Problem Solving Therapy: Research Overview

Previous Research

- Depression
- Stress
- Mental Retardation
- Schizophrenia
- ASD
- Substance Abuse
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Pain

Depression, Problems, and Problem Solving Skills

- Thomas D’Zurilla, Arthur Nezu and colleagues.

- Weak problem solving skills make a person vulnerable to depression.
- Life problems can be precipitants of depression.
- Once depressed, problems become more difficult to solve.
- Problem solving training helps patients exert control over problems.
- Fewer problems, enhanced self-efficacy, and increased “hope” lead to improved mood.
- Once learned, problem solving skills can be used to prevent depression in the future.

Behavioral Activation Model

Jacobson et al., U.Wash

- Depression associated with few reinforcing events, and increased avoidance of and escape from aversive experiences.
- Inactivity, withdrawal and inertia.
- Routine disruptions, ever narrower repertoire of functional behaviors, and consequent secondary problems.
- Re-establish routines, increase reinforcing experiences, overcome avoidance patterns.

Goals of PST

- Increase patients’ understanding of the link between their current symptoms and their current problems in living.
- Increase patients’ ability to clearly define their problems and set concrete and realistic goals.
- Teach patients a specific, structured problem-solving procedure.
- Increase pleasant, social and physical activities
- Produce positive experiences of patients’ own ability to solve problems, thereby increasing their confidence and feelings of self-control
Types of PST

- Social Problem Solving Therapy (Zurilla and Nezu, 1987)
- Problem Solving Therapy for Primary Care (Gath et al., 1989)
- Problem Solving Therapy for Older Adults (Arean, Shermer, Perri & Nezu, 1993)
- Problem Solving Therapy for Cancer (Nezu & Nezu, 1997)
- Problem Solving Therapy for Executive Dysfunction (Alexopoulos, Raue & Arean, 2002)

Seven Steps of PST

1. Clarify and Define the Problem
2. Set Realistic Goal
3. Generate Multiple Solutions
4. Evaluate and Compare Solutions
5. Select a Feasible Solution
6. Implement the Solution
7. Evaluate the Outcome

PST vs. Reminiscence

  - 90 patients randomized to PST, Reminiscence Therapy (RT) and waiting list control (WL), followed for 6 months.
  - Results found that PST and RT were superior to WL.
  - PST had better treatment outcomes than RT acutely and 6 months post treatment

PST-PC

- 1995: Mynors-Wallis, Gath et al. test PST-PC for major depression versus amitriptyline and placebo.

  Results:
  - PST-PC equal to AMI for treating major depression.
  - GP's and Psychiatrist achieved comparable outcomes with PST-PC.
  - Lower drop out / greater satisfaction with PST-PC
**PST-PC**

- 2000: Mynors-Wallis et al. test PST-PC against SRI and SRI + PST-PC.

  - **Results:**
    - All groups improved equally over 12-weeks and maintained at 52-weeks FU.
    - PST + SRI was no more effective than either treatment alone.
    - No difference in outcome between GPs or nurses.

**Impact project**

- Collaborative care model versus Usual Care.
- 21 sites throughout US.
- Enrolled 1801 primary care patients 60+.
- MDD or Dysthymia.
- Followed for 2 years.
- Offered meds and PST-PC

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**PST in Project IMPACT**

![Mean SCL-20 Depression Severity](image)

- **BL** 3 Mos * 6 Mos *
- * = p < .0001

**ED Measures**

- Stroop Response Inhibition Task, raw scores for color-word < 26
- Mattis DRS Initiation/Perseveration, raw scores < 34

**Outcome Measures**

- Depressive symptoms (HDRS)
- Disability (WHODAS II)
- Problem-solving skills (SPSI)
Depressive Symptoms (HDRS)

- Mixed-effects models:
  - Time, p<0.0001
  - Tx, p=0.07
  - Time x Tx, p=0.12, ES=0.35
  - Post, PST > ST, p<0.01
  - 75% PST vs. 22% ST remitted, p<0.01

Disability (WHODAS-II)

- Mixed-effects models:
  - Time, p<0.01
  - Tx, p<0.0001
  - Time x Tx, p<0.05, ES=0.58
  - Post, PST > ST, p<0.001

Project Renewal

- Ciechanowski et al, 2004
- 138 Minor / Dysthymia
- PST-PC guided care management, with explicit physical and social activation
- Home Based Care
- Usual Care Control
- PEARLS Superior to Usual Care
- PEARLS 43% vs 15% with ≥50% Sx reduction
- PEARLS 36% vs 12% complete remission
- PEARLS improved function and emotional well-being

Problem Solving Therapy for Older Adults... The process

- The best way to escape a problem is to solve it. - Saporta

Problem Solving Theory

- Depression is multi-causal
- Most commonly, repeated exposures to fail attempts to solve problems leads to learned helplessness
Give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.

