
- Listening to music
- Boating/fishing
- Giving a compliment
- Camping
- Solving a problem, crossword, etc.
- Going on a picnic
- Walking a dog
- Going to a party
- Cooking or baking
- Taking a trip
- Visiting others
- Bowling
- Gardening or yard work
- Going on a date
- Sitting in the sun
-
-

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 4 Summary:

- Identified ways to manage challenges to problem orientation.
- Discussed how pain affects your problem orientation.
- Added additional strategies to your Problem Orientation Toolbox.

Home Assignment:

- Complete Monitoring Problem Orientation III exercise.
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 5

Problem-Solving Styles

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Monitoring Problem Orientation III
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we talked about the ways in which symptoms and problems can make it difficult to maintain a positive orientation towards problems or challenges. We also discussed strategies to stay emotionally regulated through use of strategies listed in your toolbox.

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be to introduce the 3 "Problem-Solving Styles," and identify the one that is best for solving problems.

More About Problem Orientation

We will continue to discuss to Problem Orientation – which is the 1st component of PST – throughout the entire problem-solving process. Managing difficult emotions, maintaining a sense of hope and keeping a positive attitude (all parts of Problem Orientation) will help you as you go through the 5 problem-solving steps, which is the 2nd component. Because of this, Problem Orientation skills are woven into all 12 meetings.

Problem Solving Style

For the past few meetings, we have been focusing on the idea of “problem orientation” and how to keep it positive.

“Problem orientation,” the first component of problem-solving, describes our *relationship* to problem situations – how we are **oriented** around problems.

Today, we will add the idea of “problem solving style.” This is the second component of problem-solving. It refers to what we actually **do** about the problem.

REFERENCE CHECK

Problem Orientation: Attitudes, expectations, and beliefs around your ability to solve a problem (Can be negative, positive, or in between).

Problem-solving Style: What kind of approach you typically take when a problem occurs. What do you do? (Are you Avoidant? Impulsive? Planful?)

There are 3 styles that people use when they try to solve problems. These are: **avoidant**, **impulsive**, and **planful**.

Poor problem-solving is usually caused by avoiding problems or making impulsive decisions.

For many people, one of their **personal style pitfalls** is that they tend to be **avoidant** or **impulsive** decision-makers.

Good problem-solving typically uses a **planful** style.

PROBLEM SOLVING STYLES

AVOIDANT STYLE

- Putting off solving problems until “later” but doesn’t actually go back to the problem and solve it
- Being passive
- Hoping the problem will go away on its own
- Hoping someone else will fix the problem
- Denying the problem exists at all
- “Analysis paralysis”

IMPULSIVE STYLE

- Goes with first idea that comes to mind
- Reflexively reacts to situation rather than making a considered response
- Does a quick fix
- Can be incomplete and careless
- Emphasis on the short-term goal

PLANFUL STYLE

- Thoughtful
- Organized
- Identifies both short-term & long-term goals
- May take additional time and effort
- Uses a Positive Problem Orientation. Able to manage frustration and maintain hopeful attitude about ability to solve problem
- Able to ask questions like:
 - “What do I *really* want from this situation?”
 - “Am I missing something?”
 - “Will this problem look different when I’m not in pain?”
 - “Does the other person have a valid perspective that I am not seeing?”
 - “Is there some way we can both get something we want from this situation?”
 - “Are there additional options I should consider?”
 - “How urgent is this situation? Can I wait to act?”
- Follows a step-by-step approach:
 - (1) Defines the problem, sets up goals
 - (2) Brainstorms a set of possible options
 - (3) Examines likely pros and cons of each option
 - (4) Implements the chosen option one step at a time
 - (5) Evaluates success, learns from experience, makes another go at it

In-Meeting Exercise A:

- Practice identifying each problem solving style using the example below:

Read the following example about Joe.

Joe has chronic joint and muscle pain. His pain makes it difficult for him to do household chores, like mowing the lawn. Every time he looks at his overgrown yard, he starts having negative thoughts and feelings, and views the problem from a negative problem orientation. For example, he thinks he is useless and a burden to his family and feels ashamed and depressed. He also thinks about how his wife must be frustrated with him because he can't do as much around the house, and how she would probably be better off without him. Joe defines his problem as: "I take pride in my house and I really need to mow my lawn, but my pain is getting in my way."

Avoidant Style

If Joe were to use an avoidant style, he might just lie on the couch and watch T.V. to distract himself from the whole thing. Why would he adopt this style? Well, if Joe is feeling bad about himself because he has trouble getting household tasks done and is in the habit of avoiding things that make him feel bad, he will continue to avoid. This avoidant style might make Joe feel better temporarily, but in the long run the actual problem (the overgrown yard) will get worse, and so will his negative thoughts and feelings.

This is different from *planful avoidance* which is when you take a temporary break and then **come back** to solve the problem. *Planful avoidance* can be a good thing; but an avoidant style is usually not.

How might planful avoidance be helpful for you? How might an avoidant style not be helpful?

From your own experience, please describe a time when you approached a problem with an **avoidant style**. *What were the advantages? Disadvantages?*

Impulsive Style

If Joe were to use an impulsive style, he would probably immediately mow the entire lawn, pushing himself past his limits. He would **not** take the time to think through the consequences of his actions. *How is being spontaneous different from being impulsive?*

From your own experience, please describe a time when you approached a problem with an **impulsive style**? What were the positive and negative consequences?

It's normal to feel pulled to use an avoidant or impulsive style at times. How might problem orientation tools help you be less avoidant and less impulsive?

Planful Style

In order for Joe to use a planful style, it would be helpful for him to recognize his red flags, and then use his problem orientation management strategies.

For example, if Joe recognizes that thinking about working on his car triggers some of his **early warning signs (e.g., getting tense in his neck and chest, pacing around his house, having thoughts about being a burden, and being overly critical on himself)**, he can then use some strategies to calm down and think more clearly (e.g., **practicing muscle relaxation, and using self-talk to remind himself that while chronic pain may make things more difficult for him, he is still a useful person and capable of solving problems**).

Once Joe's problem orientation becomes more positive and hopeful, he can more clearly see the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, evaluate those solutions, and pick the most effective one. For example, after thinking through some possible options, Joe might decide to divide his car work into smaller pieces, so that he can do a little at a time. What kinds of positive and negative *consequences* are there with this planful kind of solution?

From your own experience, please describe a time when you approached a problem with a **planful style**.

What can make it hard to use a planful style?

What is your go-to Problem-Solving Style?

People often use a variety of styles depending upon the situation, but is there one style that you tend to use more than the others?

Problem-Solving Styles			
	Avoidant	Impulsive	Planful
✓ <i>Check your style</i>			

What problem orientation tools could you use to help you get back on the planful track when you are *avoiding* your problems? Or using an *impulsive* style? (Your problem orientation toolbox can give you some ideas!)

Steps to Use a Planful Style

1. First, identify if you are using an avoidant or impulsive style, and use strategies to help you use a planful style. Use the My Roadmap handout on the next page to develop your own personal roadmap to success.
2. Second, follow a step-by-step, logical approach to solving problems. This approach is outlined below. We will talk about each of these steps in more detail over the next few weeks. If you have trouble remembering the steps, remember that you need to **S-O-L-V-E** the problem!

S – *State the problem and set up goals.*

The first step is to try and define the actual problem. We need to figure out what we really want out of a situation to avoid solving the “wrong” problem. Once the problem is defined, goals can be identified. A goal is a desired result that directly follows the problem definition.

