Problem Solving Handout

Barriers to Problem Solving

- Defensiveness, or being closed to new ideas
- Having a fear of being wrong
- Unable to be creative in thinking of alternative solutions
- Feeling "stuck", or "shutting down" from too much anxiety
- Blaming others for causing the problem (and not wanting to solve it yourself)
- Feeling very tired, mentally or physically
- Feeling very angry (your energy and attention are not on solving the problem)
- A "Yes, but …" attitude, or not listening to reason

Common Problems in Recovery

- Being too confident
- Weak commitment – doesn't follow through
- Burnout – very tired, stressed out, or frustrated
- Lack of trust, or not accepting help
- Relapse – getting worse after starting to get better
- Guilt
- Perfectionism –thinking that anything less than perfect is not good enough
- Impatience, or boredom
- "Let's celebrate"
- Rationalization, or denial of the problem

Some Reasons for Problems in Recovery

- Addictive behavior
- Lacking hope in the future
- Believing in failure rather than success
- Lacking understanding
- Feeling responsible for everything that happens
- Carrying burden for others
- Lacking self-worth, having insecurity
- Irrational thinking that leads to self-defeating behaviors
- Distorted thinking, denial, or saying "it isn't that bad"

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Challenges During Recovery

- Recovery involves building new:
  - Attitudes
  - Skills and ways of coping
  - Supports and relationships
  - Habits
- Recovery can be complex because of social factors, the neighborhood, culture, and the society you live in

Drake, R. E., Wallach, M. A. & McGovern, M. P. (2005). Future directions in preventing relapse to substance abuse among clients with severe mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Services. 56*, 1297-1301.

Use optional **Problem Solving Checklist** to mark personal barriers, and discuss:

- *What makes it hard for you to solve problems or make decisions?*
- *How does substance abuse or psychiatric illness affect your ability to learn and use problem solving skills?*
- *How optimistic and motivated are you about solving your problems?*
- *Share a problem that you have been able to solve*
- *How did you solve that problem? What did you learn from that situation?*

What You Can Do

- Talk about your problem
- Get support from other people, education, or support groups
- Find and use the community resources you need
- Use crisis intervention programs in your community
- Become more hopeful and positive
- Become more assertive
- Practice using a problem solving guide
- Recognize problems you have solved in the past, and strengths you have
- Get professional help

Solving Problems in Recovery

- Because problems are common in everyone's life, many other people have problems very much like you do

Problem Solving Handout

- Some problems are predictable and can be prevented – but some happen without warning
- Problem solving in recovery is something you can learn and practice as a skill
- Get the help and information you need, but stay involved
- Decisions needs to be right for you, so **you** have to be a big part of the problem solving process
- Try using problem-solving guides:

Solving Health Problems - Use the Ask Me 3^{TM} questions:

1. **What is my main problem?**

2. **What do I need to do?**

3. **Why is it important for me to do this?**

- If you still don't understand, you might say "This is new to me. Please explain it to me again."
- If there are medical words you don't understand, have them written down, and say, "What does it mean in plain language?" You have the right to understand your health problems.

    Partnership for Clear Health Communication. (n. d.). Ask Me 3^{TM}: Good questions for your health. Retrieved from http://www.npsf.org/askme3/pdfs/AskMe_brochure_2-pg.pdf

COPE Method of Problem Solving
- **C**reativity (brainstorming of ideas)
- **O**ptimism (feeling hopeful that you can solve the problem)
- **P**lanning (creating a plan to attack the problem and prevent it from happening again)
- **E**xpert information (gathering information from professionals, and educating yourself about the problem)

Bucher, J. A., Loscalzo, M. L., Zabora, J., Houts, P. S., Hooker, C., & BrintzenbofeSzoc, K. (2001). Problem-solving cancer care education for patients and caregivers. *Cancer Practice. 9(2),* 66-70.