- Coping skill is critical to the development and maintenance of depression
- Primary success of PST is patient learning new skills to approach problems

Seven steps of PST
- Problem Identification and definition
- Goal setting
- Brain storming
- Pros and cons
- Solution selection
- Solution Implementation
- Solution evaluation

Therapeutic Process
- Patient must have some understanding of the rationale
- Education about the process is crucial

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. Abraham Maslow

Frame
- Twelve 30-50 minute sessions with occasional intersession work
- Brief depression screen before each meeting
- Problem focused
- Between session problem solving

Process
- Explain PST in first session, using worksheet.
- Subsequent sessions to go over problems and reinforce problem solving method

Aims
- To teach PST skills
- Review and use of between sessions work critical to success
- Mapping changes in mood to skill acquisition
Session 1

- Patient education and socialization
- Create a problem list
- Understand social resources
- Introduce PST process
- Solve one problem

Problem list

If you're not having a problem, you're missing a chance to grow. - Unknown

- Domains
  - Financial
  - Housing
  - Medical
  - Social
  - Family
- Organize in a hierarchy
- Start with easiest problem

Psycho-education

Anatole France

- Depression is treatable
- Depression is understandable
- Symptoms of depression
- Need to treat depression

How to solve problems

Psycho-education

Nine tenths of education is encouragement. - Anatole France

How to solve problems

How to solve problems

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of progress</td>
<td>1. Problems</td>
<td>2. Goals</td>
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<td>6. Steps</td>
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Pleasant Activities

Day 1:
Day 2:
Day 3:
Day 4:
Day 5:
Day 6:
Day 7:

Next Appointment:
Problem Orientation

Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. --Hamlet

- Cognitive component
- Emotions as red-flags
- Challenging distortions

Problem Definition

A problem well-stated is a problem half solved. --Kettering

- Concrete and specific terms
- Assumptions versus facts
- Details
- Breaking down problems

Goal Setting

The first task in solving a problem is to define the problem correctly. --Kettering

- Specific
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Measurable

Brainstorming

Don't put all your eggs in one basket --anon.

- All ideas that come to mind
- Withhold judgment
- Be detailed
- Generate five to ten solutions

Decision Making

Again and again, the impossible problem is solved when we see that the problem is only a tough decision waiting to be made. --Robert H. Schuller

- Weighing the pros and cons
- Does it meet immediate goal?
- Does it meet long term goal?
- Does it create other problems?
- Is it feasible?

Selecting the Solution

You are the sum total of all of your choices up to now. --Dr. Wayne Dyer

- One with the most pros and least cons
- Most feasible
- Least amount of effort
Solution implementation

Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

-- Will Rogers

Steps to implementation

• Specify when will do (earlier the better)
• Delegate
• When to check in
• Do you need other people to help?

Solution evaluation

When you lose, do not lose the lesson.

– Dali Lama

• Did it work?
  • If so, why?
  • Would you do anything differently?
  • Will you use this solution again?
• If not why?
  • What did you learn?
  • Does the problem need to be redefined?

Rewards and activities

One joy scatters a hundred griefs...

– Chinese proverb

• Make sure includes pleasant activities
• Include a reward for hard work
• Reinforce patient efforts at change.

Name: ____________________________

Review of progress:

1. Problem: Feeling disconnected; not getting the news

To get the Sunday paper delivered to my door

2. Goal(s):

5. Choice: ( ) Ask nephew and Lincoln

6. Steps:

a) Talk to nephew tomorrow
b) Get money ready for paper
c) Ready my chair
d) +

4. pros ( )

Feeling disconnected; not getting the news

To get the Sunday paper delivered to my door

Next Appointment: _______
Questions?