O – *Options.*

Brainstorm all possible options and solutions. It is critical to think of many options or activities that will help you accomplish your goals. This is sometimes called “brainstorming.”

L – *List the pros and cons of each solution, and pick the best one.*

Evaluate the options by looking at the Pros and Cons of each. We do this by looking at the likely consequences of each option. Once all options have been evaluated, one is selected to try first.

V – *Visualize the steps you need to take.*

It’s best to develop a step-by-step approach for what you need to do to carry out your solution. Take the time to plan out exactly what you need to do to make your solution a reality. Visualize each step before you act!

E – *Evaluate your success.*

Next you will measure how successful the solution was. If it was effective and it helps you reach your goal, you have successfully solved the problem. If the solution did not help you reach your goal, think about what you have learned about the problem. How can that knowledge help you try something else that might work better?

In-Meeting Exercise B:

The “My Roadmap” worksheet on the next page, is a great way to summarize the major steps of Problem Solving in a way that is customized to you:

- *Problem Orientation:* What are your **red** flags? What **strategies** can you use to make your problem orientation more positive?
- *Problem Solving Style:* Identify your style and ways to use a planful style more regularly.

Let’s fill out the “My Roadmap” form together now.

Handout 5: MY ROADMAP

MY RED FLAGS



MY PERSONAL STYLE PITFALLS

-
-
-



MY PROBLEMATIC CONTEXTS

-
-
-



MY WARNING SIGNS

-
-
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MY PROBLEM ORIENTATION STRATEGIES



MY COGNITIVE / SELF-TALK STRATEGIES

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MY BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES / THINGS I CAN DO

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MY SELF-SOOTHING / BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

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MY PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLE

- WHICH IS MY "GO TO" STYLE?
 - Avoidant
 - Impulsive
 - Planful
- IN WHAT TYPES OF SITUATIONS DO I USE A PLANFUL STYLE MOST CONSISTENTLY?
 -
 -
 -
- HOW CAN I USE THE PLANFUL STYLE MORE REGULARLY?
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In-Meeting Exercise C:

On the next page is the Problem Solving Worksheet. This is the most important worksheet of the PST treatment, because it includes all the concepts of problem-solving in one place.




- ✓ The **top box** lets you identify the problem.
- ✓ The **middle box** focuses on problem orientation.
- ✓ The **bottom box** spells out the 5 planful problem-solving steps that make up the planful style.

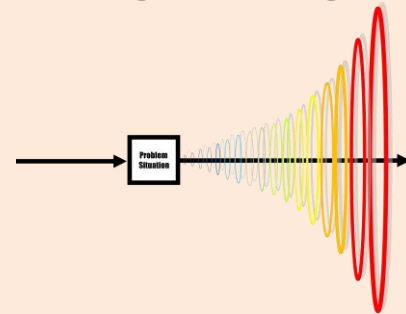
Let's fill out the first two boxes of the Problem Solving Worksheet on the next page together now.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked

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- Personal Style Pitfalls?
 Problematic Contexts?
 Early Warning Signs?
- What **Strategies** did you use to  **GO** regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ *but* _____ "

Revised: " _____ *but* _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:

3. List Pros & Cons:

	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:




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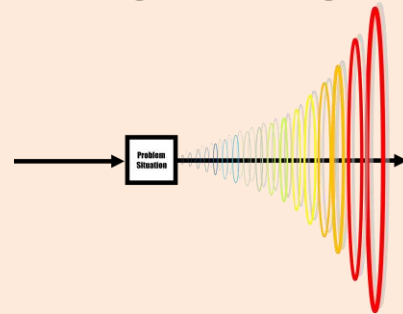
5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

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STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

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Revised: " _____ but _____ "

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5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities

Activities that may be worth adding to your day

PRACTICE A COPING STRATEGY

- Meditating
- Yoga
- Eating a good, healthy meal
- Exercising
- Taking a walk or going hiking
- Connecting with a friend
- Stretching exercises
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- Gardening or yard work
- Going on a date
- Sitting in the sun
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Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 5 Summary

- Identified 3 problem-solving styles:
 - Avoidant
 - Impulsive
 - Planful

Home Assignment:

- Complete the Problem-solving Worksheet (first 2 boxes only).
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 6

Planful Style to **S O L V E**:

'**S**' State the Problem & Goal

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we talked about the 3 Problem-solving Styles:

- Avoidant
- Impulsive
- Planful

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be to introduce the first step of planful problem solving. It is the **S** step of the **SOLVE** process. **S** is to "State the problem and goal(s)."

More About Problem Orientation

We need to honor the emotions we feel when we experience chronic symptoms, trauma or disappointment; but we also need to separate the objective reality (the facts) from these understandable subjective emotional reactions.

Planful Problem-Solving Steps: **S** – State the Problem and Goal

As we have been discussing, how we see a problem will direct our thinking about what our goals are.

REFERENCE CHECK

When you **define the problem**, you clearly state the conflict you are experiencing, including the obstacle that is getting in the way.

Once you have a clear and accurate problem definition, you can identify your **goal**.

People aren't usually aware that they are making Problem Definitions or goals; they are just reacting naturally to situations. Nevertheless, the way we see and understand these situations lead to the choices we make about how to solve the problems. You will practice becoming more aware of your reactions and beliefs. This will help you choose a Problem Definition that will better help you achieve what you actually want to achieve. Sometimes the first definition we come up with is not the most accurate or helpful. We need to pause and think about whether we need to revise our problem definitions.

In-Meeting Exercise A:

Read the following example about Jack.

Jack is on the phone. He is trying to contact his doctor about a new acupuncture treatment for his neck pain. He is transferred from one person to the next and kept on hold for a long time. He begins to notice that his neck pain increases from holding the phone for too long. This causes him to get very frustrated. He starts having thoughts that *"my doctor and her office are horrible."* He continues to think about how it's probably useless to try this new treatment anyway.

In his frustration, Jack develops the **problem definition**: *"I want help but I'm stuck on hold in this telephone nightmare! My doctor is awful!"* That kind of problem definition could lead to the goal of ending the nightmare. Jack might hang up and just avoid the doctor. But if Jack is able to stop and think about what he really wants, he might come up with a **revised problem definition** like this: *"I need to get information about acupuncture but I'm getting frustrated and I'm in pain."*

How could Jack revise his Problem Definition?

Checking your Problem Orientation

The first step in revising a problem definition is checking your **Problem Orientation**. If Jack can first use a more **Positive Problem Orientation**, he can better talk himself through the problem calmly.

What sorts of things do you tell yourself when using a **negative** problem orientation?

One way to develop a more Positive Problem Orientation is to identify and replace **negative** and catastrophic language:

- ✗ *"This is the worst!"*
- ✗ *"I can't stand it."*
- ✗ *"Why does this stuff always happen to me?!"*
- ✗ *"I'll never figure this out."*

If Jack uses positive, hopeful and realistic language instead, he can reframe problems as challenges. Jack can develop a more Positive Problem Orientation by reminding himself of **positive** facts:

- ✓ *"Challenges are a normal part of life."*
- ✓ *"Most problems are solvable one way or another."*
- ✓ *"It may take a little time and work, but I should be able to solve this."*
- ✓ *"I may not have found the solution yet, but I'm pretty sure it's here somewhere."*
- ✓ *"I have solved problems like this in the past."*

What sort of things do you tell yourself when using a more **positive** problem orientation?

