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# Problem Solving Techniques in CBT

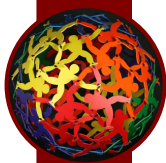
Master Practitioner Diploma in CBT  
Module 5

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“I don’t know what to do”      OR  
 “I don’t know how to do it”      OR  
 “What I do doesn’t work”      OR  
 “I don’t know where to start “ OR  
 “Will it make things worse”      OR  
 “How do I know if it’ll work ?” OR  
 “It can’t be solved”              OR  
 “What if its solved and I don’t like the result”

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D'Zurilla, T., & Goldfried, M. R., (1971).

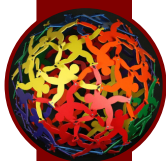
### **Problem Solving And Behavior Modification.**

Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 78, 107-126



## **Evidence Base**

- Anxiety-related problems (Nezu et al., 2004)
- Depression (Nezu, Nezu, & Perri, 1989)
- Closed head injury (Foxx, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 1989);
- Obesity (Perri et al., 2001)
- Schizophrenia (Favrod, et al, 2000)
- Psychological responses to cancer (Nezu, Nezu, Houts, Friedman, & Faddis, 1999)



## D’Zurilla & Goldfried’s Five Step Process

### 1. General orientation or set

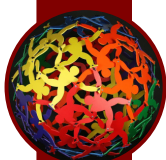
- Normalise problems / “everybody has them”
- What is a problem
- Stop & think about the problem vs impulsive reactivity
- Recognising optimal and sub-optimal responses and self-efficacy
- Threat vs challenge appraisals

### 2. Problem Definition

- Break down the problem and make it clear and succinct
- Rule out the irrelevant

### 3. Generation of Alternatives

- “Brainstorming” (Osborn 1948)



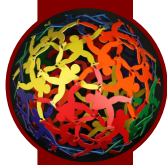
## D’Zurilla & Goldfried’s Five Step Process

### 4. Decision Making

- Choose the best option

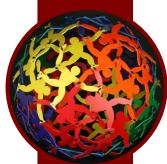
### 5. Verification

- Determine whether it is the “best” option
- Determine whether it solves the problem
- Test it out



## Exercise 1

Take a problem and run through the problem with your partner using D’Zurilla and Goldfried’s model and the protocol provided



## Osborn’s (1948) Brainstorming

### 4 Rules

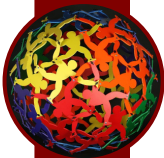
1. Focus on quantity
2. Defer criticism
3. Welcome unusual ideas
4. Combine and improve ideas ( $1+1=3$ )



## Osborn's (1948) Brainstorming

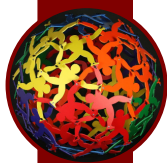
### Caveats

1. Quantity  $\neq$  Increased Quality  
NECESSARILY
2. Group brainstorming less effective than individual
3. NOT useful for decision making
4. Associations predictable - Palermo & Jenkins (1964)



## General orientation

1. **“Normalising” issues**
  - “Others don’t have problems”
  - “My problems are different from other peoples”
  - “My problems are not solvable”
  - “I don’t have problems”
  - “It’s up to others to change, not me “
  - “I can’t live with the uncertainty of not knowing if I’m making the right choice”



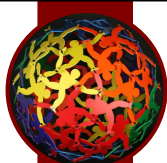
## Exercise 2

Identify possible strategies for exploring and addressing the different types of normalising issues that might arise with clients.

Red : Client problem uniqueness cognitions

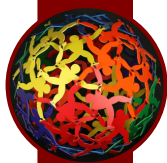
Blue : Client motivational issues

Purple : Uncertainty intolerance of decision making



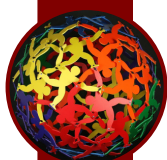
## Normalising Issues

- **Negative cognitions regarding the unique nature of client's problems**
  - Explore with Socratic Questioning
  - Explore supporting evidence and aim to create doubt (Pros /Cons or Continuum)
  - Set up a Behavioural Experiment to test out beliefs




## Normalising Issues

- **Client motivational issues**
  - Explore with Socratic Questioning
  - Explore attitude to current situation and benefits and negative consequences of change
  - Elicit motivational statements regarding change



## Normalising Issues

- **Uncertainty intolerance of decision making**
  - Explore with Socratic Questioning
  - Complete Risk & Uncertainty Record Form and Responses to Uncertainty Record Form




## Risk & Uncertainty Record Form


(adapted from Clark & Beck 2010)


Problem	Possible Problem Response	“What if” Questions	Level of Uncertainty 0-100	Responses to the Uncertainty
My partner isn't paying child maintenance	Acknowledge his difficulty, explain to him the importance of paying and how I will take legal action if necessary	He might do “a runner” and pay me nothing	25%	Ignore it/unimportant
		He might shout at me and make me feel very guilty	90%	Not confront him as I couldn't tolerate that
		He might challenge me to take him to court	60%	Not confront him as I'd feel a fool threatening but not doing it

