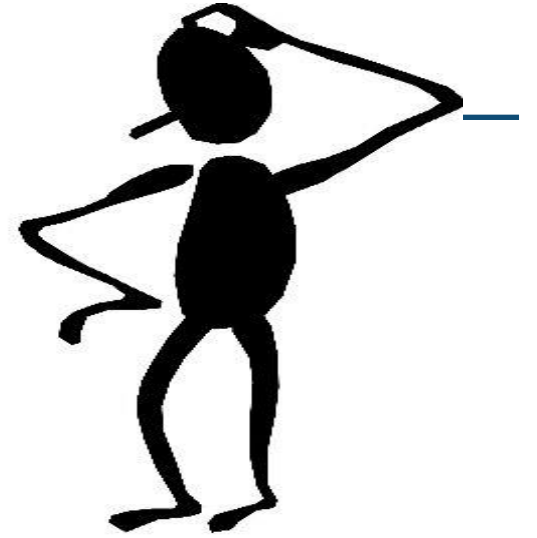




# Problem Solving Therapy

# What is PST?

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- PST is a brief, evidenced based, cognitive-behavioral intervention that aims to improve the ability to cope with stressful life experiences through adoption of an optimistic view of coping and increased understanding of the role of emotions.
- It focuses on the present, involves the patient being more active in their life choices, and strives for empower the patient.
- This approach is effective with most patients.

# Why PST in COCM?

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Collaborative Care is an evidenced based approach for treating depression and anxiety in the primary care setting

There is an increase in patients reporting symptoms of mental health issues currently, often in their PCP's office

Problem Solving therapy is an evidenced base practice that lends to being delivered in the primary care setting due to it being time efficient, structured, and patient centered

# Behavioral Interventions

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Includes a patient engagement component

Time efficient, running no more than 20-30 minutes a visit

Follows a structured, AND patient-centered approach

Are relevant and applicable to diverse patient populations

Have a substantial research evidence base



This is not  
traditional  
therapy

Effective  
in remote  
sessions

# Problem Solving Techniques

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**PST is:**

- an evidence based therapeutic approach, in which the care manager helps the patient to become empowered to learn to solve problems for themselves

**PST can:**

- provide training in adaptive problem-solving skills as a means of better resolving and/or coping with stressful problems

**PST aims:**

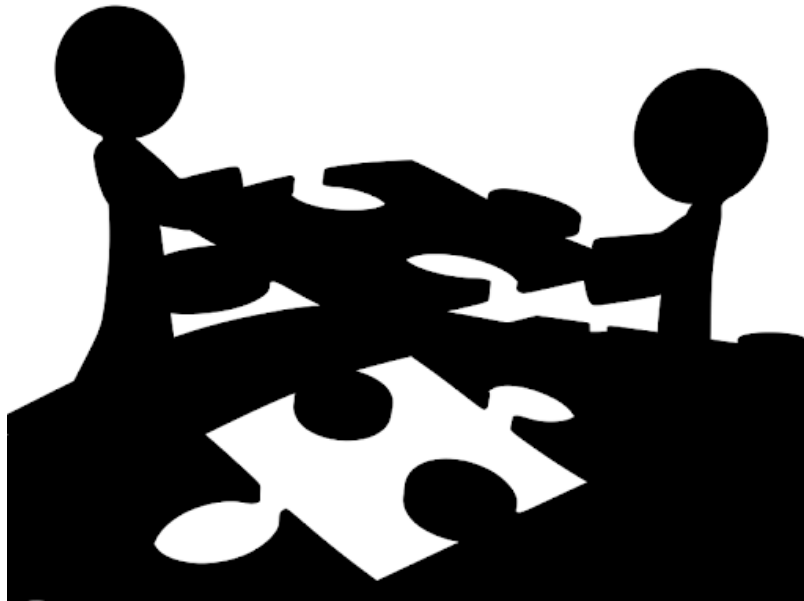
- to help individuals adopt a realistic view of coping, understand the role of emotions, learn to identify barriers, and creatively develop an action plan

# Problem solving really works!

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A 2018 meta-analysis found that PST is more effective than control groups and about equally as effective as other psychotherapies such as CBT and IPT.