What makes it hard to do this?

Clearly State the Problem

A problem is a conflict that does not have an immediately obvious solution. Remember, there are three types of problems:

- Conflict between 2 of your own goals,
- Conflict between your goal and someone else's goal, and
- When your original plan is blocked and you can't think of other options.

Identify the obstacle right in the problem definition.

The way to do this is to add the word "but."

Problem Definition Examples:

- "I want to go to my cousin's wedding **but** I can't afford the plane ticket."
- "I want to shovel snow **but** I'm afraid I'll pull my back out."
- "My daughter wants her son to come live with me **but** I don't have the energy anymore for a 6-year-old boy in my house."
- "My wife tries to be nice when she says she understands my pain **but** there's no way she can and I wish she would stop saying it!"

Also, to define the problem, we need to think flexibly and open up our thinking. We can promote flexibility by **asking questions**. Shake things up. Suggestions include:



Set up Goals

Once you have defined a problem, the next part is to define your goal for that problem. What would you like to see changed about your problem? If your problem was changed, what would you be able to achieve? Your goal should flow naturally from your problem definition.

For example, if Jack's problem is "I need to get information about this new treatment but I'm getting frustrated and I'm in pain," then his goal might be **to manage his frustration and pain while he waits for the information he needs.**




In-Meeting Exercise B:

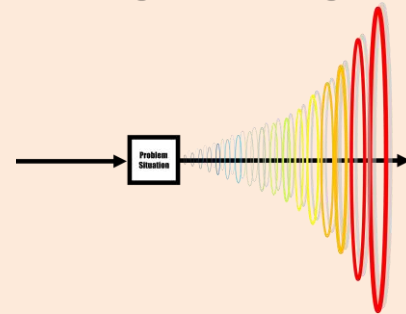
Let's use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" on the following page using a problem from real life. We will fill out the first 2 boxes, and the Step **S**: "State the Problem & Goal," of the third box.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked

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- What **Strategies** did you use to  **GO** regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:

3. List Pros & Cons:

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Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:




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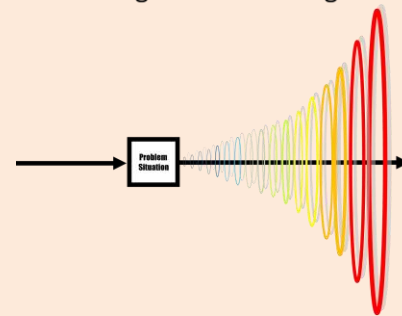
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 - How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
 - What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  **STOP** ?
- Personal Style Pitfalls?
 Problematic Contexts?
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- What **Strategies** did you use to  **GO** regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ *but* _____ "

Revised: " _____ *but* _____ "

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4. Visualize the steps:

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5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities

Activities that may be worth adding to your day

PRACTICE A COPING STRATEGY

- Meditating
- Yoga
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- Exercising
- Taking a walk or going hiking
- Connecting with a friend
- Stretching exercises
- Learn about tai chi – (YouTube)
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Challenge negative thoughts daily
- Massage
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ADD A POSITIVE ACTIVITY

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- Going on a date
- Sitting in the sun
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Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 6 Summary:

- When faced with a problem, we need to clearly define how we see the problem to make sure we are addressing the problem we really want to solve. Often, our first definition doesn't quite capture our concern, so it is a great idea to ask ourselves, "do I need to **re**define the problem?"
- Once we (re)define the problem, we can identify our goal.

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete up to Step **S**: "State the Problem & Goal."
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 7

Planful Style to **S O L V E**:

'**O**' Options and '**L**' List Pros & Cons

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we talked about:

- Planful Step **S**: Stating the problem and identifying goals
- Identifying how your problem orientation affects how you see your problems

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be on generating different types of possible solutions to attain your goal, and evaluating the pros and cons. In the **S O L V E** model, we will discuss **O** & **L** today.

More About Problem Orientation

A big part of developing a positive problem orientation is having the belief that the problem – or some part of it – may be *solvable*. This is not always easy to do. But by being open to generate possible options that might help the situation, you can sometimes discover choices you didn't originally think of.

Problem-Solving Steps: ○ – Options

After working through the steps of defining the problem and goal, the next step is to generate possible options. This is often called brainstorming. An option is any possible action that gets you closer to your goal.

For example:

Devin struggles with knee pain and chronic fatigue. He wants to go to his grandson's football game but knows if he goes, he will regret it. This is because it will worsen his symptoms which will be embarrassing as well as painful. Thinking about missing the game makes him feel hopeless. He starts to question whether he will ever be able to do the things he likes to do.

Planful Problem-Solving Step: **S** – State the problem and identify goal

Initial Problem Definition:

*Devin wants to go to his grandson's football game **but** knows he will regret it.*

Initially, Devin thought the problem definition was that there's no way that he could attend the football game no matter how much he wanted to do so. He knows the football bleachers are hard and only aggravate his pain. He thought that people would think he was frail and a burden if he complained of his pain. He thought that it was foolish for him to think that he would be able to go given his condition.

Devin realized that he was using a **negative problem orientation**, and was being too critical of himself and his own abilities. Devin tried to think about the problem more positively. Devin took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and tried to slow down his breathing. He replaced negative self-talk, "I'm such a burden" with positive self-talk, "It's so nice my family wants me to participate." He tried to think of at least 3 times when things eventually worked out despite his chronic symptoms. He remembered that while he would probably still be in pain during the game, it might be a good distraction and would get him out of the house. This allowed him to develop a more positive problem orientation.

Revised Problem Definition: Devin was then able to define the problem like this: *I want to spend more time with my family and to get out of the house, **but** I am afraid of being stuck at the game without a way home if I need to leave early.*

Goal: To attend the game and have an **exit strategy** in case I need to leave early.

Planful Problem-Solving Step: **O** – *Options*

- Devin’s daughter goes to the game, and Facetimes him so he can participate.
- Devin just goes to the football game – symptoms be damned!
- Devin asks his friend Moe to drive him to the game and makes a plan to attend only 30 minutes of the game.
- Devin goes to his grandson’s football practice before the game to avoid a crowd and brings along his friend Moe or a family member to take him home.
- Devin brings a cushion which will make the seat more comfortable.
- Devin gets some education on using Uber or Lyft, so he can leave if he has to without bothering anyone else.

Planful Problem-Solving Step: **L** – *List Pros and Cons & Pick Best Option*

An effective solution is one that accomplishes a pre-determined goal, improves a situation, and/or lessens stress. A good solution will maximize positive consequences and minimize negative ones. Often a doable solution will have both short and long term effects, and we need to identify what they are before making a choice of which solution to try. Once you have looked at all the possible solutions, it’s time to select the solution you think is best based on the list of pros and cons. Do you see this solution as one that shows a high likelihood of you achieving your goal? Do the pros outweigh the cons? You will probably notice that the easiest solution is not always the best solution.

Devin will now think about the pros and cons of each of his generated options. Will the cost of an Uber or Lyft be within Devin’s budget? What is his relationship like with Moe these days? How confident is he that the seat cushion will do the trick? How important is it for him to be there in person (as opposed to using Facetime)?

In-Meeting Exercise A: Generating **O**ptions & **L**ist Pros/Cons

In our last meeting’s exercise you identified a problem which we used to explore the **S** step of the Planful Style (State the problem and identify goal). In that exercise you identified a problem definition, perhaps revised that problem definition and then finally determined a goal. Let’s use that same goal to brainstorm a number of possible **O**ptions to get closer to your goal. Then, let’s **L**ist the likely advantages (pros) and disadvantages (cons) of putting each of these options into action. Let’s use the Problem-solving Worksheet on the next page to do this.

