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# PROBLEM SOLVING TREATMENT

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## Viewers will:

1. Learn the research findings about the behavioral health conditions for which PST is and is not effective
2. Understand the role of the clinician in providing PST
3. Be able to explain the 7 steps of problem solving

- » Problem-solving therapy is an evidence based cognitive–behavioral intervention geared to improve an individual's ability to cope with stressful life experiences
- » Effective in a variety of counseling settings and primary care
- » PST teaches and empowers people to solve the here-and-now problems contributing to their depression and helps increase self-efficacy
- » Skill building interventions include
  - Psychoeducation
  - Interactive problem-solving exercises
  - Motivational homework assignments

- »» Most research has focused on depression
  - In randomized control trials (RCTs), when delivered by appropriately trained PCPs to patients experiencing major depression, PST has been shown to be more effective than placebo and equally as effective as antidepressant medication
  - A meta-analysis of 22 studies reported that for depression, PST was as effective as medication and other psychosocial therapies, and more effective than no treatment
- »» For anxiety, benefit from PST is less well established
- »» PST is not indicated as a primary treatment for: substance abuse/dependence, acute primary post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, new onset bipolar disorder, new onset psychosis

- Mynors-Wallis LM, Gath DH, Lloyd-Thomas AR, Tomlinson D. Randomized control trial comparing problem solving treatment with Amitriptyline and placebo for major depression in primary care. *BMJ* 1995;310:441–5. [Search PubMed](#)
- Mynors-Wallis LM, Gath DH, Day A, Baker F. Randomized controlled trial of problem solving treatment, antidepressant medication, and combined treatment for major depression in primary care. *BMJ* 2000;320:26–30. [Search PubMed](#)
- Bell A, D'Zurilla. Problem-solving therapy for depression: a meta-analysis. *Clin Psychol Rev* 2009;29:348–53. [Search PubMed](#)
- Mynors-Wallis L. Problem solving treatment for anxiety and depression. Oxford: OUP, 2005. [Search PubMed](#)

A problem is any situation in which an immediate and easily recognizable solution is not apparent

Unresolved problems create a feeling of overwhelm that is usually met with avoidance and feelings of powerlessness

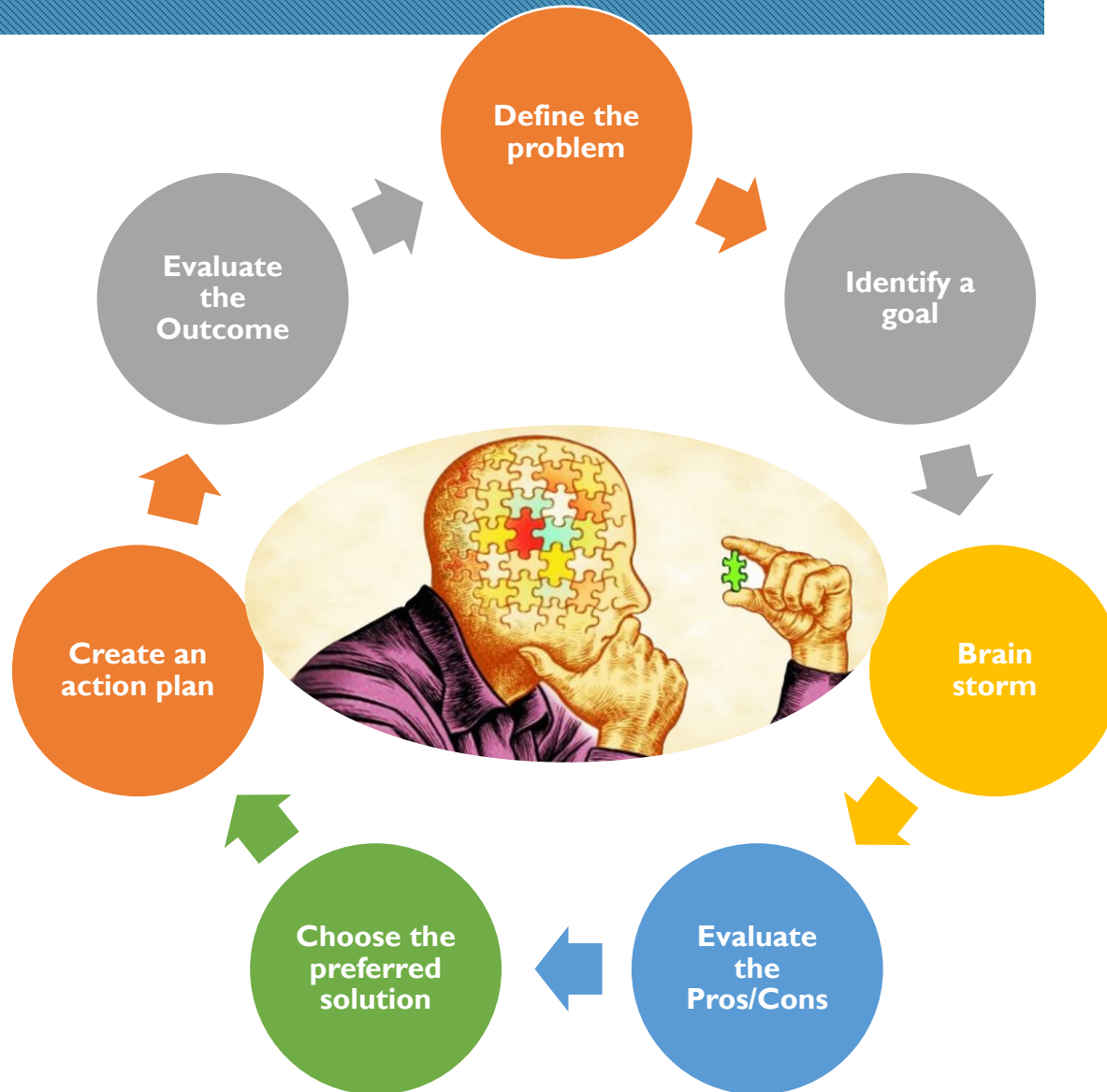
Weak problem-solving skills make a person vulnerable to depression