(Cuijpers, et al., 2018)



The advantage  
of PST?  
IT CAN BE BRIEF

# How does it help?

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When we can't effectively solve stressful problems, this can lead to emotional or behavioral difficulties

Focused on a current situation; solve current issues and set future goals that will support well-being

Well-suited for primary care and can be done by phone

Helps patients gain a sense of mastery and learn skills that can be used again in the future

Can help prevent relapse

# Challenging events vs. daily stressors

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## Major challenging events

- Coping with a new diagnosis
- Job loss or a new job
- Figuring out housing
- A conflict with a friend
- Divorce or marriage
- Legal issue

## Recurrent daily stressors

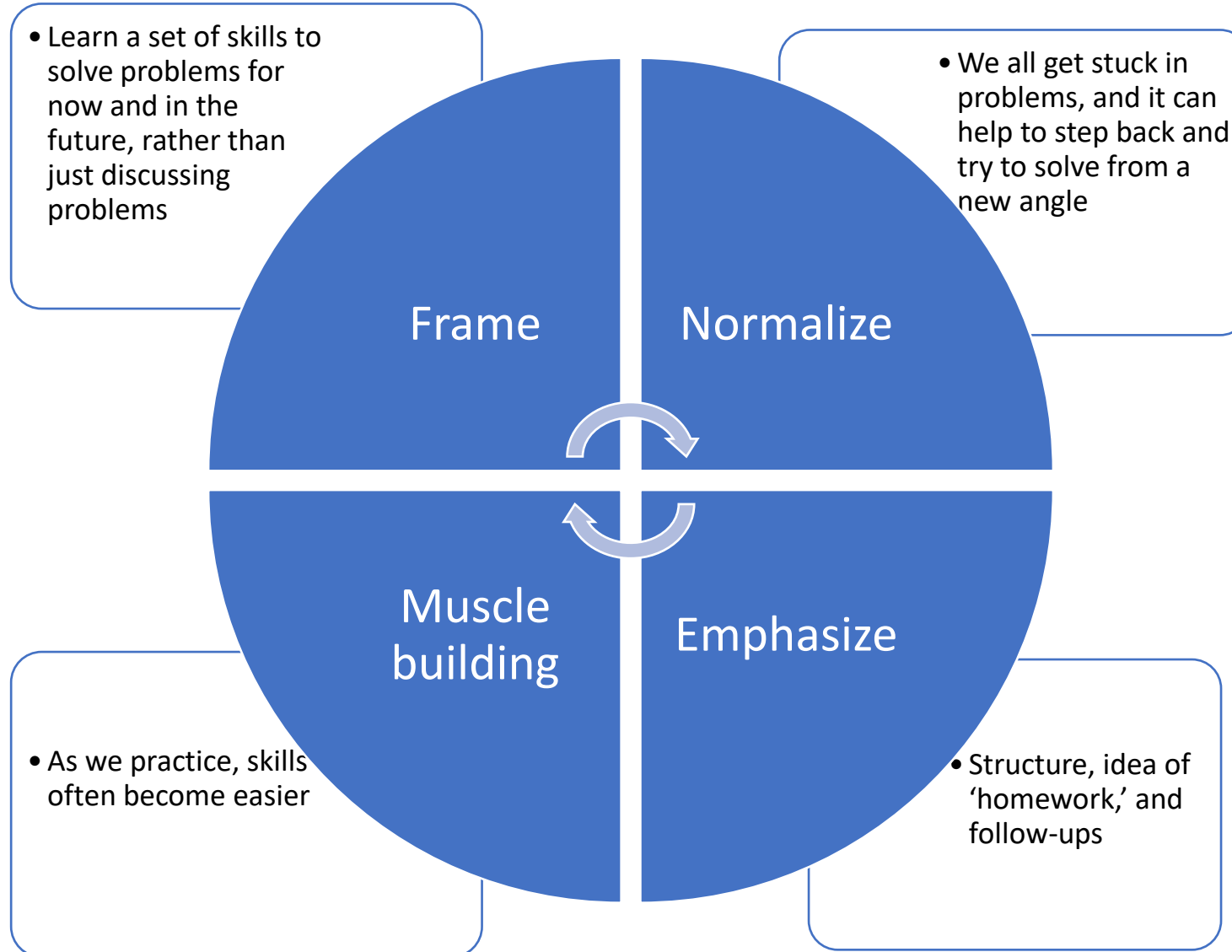
- Financial problems
- Managing a chronic illness
- Limited social support
- Ongoing arguments with a family member
- COVID