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WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


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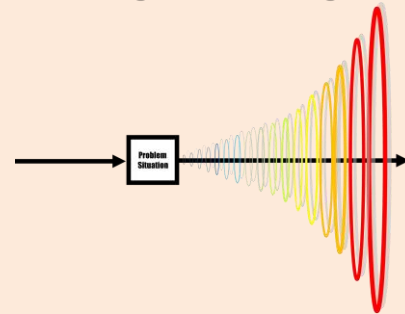
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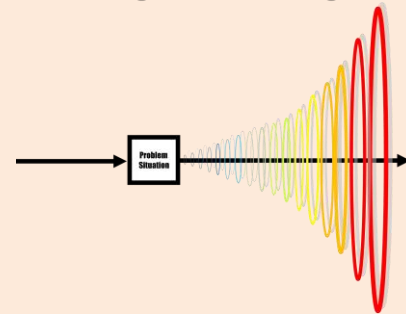
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Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
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3.			

Meeting 7 Summary:

- Coming up with options to problems should be created without restrictions. Brainstorm!
- Using a pro and con list can help rate the likely success of your options. This will help you pick the best one.

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete steps
 - **S**: "State the Problem & Goal"
 - **O**: "Options"
 - **L**: "List Pros & Cons and Pick Best One"
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 8

Planful Style to **S O L V E**:

'**V**' Visualize the Steps

'**E**' Evaluate Success

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we talked about:

- Planful Step **O**: Options, brainstorming as many options as possible
- Planful Step **L**: Listing the pros & cons of each option and choosing one

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be on visualizing the steps to solving your problem, and evaluating your success. In the **S O L V E** model, we will discuss **V** & **E** today.

More About Problem Orientation

If you can keep your problem orientation more positive, your ability to navigate the 5 problem solving steps gets better. Do you agree with this statement? Why, or why not?

Planful Problem-Solving Steps: **V** – Visualize the steps

Once a solution is decided upon, it is now the time to visualize steps to implement the solution. Any particular solution can be broken down into smaller, attainable steps.

For example:

Let's say Diane's goal is to improve her pain. She chose the solution of starting an exercise program. She needs to identify the smaller, attainable steps to begin her program. These small steps can include determining what type of exercise, determining a time to exercise, and setting a gradual exercise progression (e.g., start walking 5 minutes a day.) Small, attainable steps lead to greater success!

What steps can you visualize that might be best for:

- Sidney, who decided the option to switch careers and get a job in security had the most pros and fewest cons.

- Doris, who decided the option of getting a home care attendant for her mom was the best way to go.

- Michael, who decided the option of couples counseling made the most sense.

Planful Problem-Solving Steps: **E** – Evaluate success

You have now reached the final step! You have already gone through the first 4 steps:

S – *State the problem and set up goals.*

The first step is to try and define the actual problem. You need to figure out what you really want out of a situation to avoid solving the “wrong” problem. Once the problem is defined, goals can be identified. A goal is a desired result that directly follows the problem definition.

O – *Options.*

Brainstorm all possible options and solutions. It is critical to think of many options or activities that will help you accomplish your goals.

L – *List the pros and cons of each solution, and pick the best one.*

Then the solutions are evaluated by looking at the Pros and Cons. You do this by looking at feasibility and consequences of each possible solution. Once all solutions have been evaluated, one is selected to try first.

V – *Visualize the steps you need to take.*

You want to develop a step-by-step outline for what you need to do to carry out your solution. Take the time to plan out exactly what you need to do to make your solution a reality.

Now, you need to:

E – *Evaluate* success. You want to see how it went; to determine if the option you tried was successful. You can measure success by asking questions like these:

- Did the solution achieve the goal?
- Did the consequences of the solution turn out as you expected?
- Did the benefits of the solution turn out as you expected?
- Are you satisfied with the results?

Remember, the answers to these questions won’t always be “Yes,” but you will always get valuable feedback!

Paying Attention to Your Problem Orientation

It can be frustrating and disappointing when your attempt to solve the problem doesn't work. It is easy to feel hopeless when you run into obstacle after obstacle, and it can be hard to maintain a positive problem orientation.

But you need to remind yourself:

- Problems are a normal part of life and the first attempt we make at solving them doesn't usually work.
- Almost all problems have solutions - but it may take a few tries to find the best one.
- When a solution doesn't work out, it gives you a lot of information that will be very helpful in picking a better solution for your next try.
- Again, this is normal. No one gets the best solution the first time all the time.

When you remember these things, you can nudge your problem orientation in a more positive direction!

Evaluate Success and Make the Next Move

When you get to the "Evaluate" step and ask yourself, "*Was the option we chose successful?*" sometimes you will be able to answer "yes" and you are done!

But if you are not satisfied with the result, you need to pick a new option. Or implement it differently. Or maybe even redefine the problem in a new way. Here are some helpful questions to consider:

- ✓ Does it make sense to try out a different possible option from the list you already have?
- ✓ Or do you need to generate new options for the possible solution list?
- ✓ Or would it be better to revise the problem definition and goal and then generate a whole new list of possible solutions based on the new goal?
- ✓ What new information do you have about the problem now that you didn't have before?
- ✓ Did you make any assumptions that we now know are incorrect?

For example:

William struggles with chronic pain and has been feeling lonely lately. He thought it would be good to reach out to some old friends who he had deployed with to Iraq. His **initial problem definition** was that he wanted to get back in touch **but** figured no one was interested because no one had reached out to him lately. He realized how negative that sounded, so he went for a walk to relax and asked himself whether there was another way to look at the problem. He then was able to **revise the problem definition** to say that he wanted to be back in touch **but** felt overwhelmed by how he would do that. He set up a **goal** of taking at least the first step to getting back in touch with friends. He generated a list of **options** that included reaching out through social networking, calling back a friend who had sent him a Christmas card a couple of years ago, and flying to Florida to join a Desert Shield/Storm cruise. In **listing pros and cons**, William identified that he didn't like social networking and didn't feel up to traveling to Florida for a cruise. He decided to call the friend who sent the card. He **visualized** the steps of finding the card to locate the contact number, and picking a time to call. After leaving a message, his friend never called him back.

William **evaluated** his problem-solving and felt disappointed by the result. He reminded himself that it is normal to run into obstacles and that there are other options that might work. He decided to reach out to his friend through social media. He was able to reach his buddy, who gave William his new phone number. William learned that they both had been struggling with similar physical and mental health problems. He noticed that he felt less isolated when he realized he wasn't alone.

In-Meeting Exercise A:



Let's use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" on the following page to analyze a problem from real life. Think of an example when:

- You identified all the steps necessary to try out the possible option, but when you tried it, it did not work.
- And the experience helped you make a better choice with the second (or third, or fourth...) try at solving the problem.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

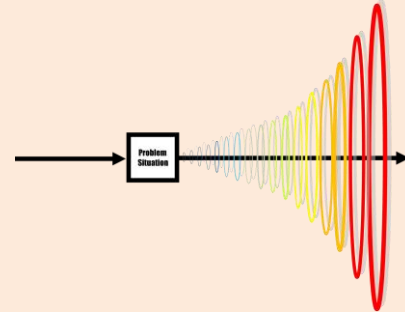
- What were your attitudes, beliefs and expectations?
- How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
- What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  ?

Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:



-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

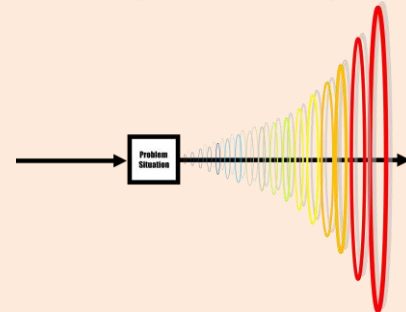
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Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:

3. List Pros & Cons:

	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:

-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 8 Summary:

- Once you choose a solution, it's helpful if you **visualize** how it could be broken down into small, attainable steps to help ensure success.
- Once you try out the chosen solution, you'll want to **evaluate** its success. If you reached your goal, that's great! If not, it is important to go back and pick a different possible solution to try out, or possibly revise your problem definition.

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete all parts:
 - **S**: "State the Problem & Goal"
 - **O**: "Options"
 - **L**: "List Pros & Cons and Pick Best One"
 - **V**: "Visualize the steps"
 - **E**: "Evaluate success"
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 9

Practicing Problem-Solving Skills

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we completed the final steps of the **S O L V E** model. When we are able to keep a positive problem orientation **AND** follow the logical **S O L V E** steps, problem solving is most successful.

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be to practice using PST skills.

More About Problem Orientation

What helps you change a negative problem orientation to a positive one? What helps you keep a positive problem orientation positive?

Review of Problem-Solving Process

- ✓ First, describe **what happened**. Where is the **goal conflict** (internal, external, plan was blocked)?
- ✓ Next, check your **problem orientation**. How positive or negative was your PO? What **red flags** (**personal style pitfalls**, **problematic contexts**, and **early warning signs**) did you notice, and what **strategies** did you use to shift your problem orientation if needed?
- ✓ Then, follow the steps to **SOLVE** the problem:
 - **S**tate the problem and Goal
 - **O**ptions to consider
 - **L**ist pros & cons
 - **V**isualize the steps
 - **E**valuate success – need to redo or revise?



In-Meeting Exercise A:

Let's use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" on the following page to analyze a problem from real life.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

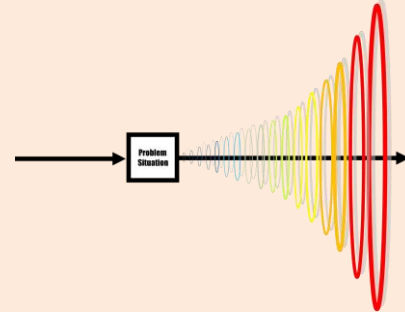
- What were your attitudes, beliefs and expectations?
- How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
- What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  ?

Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:



-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


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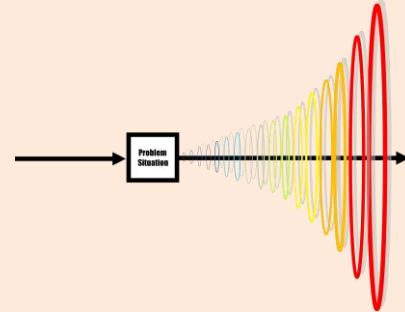
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Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:

-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities

Activities that may be worth adding to your day

PRACTICE A COPING STRATEGY

- Meditating
- Yoga
- Eating a good, healthy meal
- Exercising
- Taking a walk or going hiking
- Connecting with a friend
- Stretching exercises
- Learn about tai chi – (YouTube)
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Challenge negative thoughts daily
- Massage
- Use stationery bike
- Spend time socializing with Veterans
- Take warm bath before bed
- Practice 2 new relaxation techniques
- Aromatherapy
- Listen to music
- Use a problem-solving worksheet
- Use guided meditation
- Go to a Veteran's group
- Mindfully eat a healthy snack
- Complete a sudoku or photo puzzle
- Look at a happy memory photo
- Call someone I haven't spoken to in a while
- Paint a peaceful scene
-
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ADD A POSITIVE ACTIVITY

- Playing a musical instrument
- Playing with children or grandchildren
- Working on machines (cars, bikes, etc.)
- Riding a bike or motorcycle
- Going out for coffee
- Taking a picture
- Eating out
- Doing a favor for someone
- Bird watching
- Watching a sunrise or sunset
- Going to a religious service/ceremony
- Spending time with friends
- Listening to the sounds of nature
- Volunteering
- Golfing
- Going to the beach
- Doing art work
- Studying religious or spiritual readings
- Painting, woodworking, or other craft
- Going to a sports event
- Listening to music
- Boating/fishing
- Giving a compliment
- Camping
- Solving a problem, crossword, etc.
- Going on a picnic
- Walking a dog
- Going to a party
- Cooking or baking
- Taking a trip
- Visiting others
- Bowling
- Gardening or yard work
- Going on a date
- Sitting in the sun
-
-

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 9 Summary:

- It takes practice and repetition to learn new skills and to build hope.
- Each time you practice the problem-solving process at home – no matter the obstacles you face – you are strengthening your skills.

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete all parts:
 - **S**: "State the Problem & Goal"
 - **O**: "Options"
 - **L**: "List Pros & Cons and Pick Best One"
 - **V**: "Visualize the steps"
 - **E**: "Evaluate success"
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 10

Practicing Problem-Solving Skills

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we practiced using the PST model using real life problems.

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be to practice using PST skills.

More About Problem Orientation

On a scale of **1** to **10**, with **10** being the most, how much control do you have over your problem orientation?

Review of Problem-Solving Process

- ✓ First, describe **what happened**. Where is the **goal conflict** (internal, external, plan was blocked)?
- ✓ Next, check your **problem orientation**. How positive or negative was your PO? What **red flags** (**personal style pitfalls, problematic contexts, and early warning signs**) did you notice, and what **strategies** did you use to shift your problem orientation if needed?
- ✓ Then, follow the steps to **SOLVE** the problem:
 - **S**tate the problem and Goal
 - **O**ptions to consider
 - **L**ist pros & cons
 - **V**isualize the steps
 - **E**valuate success – need to redo or revise?



In-Meeting Exercise A:

Let's use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" on the following page to analyze a problem from real life.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

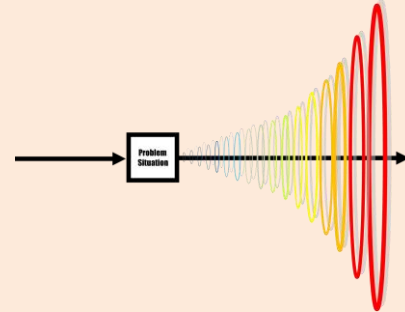
- What were your attitudes, beliefs and expectations?
- How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
- What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  ?

Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:



-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


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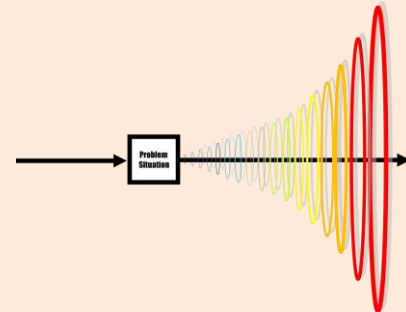
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Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:

3. List Pros & Cons:

	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:

-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 10 Summary:

- It takes practice and repetition to learn new skills and to build hope.
- Each time you practice the problem-solving process at home – no matter the obstacles you face – you are strengthening your skills

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete all parts:
 - **S**: "State the Problem & Goal"
 - **O**: "Options"
 - **L**: "List Pros & Cons and Pick Best One"
 - **V**: "Visualize the steps"
 - **E**: "Evaluate success"
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 11

Practicing Problem-Solving Skills

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we practiced using the PST model using real life problems.