Once depressed, problems become more difficult to solve

- You are in the role of *teacher* when doing PST
- **The goal of PST** is to teach the individual problem-solving skills so that they can use them in the future to avoid depression
- *Once learned, problem solving skills can help prevent relapse*



# THE 7 STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING



# STEP 1 PSYCHOEDUCATION: INTRODUCE PST, AND DEFINE THE PROBLEM



Problems are a normal, predictable part of living

Having problems is not “unfair” and should not be unexpected

Problems are a challenge to be addressed, not avoided

Negative mood is a sign that a problem exists and a cue to action

Stop and think –  
Look for problem areas and start problem solving



# WORKSHEET FOR STEPS 2-4



HEALTH MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES



## PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

**Name:**

**Date:**

1. **Problem:**
2. **Goal:**
3. **Brainstorm potential options/solutions**
4. **Pros versus Cons (e.g., explore effort, time, emotional impact, involving others, etc.)**

| Potential Options/Solutions | Pros<br>What makes this a good choice? | Cons |
|-----------------------------|--|------|
|                             |  |      |
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<https://www.integratedcaredc.com/resource/problem-solving-worksheet/>

# WORKSHEET FOR STEPS 5-7



## HEALTH MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES



5. Option/Solution:

6. Develop an action plan that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely (SMART)

|   |
|---|
| Specific: Clearly what you want to accomplish. What is the desired result?  |
| Measurable: Does the action step include a number, target or milestone that shows your progress?                            |
| Attainable: Is it a reachable goal or action step? Do you list the resources and time available to you to complete?         |
| Realistic: Does it make sense and is it consistent with your health goals, personal health status, your beliefs and values? |
| Timely: Does your action plan/goal have a beginning and an end?   |

7. Evaluate the Outcome

a. Review the progress made

b. How satisfied are you with your effort 0 – 10 (0 = Not at all; 10 = Super)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

c. Rate your mood on a scale of 0 – 10

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

<https://www.integratedcarecdc.com/resource/problem-solving-worksheet/>

- » Problem-solving therapy is an evidence based cognitive–behavioral intervention geared to improve an individual's ability to cope with stressful life experiences
- » Effective in a variety of counseling settings and primary care
- » Intervention uses psychoeducation about problem solving and skill building in the steps to effectively solve problems
- » Demonstrated effective in treatment of depression