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## Responses to Uncertainty Record Form

Current response to Uncertainty	NAT /Belief relating to response	Options for testing the evidence of response	New Level of Uncertainty 0-100
Not confront partner as I couldn't tolerate him making me feel guilty	I will feel guilty if he shouts at me (a)	Collect exceptions of (b)	50%
	I won't be able to tolerate feeling guilty if he shouts at me (b)	Learn and practice “self soothing” strategies for (b)  Test out (b) with a small example	

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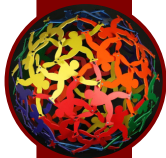






## Exercise 3

- Coach with your partner (using these forms) a response to a problem you believe is a “good” way forward but which “what if “ NATS have prevented you doing.
- Swop around



## General orientation

2. How do we know if we have a problem?
3. How to encourage “STOP & THINK”?



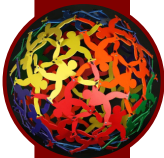
## Sometimes defining problems is not easy or straightforward!

Two wilderness hikers chanced upon a fierce grizzly bear.

One of them pulled his running shoes from his pack and rapidly laced them up.

His companion yelled in astonishment:  
“Are you crazy? You can’t outrun a bear.”

His reply as he took off down the trail:  
“I don’t have to outrun the bear. All I have to do is outrun you.”



## Defining Problems

- **Assumptions about what the problem is OR what the highest priority is**

“My problem is not my habit, it’s the fact I haven’t got enough money to feed my habit and that gets me in trouble”

- **Multiple / “interconnecting” problems**

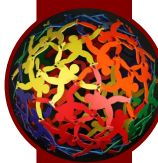
“I don’t know where to start because if I touch X, that will make Y worse and I can’t do it because of Z”

- **Poorly defined problems**

“ I just don’t feel right but I don’t know how”

- **All encompassing problems**

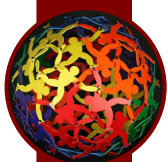
“I just feel paralysed by it. Its always been like this”



## Defining Complex Problems

- Kepner-Tregoe Problem Analysis
  - Aims:
  - To give the problem clear definition
  - To externalise the problem by “walking around it”
  - To give the problem context and comparison points

Kepner & Tregoe (1981)



## Kepner-Tregoe Problem Analysis

**What** is the problem?

- isn't the problem?

**Where** does the problem happen?

- doesn't the problem happen?

**What** makes the problem stand out?

- isn't distinctive about the problem?

**When** does the problem happen?

- doesn't the problem happen?

**Who/what** does the problem involve?

- doesn't the problem involve?

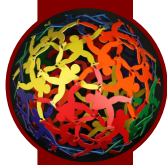
**What** changes as the problem happens?

- is the same when the problem happens?

**What** is the extent of the problem?

- is getting bigger/smaller/same?

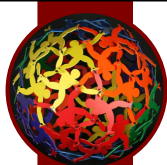
**What** is distinctive about the size of the problem ?



## Exercise 4

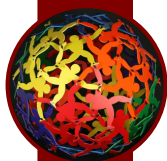
Take a problem and run through the problem with your partner using Kepner-Tregoe's problem analysis

Swop around



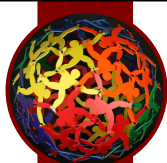
## Problems as metaphors

- Aims:
  - To free up thinking about the problem by giving it a radically different shape
  - To externalise the problem
  - To remove emotional tone from the problem or even to ridicule it



## View problems as metaphors

- **Garden model.** How is problem or solution like a garden? Vegetative, growing, expansive, fruitful, weedy, nurturant, insect infested, etc.
- **Machine model.** How is problem like a machine? Parts working together, parts worn or broken, energy input or driving force, work output?
- **Human body model.** How like a body? What makes it move? What is life energy? What are hands, feet, mouth, eyes, ears? Which bits are problematic
- **Vehicle model.** Ship, plane, boat, car, train, blimp, bike, skateboard. What powers it? Who are passengers? Where going? What are its wheels? What's not working in it?

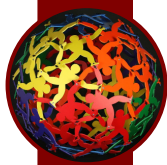


## Exercise 5

Take a problem and run through the problem with your partner using a metaphor based on an interest you have

Note: Your partner will have to adapt questions accordingly

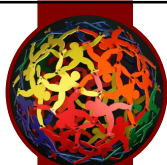
Swop around



## References

D'Zurilla T.J. & Goldfried M R. Problem solving and behavior modification J. Abnormal Psychol. 78:107-26, 1971.

Nezu,Nezu & Perri Problem-solving therapy for depression: Theory, research, and clinical guidelines. 1989



## What's next?

- Evidence Reading Module
- Case Formulations
- Other modules of Master Practitioner Diploma in CBT:
- [www.skillsdevelopment.co.uk/CBT](http://www.skillsdevelopment.co.uk/CBT)