

# SESSION 8

## Problem-Solving Practice: I Can Do It!

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*  
—Aristotle

### RATIONALE

As McGinnis and Goldstein (1997) observe, “Transfer of training has been shown to be enhanced by implementing procedures which maximize overlearning or response availability. . . . That is, the more we have practiced responses (especially correct ones), the easier it will be to use them in other contexts or at later times” (p. 208). Through repetition of the process of finding and implementing solutions to a variety of problems, participants increase their coping repertoires. This session can be repeated numerous times, in a group setting or individually. Repetition is the best form of emphasis.

### MATERIALS

Flip chart or whiteboard  
Full Problem-Solving Sequence Worksheet  
Flip chart sheets from Sessions 6 and 7

### SESSION PLAN

#### Introduction and Review

1. Review the group rules and lead an icebreaker.
2. Post the flip chart sheets from Sessions 6 and 7. Review what happened when group members tried their chosen alternatives. If they did not get the results they were looking for, what other alternative did they/might they try?
3. Have participants go over their Problem-Solving Worksheets. Using their own personal scenarios, have them describe their problem and identify their Problem Signs. Then proceed with Stop and Think, Thinking Errors, Problem Identification, the information they gathered, the alternative solutions they came up with, and their potential consequences and/or outcomes, and review what happened

when they tried their chosen alternative. If they did not get the results they were looking for, what other alternative did they/might they try?

4. Referring to the Problem-Solving poster or worksheet, review the steps learned to date, using an example relevant to participants and model each step using self-talk.
5. Regardless of our teaching, there are times youth will fail to solve their problems. They may not have properly identified the problem, gathered enough information, or brainstormed a sufficient number of solutions. There are also times when a problem has no solution. What do they do then? To illustrate this to the group, take a new monetary note (e.g., a five-dollar bill). Hold it up vertically from one end. Offer to give the money to anyone who can catch it. Ask a volunteer to stretch index finger and thumb wide apart, both digits halfway up either side of the bill. The volunteer tries to catch it with his or her two fingers after it is released by the holder.

*This activity is frustrating because it looks simple yet is next to impossible. It illustrates that certain things are beyond a normal person's capabilities, no matter how easy the task may seem. So what does one do? Give up? Yes and no: Yes, because the effort does not match the potential reward. No, because you need to find another way to resolve the problem. Or you may choose to simply move on.*

## **Role-Playing**

1. Model a problem situation (with your co-facilitator, if necessary). Use a situation relevant to the group or, if need be, one of the following examples. Ask and answer the following questions:
  - What is the problem?
  - What are the Problem Signs?
  - When should I take a deep breath and Stop and Think?
  - What are the Thinking Error(s)?
  - What is my goal?
  - What are the obstacle(s)?
  - What change do I need to make?
  - What information can I gather from myself? From others?
  - What alternatives can I brainstorm to solve this problem?
  - Which alternatives will work? Which will not?
  - After you have tried it, how well did the alternative work?

### **Situation 1**

You are traveling by bus to visit a friend you met at camp. He (or she) lives in the heart of a large city. You are following the directions carefully and successfully transfer on to your last bus. This last ride should take 20 minutes. It's 9:00 p.m., and it's getting dark. You are traveling alone with your knapsack and wearing your new designer jacket. Fifteen minutes later, the bus driver pulls the bus over and says, "End of the line. Everybody out!" You get off the bus and start checking out the

area and the bus driver pulls away. You should be at 124<sup>th</sup> Street and Brown Avenue. You look up at the street signs, and you are on the corner of Lincoln and Center Street. Uh-oh! You pull your cell phone out of your backpack to call your friend and remember that it's dead. You say to yourself, "Oh, no! I was going to charge it, but I forgot. Now what do I do? I don't know where I am, and I'll probably get mugged." Just then you hear behind you "Oooh, look at that brand new jacket. I'd love one of those!" You see three figures walking toward you.

### Situation 2

As far back as you can remember, you have known that you were adopted. Your parents have always treated you the exact same way they treat your older brother and sister, their biological children. They are good parents but more strict than those of your friends. You are getting pretty fed up with their rules: not being allowed out during the week and always being the one with the earliest curfew on weekends. You and your parents are arguing a lot these days, and your brother and sister are taking their side. It's really not great living at home. You are nearly 16 years old and want to meet your birth parents. They may be in a better situation now and might even consider having you live with them. Your parents wouldn't really miss you, anyways.

### Situation 3

You are with a few friends at the park one Saturday night, with nothing much to do. It is getting cold, so you invite everyone back to your house. There isn't anything interesting on television, so you all decide to go onto your chat line on the computer. One of the people online used to be your friend, but you got into a big argument a week ago. Rumors were going around that you and she had alcohol at the school dance. The chaperones couldn't prove it, but the dance ended early because of it. You suspected this person was pretending to be drunk just to show off. Now lots of the students blame you for spoiling their night. One of your friends says, "Why don't we teach this girl a lesson? She pretended to be drunk, so why don't we all make her life miserable by spreading rumors on the Internet that she likes to get drunk and sleep around?" You do not think that this is a good idea and do not want any part of it.

2. Using examples from their Problem-Solving Worksheets, have participants role-play the full problem-solving sequence from start to finish, including assessment of how well the alternative worked:

*Problem Signs + Stop and Think + Problem Identification + Thinking Errors + Gathering Information (Own and Others' Perspective) + Brainstorming Alternatives + Evaluating Consequences and Outcomes*

3. Conduct performance feedback in the prescribed order: coactor, observers, facilitator(s), and main actor.

## Session Review and Practice

1. Briefly review the main points of the session and answer any questions.

2. Hand out copies of the Full Problem-Solving Sequence Worksheet and encourage participants to continue using it to help them organize their thinking anytime they have a problem.

## Full Problem-Solving Sequence Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Describe a problem you have or have had lately.*

**What is the problem?** \_\_\_\_\_

What are your **Problem Signs**?

Physical: \_\_\_\_\_

Emotional: \_\_\_\_\_

When should you take a deep breath and **Stop and Think**? \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the **Thinking Error(s)**:

Self-Centered

Assuming the Worst

Blaming Others

Minimizing

Expecting Hostility

### Problem Identification

What is my goal? \_\_\_\_\_

What is it I don't like? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the obstacle(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

What change do I need to make? \_\_\_\_\_

### Gathering Information

What could/did I learn for myself? \_\_\_\_\_

What could/did I learn from others? \_\_\_\_\_

### Brainstorming Alternatives

Suggest at least three solutions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Evaluating Consequences and Outcomes

*Circle the alternative above that you think will work best.*

Why will it work? \_\_\_\_\_

Which alternatives will not work? Why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

After you try it, how well did the alternative work? (*Circle one.*)

Poorly

Not so well

OK

Good

Great