Today's Focus

The focus of today's meeting will be to practice using PST skills.

More About Problem Orientation

As you continue to work towards achieving your goals, you are likely to run into obstacles. How can you move towards a more positive, hopeful problem orientation, even when things aren't working out the way you had planned?

Review of Problem-Solving Process

- ✓ First, describe **what happened**. Where is the **goal conflict** (internal, external, plan was blocked)?
- ✓ Next, check your **problem orientation**. How positive or negative was your PO? What **red flags** (**personal style pitfalls**, **problematic contexts**, and **early warning signs**) did you notice, and what **strategies** did you use to shift your problem orientation if needed?
- ✓ Then, follow the steps to **SOLVE** the problem:
 - **S**tate the problem and Goal
 - **O**ptions to consider
 - **L**ist pros & cons
 - **V**isualize the steps
 - **E**valuate success – need to redo or revise?



In-Meeting Exercise A:

Let's use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" on the following page to analyze a problem from real life.

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

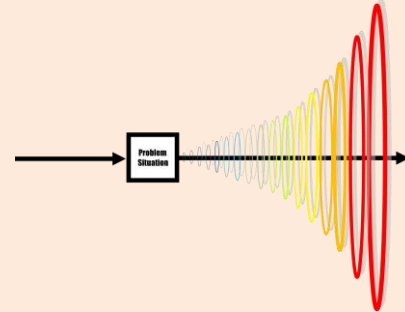
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- How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
- What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  ?

Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:



-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked


HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

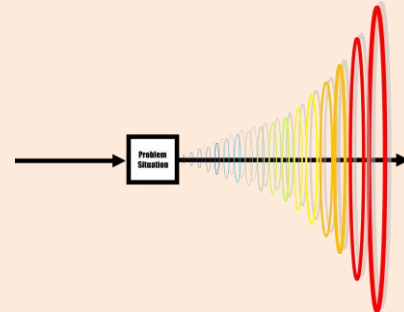
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Personal Style Pitfalls?

Problematic Contexts?

Early Warning Signs?

- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:	3. List Pros & Cons:	
	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:

-
-
-

5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

Home Assignment: Weekly Activity Tracker

Activity	When did you do the activity?	Achieved (If yes, ✓)	If not achieved, what got in the way?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Meeting 11 Summary:

- It takes practice and repetition to learn new skills and to build hope.
- Each time you practice the problem-solving process at home – no matter the obstacles you face – you are strengthening your skills.

Home Assignment:

- Fill out Problem-solving worksheet(s) based on a problem you actually encountered. Complete all parts:
 - **S**: "State the Problem & Goal"
 - **O**: "Options"
 - **L**: "List Pros & Cons and Pick Best One"
 - **V**: "Visualize the steps"
 - **E**: "Evaluate success"
- Choose activities from the list of Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities; keep track of them on the Weekly Activity Tracker.

Plan for Next Week:

- Next meeting to take place on (date & time): _____

PST Hope: Session 12

Strengthening & Reinforcing

Check-in

Reviewing Home Practice

- Problem-solving Worksheet
- Weekly Coping Strategies & Positive Activities
- Have you added anything to your Hope Box (Handout 1 in Appendix)?

Review of Last Week

Last week we practiced using the PST model using real life problems.

Today's Focus

- The focus of today's meeting will be to review the work we have done these past 12 meetings. We also want to look forward and plan for your continued use of the skills we have discussed.
- Review the Coping Plan

More About Problem Orientation

If you were trying to help a friend be a better problem-solver, what would you say about *problem orientation*?

Review of Problem-Solving Process

- ✓ First, describe **what happened**. Where is the **goal conflict** (internal, external, plan was blocked)?
- ✓ Next, check your problem orientation. How positive or negative was your PO? What **red flags** (**personal style pitfalls, problematic contexts, and early warning signs**) did you notice, and what **strategies** did you use to shift your problem orientation positive if needed?
- ✓ Then, follow the steps to **SOLVE** the problem:
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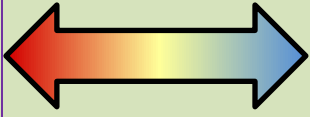
Reviewing your Progress

Let's review the progress that you have made so far and identify what's been helpful. Let's also consider any potential barriers to maintaining your progress and use your problem-solving skills to address them.

Problem Orientation Review

When you first started PST, we asked you to observe your problem orientation and identify the ways your symptoms could influence it.

In Session 2, you rated a number of problem-orientation statements. Now that you have an increasingly full problem orientation toolbelt, please rate the statements again on the next page.

Rate your Problem Orientation		Disagree	Agree
<i>Please circle the number that represents how much you agree with the statements below.</i>			
		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
1	I view problems as challenges or opportunities for positive change.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
2	When faced with a problem, I remind myself of past successes in dealing with similar problems.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
3	I am willing to commit myself to solving problems when they occur.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
4	I have confidence in my ability to solve most problems.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
5	I believe if I put in the necessary time and effort, I can make some improvement to the problem situation.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
6	The first thing I usually do when I have to deal with a problem is take a deep breath to relax.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
7	I believe most problems have a solution, (although it may not always be easy to find!)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
8	I make sure to use encouraging self-talk when working on a difficult problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
9	Problems are a normal part of life; so when I have a problem it is just a sign that I am human – <i>not</i> that I messed up.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
10	My instinct is not to avoid problems or make impulsive decisions about them, but to use a methodical approach.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
TOTAL SCORE			

Recognizing Red Flags

The Personal Style Pitfalls, Problematic Contexts, and Warning Signs that particularly threaten my problem orientation are:

Problem Orientation Strategies

When I find my problem orientation shifting negative (by recognizing my red flags), I find it most helpful to use strategies like these:

Problem-solving Style Review

You have also learned a lot about your own problem-solving style, and have been working hard to consistently use a planful style, which means breaking down the steps of the problem, organizing the information, making decisions after careful consideration of potential solutions, and being focused on the long-term.

In meeting 5, you identified your most frequent style as (circle):

Avoidant Impulsive Planful

Now, with the new or rediscovered tools in your toolbelt, what would you identify as your most frequent style?

Avoidant Impulsive Planful

What are some pitfalls to look out for?



Coping Plan

When we started, you developed some tools to have handy in the event of particularly stressful situations in order to avoid crisis situations. You developed a coping plan as a roadmap in the event that the pressures of life started to overwhelm your coping resources. The coping plan is meant to both help stop a crisis from happening, as well as help you regain your footing if a crisis does happen. Like a roadmap or a to-do list, a coping plan works best when it's reviewed and updated regularly. Let's take a look at your plan to see if you'd like to make any changes or updates.

Similarly, your **hope toolbox** is most effective when you use it regularly. We encourage you to revisit this tool often, whether yours is virtual or a physical box. Like your toolbelt, there's no limit on what to include!

Referrals

It is not uncommon that after completing PST, some Veterans find that they would like to continue working with a therapist to continue practicing their skills and building their Hope Toolbox.

Continued work with a professional can be like calling on a trusted handyman or a contractor to give you that extra support and help you generate new ideas. There are many excellent resources for continued therapy. Please discuss with your therapist if you would like help identifying therapy resources.

