



Basic Counseling Skills VI – Problem Solving in Counseling Sessions

The steps in the counseling process have been identified as:

1. Building a relationship
2. Understanding the problem
3. Looking at options
4. Setting goals
5. Developing a plan of action
6. Monitoring and evaluating

Previous lessons have focused on:

Step 1 - Building a relationship with the child:

- I - Active Listening
- II – Listening for Feelings
- III – Open and Closed Questions,
- IV - Building a Counseling Relationship

Step 2 – Understanding the Problem

This lesson will outline the remaining steps

Step 3 – Looking at Options

- By this time you and the child should have a thorough understanding of the issue.
- It may be easier to tackle one part of the problem at a time. Prioritize what needs to be dealt with first. What is having the greatest impact, or what would be a good first step to feel a success?
- The child must be empowered to solve their own problems and not told what to do. Teach these problem solving skills to help the child feel more in control of the situation and to help them solve their future issues on their own.

Brainstorm possible solutions – don't rule out anything at this time.

- Ideally, how would the child like the problem to be resolved? What would he/she be willing to settle for?
- What would happen if the child just ignored the problem? (This is a possible solution, though probably not the best.) What are the “costs” of not changing?
- Are there any ways to turn a negative into a positive?
- What has the child done in the past when faced with similar problems? How have other people handled these issues?

Help the child assess their strengths and resources. What strengths do they have that would help them resolve the issue? Who or what can they call upon to assist?

Each possible solution will have advantages and disadvantages. Consider:

- Is the option realistic?
- What are the short term and long-term consequences?
- What is the potential impact on others?
- What is most important to the child (his/her values)?

Remove solutions where negatives outweigh the positives.

Help the child complete the worksheet included with this lesson to assist with the problem solving process.

Step 4 – Setting Goals

- Transform problem statements into goal statements. Choose an option from the problem solving worksheet and decide on simple goals that may be successfully achieved. Keep goals positive (“I will” rather than “I won't”)
- The child needs to “drive the bus” (determine where they want to go) when setting goals. This builds a sense of ownership and motivation, which are very important in the change process.

What small steps can the child take toward the solution? Small steps can lead to big results. What can the child do today that will make a difference tomorrow? It will help the child feel more positive, confident, and in control. Smaller goals may lead, over time, to reaching larger goals.

“The journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step” ~Confucius

Help the child set a SMART goal for their first step:

S – Specific – state exactly what you are aiming at; clearly define what you are going to do.

M – Measurable – you need to be able to measure progress. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. If you can't measure it, how do you know if you've achieved it?

A – Action Oriented - It is not enough to just set a goal; you must take actions to achieve it. Most people do not achieve their goals mainly because they do not take any action after setting the goal. So in order to achieve goals we need to draw out a plan step by step as to how we are going to achieve it.

R- Realistic - Realistic means "do-able." The goal you set should be practical and something you can reach. Set realistic goals and build on existing and potential skills.

T- Timely - Set a timeframe for the goal for next week, the next month, in three months, etc. Putting an end point on your goal gives you a clear target to work towards. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. It tends not to happen because you feel you can start at any time. Without a time limit, there's no urgency to start taking action now. Give yourself enough time to achieve your goal but not so much time that you lose sight of your goal.

Step 5 – Developing a Plan of Action

You and the child need to develop a plan of action based on the option they select to help them reach their goal. Include:

- What will they do?
- How can they incorporate the skills they have learned?
- When will they begin?
- How often?
- How will they know when results have been achieved?
- And any other details needed to create SMART goals

Assign a homework task for them to get started. This helps the child to feel they are making progress toward their goal and gives them HOPE.

Practice/role play the new behavior with the child to build their confidence.

Begin each future session by discussing homework from the previous session. You and the child can learn much from their homework. Discuss what worked and what didn't work and make any necessary changes.

Step 6 – Monitoring and Evaluating

As the child carries out the plan of action, discuss how effective the plan is. What successes have they seen? What challenges have they faced? Do they need to practice the new behavior with you more?

- If necessary, rethink the options and decide on a new plan of action until progress is seen.
- Move on to the next step when the child is ready. Remember, small steps lead to big results.

PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

Problem:

Possible Solutions	Pros*	Cons*

***Consider:**

Is it realistic and do-able?

What are the short-term and long-term consequences?

What is the potential impact on others?

How does it fit into your goals and values?

Solution Chosen:
