Problem Solving Techniques in CBT

Master Practitioner Diploma in CBT
Module 5

“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 it’s solved and I don’t like the result?”

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)

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 ≠ 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)

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

### Responses to Uncertainty Record Form

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

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