Meeting 12 Summary:

- Reviewed problem orientation and the planful style
- Reviewed your progress since beginning PST
- Updated your coping plan. Remember to do this regularly!
- Discussed need for referrals
- Congratulations on your PST graduation!



PST Hope

Appendix

Handout 1: Hope Toolbox

Handout 2: Problem Orientation Toolbox (x2)

Handout 3: Pain Management Strategies

Handout 4: Problem Orientation Management graphic

Handout 5: My Roadmap

Handout 6: Problem-solving Worksheets (x8)

References



Handout 1: HOPE TOOLBOX

Strategies for Hope

Get the app "Virtual Hope Box"
from National Center for Telehealth & Technology

Things to REMIND ME of the good things in my life and reasons to live. Place objects in the Hope Box. For example:

- Pictures of family, friends, pets, loved ones
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Things to DISTRACT ME from negative thoughts when they come up. Write activities on paper and place inside. For example:

- Take a walk; change the environment
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Things to INSPIRE ME to see life from a different perspective. Write reminders on paper and place inside. For example:

- Affirmations
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Things to RELAX ME when I am stressed or burdened. Write on a piece of paper the names of relaxing activities that I can do and place inside:

For example:

- Deep breathing exercise
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Things to HELP ME COPE when I have a problem. Place paper copies of coping strategies inside. For example:

- Crisis Number card, magnet, bracelet
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- Replace negative self-talk with positive
 - Do I need to use *Acceptance* or *Change*?
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Handout 2 (filled-out example): PROBLEM ORIENTATION TOOLBOX

COGNITIVE / SELF-TALK STRATEGIES

- “It may take me longer, but I can still do it”
- “Let it go, this will pass”
- “Is there another way to look at this situation? What am I missing?”
- “What would *Bobby* do?”
- “I’ve solved issues like this before”
- “When I am **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely or **T**ired – **HALT!**”
- “My perceptions may be distorted – Look for the evidence”
- “Take it step by step; I can do this”
- “Problems are part of life for everyone.”
- “Am I using all-or-nothing thinking?”
- “Is this a situation requiring *acceptance* or *change*?”
-

BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES / THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Leave the scene, walk away
- Count to 10
- Distract myself (e.g., watch a movie, listen to music, call a friend, play with the dog)
- Use a worksheet
- Prayer
- Journal
- Go outdoors, be in nature
- Go to a Veterans’ group (e.g., VFW, VA, etc.)
- Exercise or stretch
- Go for a bike ride
- Call a support person
- Do something self-loving (e.g., eat a healthy meal, say something kind to myself)
- Help someone else who is need
-
-

SELF-SOOTHING / BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery: Beach, Forest, Country road
- Engage senses (e.g., aromatherapy, splash face with cold water, take warm bath)
- Massage neck and shoulders
- Meditation
- Make a cup of aromatic tea, or have a special comforting food
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Handout 2: PROBLEM ORIENTATION TOOLBOX

COGNITIVE / SELF-TALK STRATEGIES

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BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES / THINGS YOU CAN DO

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SELF-SOOTHING / BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

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Handout 3: PAIN MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

PAIN MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO ADD TO YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION TOOLBOX

There are many techniques that can help manage your pain and keep you feeling in control. The key is finding the strategies that work best for you, and identifying as many as possible. Small improvements in pain can add up, and the benefits of each strategy can build on each other.

1. Differentiate between ACCEPTANCE & CHANGE:

Which aspects of your pain do you need to **accept**, and which aspects can you **change**? Maybe you have accepted that you have pain, but are working towards changing your beliefs about pain. Maybe new beliefs include “I can live a good life even with my pain,” or “I may not be able to rid myself of the pain, but using relaxation techniques can reduce it.”

2. Plan Ahead:

When a pain flare occurs, it is often difficult to think clearly, focus, concentrate, or problem-solve. Often, a person may go into survival mode just by trying to endure the increased pain level. It is better to plan ahead before you are having a pain flare up, so that you can prepare for flares. You can develop a personalized list of strategies that you can use at any time to manage pain.

3. Be a Detective:

Try to understand what can create a flare-up, e.g., bending or lifting something, not getting enough sleep, experiencing an emotionally stressful conversation, or another event. Knowing what triggers flare-ups can allow you to approach those situations in a different way in the future. Sometimes, if a person tries to get too much done on a “good” day, it might lead to several “bad” days. A pain diary can be helpful in tracking connections between increased pain and whatever may have triggered it.

4. Distraction:

Look for ways to divert attention to other things in order to minimize over-focusing on the pain, especially when pain is high. Ask, “What are the things that help to distract me?” Everyone is different. Distractions could include music, movies, conversation, games, etc.

5. Soothing the Pain:

This can include applying heat or cold, taking a warm bath or shower, resting, taking a nap, self-massage, applying an ointment, etc.

6. Activity Level:

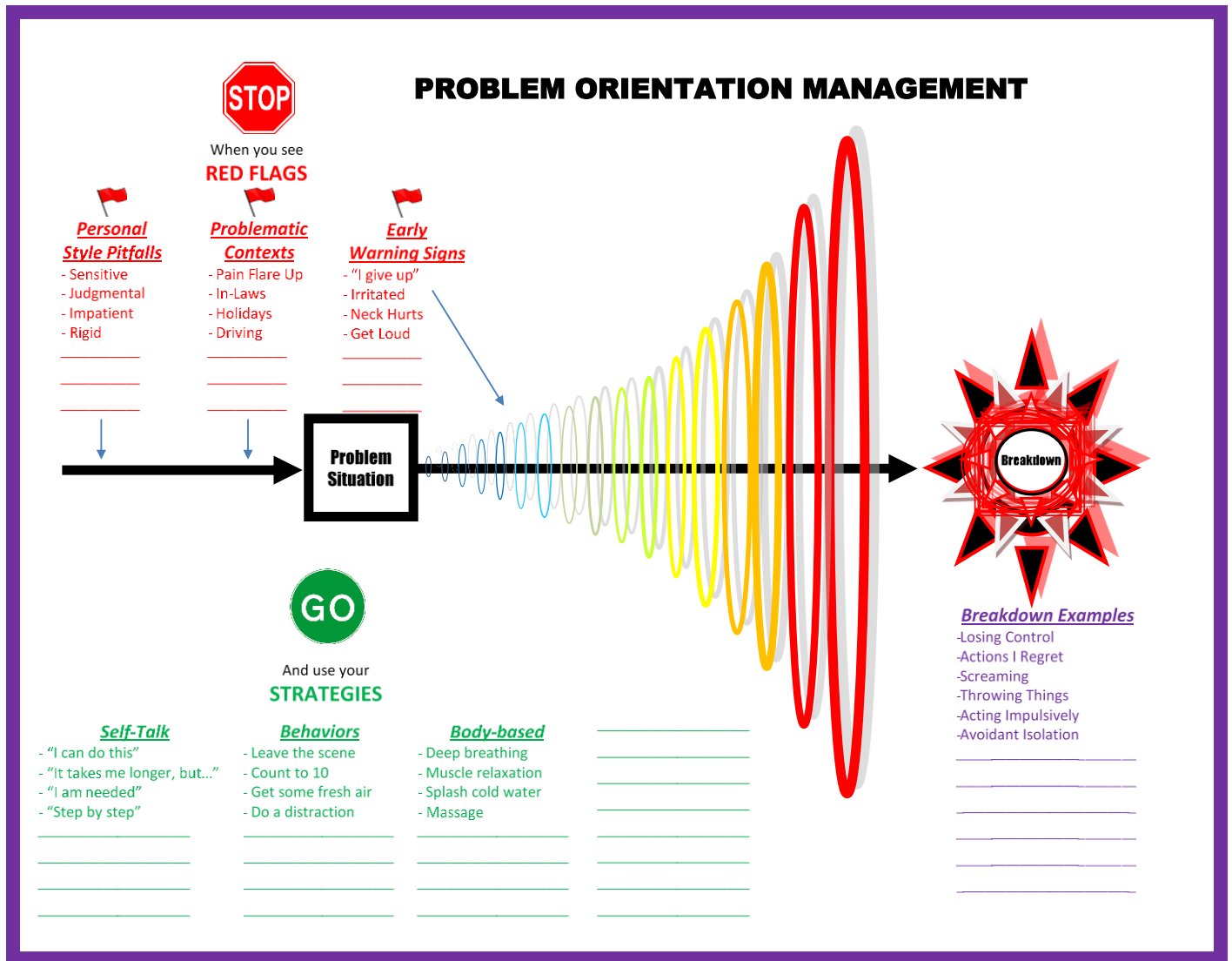
Gradual increases in physical activity can be helpful for pain. It is important not to give up on physical activity completely during a pain flare. It may be necessary to cut back on normal activity, but it should not be cut out completely. Activities that are particularly helpful for pain include yoga, tai chi, and low-impact aerobic exercise (such as swimming and walking).