Evidence-Based Problem Solving
- Using the best available evidence to evaluate options while making decisions

Problem Solving Handout

- It is important for making informed decisions
- Using sound, scientific evidence from research helps shape health care, policies, and decisions
- The evidence should be valid and strong
- High quality, "rigorous" research is meant to improve health and health care
- Evidence for Decision Making
- You will also find poor quality, weak research studies
    - Some "facts" may be written by people who are not experts (but they may think they are)
    - Many web sites share information without even writing down where it came from – It may not be based on evidence at all, but rather on someone's opinion, or unscientific research
        - Use websites recommended by your health care team when searching for information on the Internet. The Community Resources Handout can help you.

Optional Learning Activities: Watch video **Life Problem Solving** (2:11 minutes) at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX6_Ji2OYSY

Write down some problems that you have, and decide which one you want to solve. You may ask your family or someone on your health care team to help you use the steps of the problem solving process.

Productive Problem Solving
- **Prepare for Problem Solving:**
- Develop a sense of optimism and positive thinking
- Be motivated to use the problem-solving process with a positive attitude
    - If you don't try, or if you have a negative attitude, *you will not be able to solve the problem*
    - If you are part of the problem, and you want to solve it, *you have to be part of the solution*
    - Identify negative and positive things about the problem

Problem Solving Handout

- **Define the Problem:**
- Whose problem is it? Does the problem belong to you, or someone else?
- Who else is affected by this problem? How big is it?
- How would it impact you, your family, job, marriage, school, or community life if the problem is not solved?
    - Separate the facts from things you are assuming – you might not be seeing things as they truly are
    - Simplify the problem if you can, and have someone help you set a specific goal that is possible for you to reach

- **Find Alternatives by Brainstorming**
- Spend time thinking of possible solutions (This can be done with a group of trusted friends)
- Write them all on a list, even if you aren't sure they will work
- Ask people on your health care team for possible solutions
- Get a lot of ideas - They can be combined or changed later
- Don't judge the ideas or criticize them when brainstorming – No idea is too "wild" to write down

- **Decision Making:**
- Consider each of the possible solutions on your list and rank them in order from the best to worst chance of success
- "Stop and Think" by looking at their possible outcomes, cost, and benefits :
    - Would it be reasonable for you to do that?
    - Would it achieve your goal?
    - Would it "fit" with the problem and the barriers you have?
    - Is it something you would be likely to do?

- **Verify and Evaluate**
- Take action to solve the problem
- Review it later to see if the solution worked or not
    - Was the outcome what you wanted?
    - What made the chosen solution work (or not)?

- - How would you handle a future problem like it?
- Evaluate yourself as the problem solver:
  - Are you avoiding the problem or putting things off?
  - Is there anything blocking your creative thinking?

Modified from: Tezel, A. & Gozum, S. (2006). Comparison of effects of nursing care to problem solving training on levels of depressive symptoms in post partum women. *Patient Education and Counseling. 63 (1-2)*, 64-73.

Optional Discussion:

How can spirituality help with problem solving?

- *Some people are able to "let go and let God (or the higher power in their life)" carry the load of their emotional stress and strain*
- *Faith can be something to "hang on to" during rough times when nothing else seems to be solid*
- *Sometimes, prayer, patience, or "sleeping on it" can help you pause long enough to make a clearer decision*
- *Does spirituality help you?*

Conclusion

- Problems will naturally be part of your life
- It is best to handle them as calmly as possible, so you can think more clearly and creatively
- Improving problem solving skills can improve your health, relationships, mood, and sense of self-control
- Feeling more positive and hopeful about problem solving helps you feel less anxious and depressed
- Along with your other ways of coping, problem solving skills are valuable tools during your recovery journey

References

Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. M. (2007). Problem solving in recovery. Tools for coping with life's stressors: Problem solving in recovery. Retrieved December 13, 2008 from http://www.coping.org/selfesteem/lifestyle/problem.htm