7. Work with Your Health Care Providers:

There are many effective treatments for chronic pain. These include acupuncture, biofeedback, meditation, massage, and CBT for chronic pain. Developing a plan to incorporate these alternative treatments into your regular health care routine can help reduce your pain. Talk with your primary care provider about getting a referral!

8. What have you found helpful?: _____

Handout 4: PROBLEM ORIENTATION MANGEMENT GRAPHIC



Handout 5: MY ROADMAP

MY RED FLAGS

 MY PERSONAL STYLE PITFALLS

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 MY PROBLEMATIC CONTEXTS


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-

 MY WARNING SIGNS

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-
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MY PROBLEM ORIENTATION STRATEGIES

 MY COGNITIVE / SELF-TALK STRATEGIES

-
-
-

 MY BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES / THINGS I CAN DO

-
-
-

 MY SELF-SOOTHING / BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

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MY PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLE

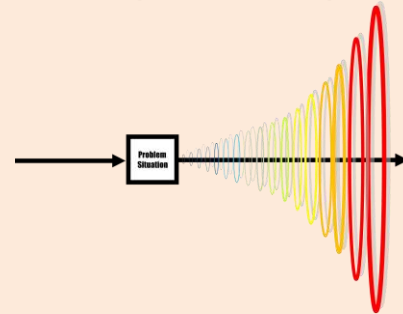
- WHICH IS MY "GO TO" STYLE?
 - Avoidant
 - Impulsive
 - Planful
- IN WHAT TYPES OF SITUATIONS DO I USE A PLANFUL STYLE MOST CONSISTENTLY?
 -
 -
 -
- HOW CAN I USE THE PLANFUL STYLE MORE REGULARLY?
 -
 -
 -
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 -

Handout 6: PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

WHAT HAPPENED? Describe the problem situation. Was it: a) conflict between your goal and someone else's; b) conflict between 2 of your own goals; or c) situation where your plan was blocked

HOW POSITIVE or NEGATIVE WAS YOUR PROBLEM ORIENTATION?

- What were your attitudes, beliefs and expectations?
 - How much of your reaction was driven by emotion? Were your emotions regulated or unregulated?
 - What  **Red Flags** did you notice in order to  ?
- Personal Style Pitfalls?
 Problematic Contexts?
 Early Warning Signs?
- What **Strategies** did you use to  regain control?



STEPS to SOLVE the PROBLEM

1. State the Problem & Goal:

Initial: " _____ but _____ "

Revised: " _____ but _____ "

Goal(s): _____

2. Options:

3. List Pros & Cons:

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	Pros (+)	Cons (-)

Best Option: _____

4. Visualize the steps:




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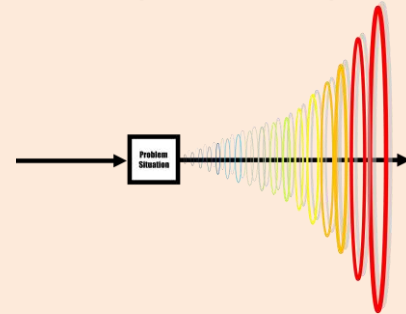
5. Evaluate success – Need to redo or revise?

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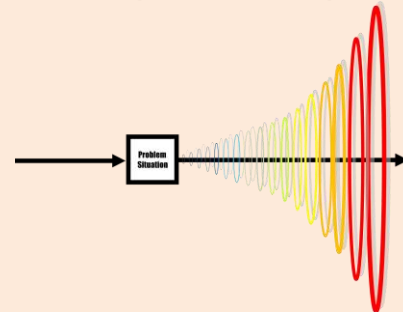
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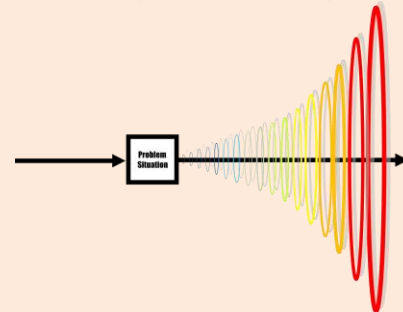
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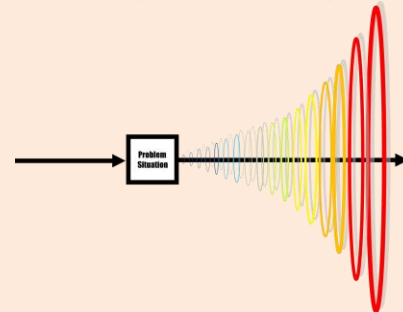
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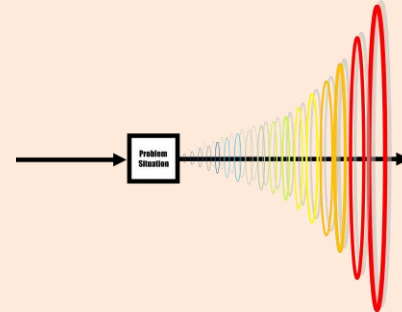
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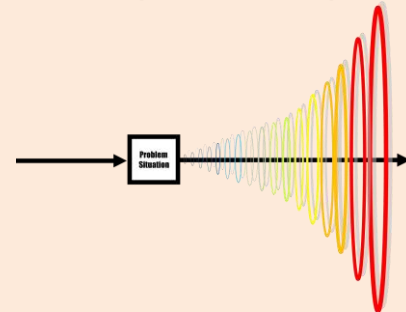
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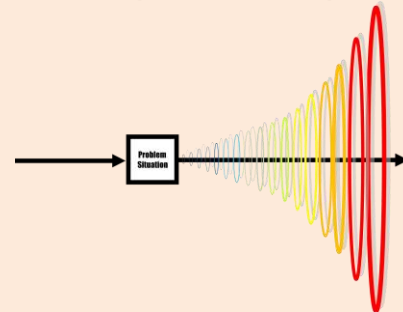
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