# Educating patients about PST

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**Care Manager Tip:**  
Ask permission and emphasize autonomy

# 7 Steps of Problem Solving

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Step 1: Identify, clarify, and define the problem

Step 2: Set a realistic, achievable goal within our control


Step 3: Brainstorm solutions

Step 4: Compare solutions by evaluating the pros and cons

Step 5: Choose the preferred solution

Step 6: Make an action plan to implement the solution

Step 7: Monitor and evaluate the outcome



~ 15  
minutes

# Process of PST

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Develop a problem list *or* tackle a clear, current problem

If possible, starting with a simple problem can build mastery

Narrow down to one succinct problem

- Objective, current, specific, and solvable

Break large problems into small steps

- “Unemployed”
  - No transportation to get to work
  - No computer to apply for jobs
  - No resume/cover letter

Help the patient to set aside emotions and see as a “problematic behavior,” not a “flawed person”

# Step 1: Clarify the problem

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## Unclear Problem

- “My life is terrible”
- “I can’t do anything right”
- “I am unhappy”

## Clear Problem

- “I don’t have a job”
- “I don’t know how to share my problems with my spouse”
- “I don’t have fun activities I participate in”



# Step 2: Set a realistic, achievable goal

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## SMART goals



# SMART goals: goal directly follows problem statement

Specific

- Focuses on what will get accomplished, within the patient's control

Measurable

- The patient should know exactly what needs to be done and when it has been achieved

Achievable

- The goal needs to be able to be accomplished in a reasonable time, with the resources/skills the patient has/can acquire

Relevant

- The goal needs to be important to the patient

Time Framed

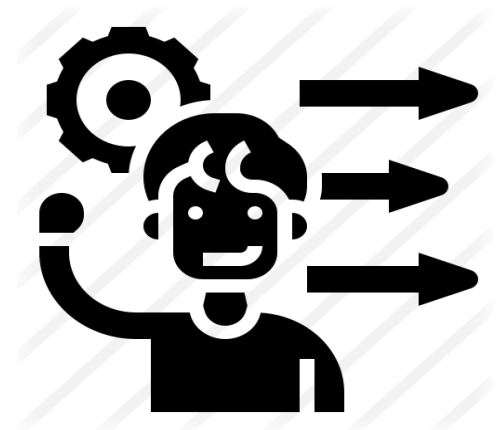
- The goal should have a date for accomplishment in order to prompt and motivate the patient

# Step 3: Brainstorm solutions

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- As many as possible – don't decide... **yet!**
- The more solutions, the greater chance of solving the problem
- Solutions **should** come from the patient – they're the expert
  - Can be difficult for patients with depression
- Prompts: *What might other people do?*
- Have fun with this – feel free to really think outside the box. No suggestion is a bad suggestion

**Remember: The first idea is not always the best idea**



# Step 4: Compare solutions by evaluating pros & cons

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- Don't rush, this is what develops critical thinking skills, such as weighing evidence and drawing appropriate conclusions
- Consider:
  - Advantages and disadvantages
  - Feasibility and obstacles
  - Benefits and challenges
  - Whether the solution meets long- and short-term goals
  - Pros and cons for both self and others



Pros and cons come from the patient, unless:

- Patient overlooks extreme negative consequences



# Step 5: Choose preferred solution

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- Thoroughly examine *all* solutions by evaluating pros and cons: Remember, not all are of equal weight
- Weak solutions: Weed out or discuss how to strengthen
- Select a solution:
  - Using decisional balance
  - That best satisfies the goal
  - That has the greatest likelihood of being successfully implemented and completed
- BHCM's can help patients thoroughly review pros and cons and can bring attention to clearly important issues that were missed

The easiest solution is  
not always the most  
useful

# Step 6: Make an action plan to implement the solution

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- Identify simple, relevant, achievable, specific tasks
- List out the steps for the action plan
- Consider obstacles
  - May require more simple sub-steps or revisiting solutions
- Inquire about commitment to completing homework
  - Importance and confidence ruler
    - “How confident are you on a scale of 1-10? Why a 4 and not a 7?”
    - “What would have to happen to increase your confidence?”



# Areas to Assess with Patient

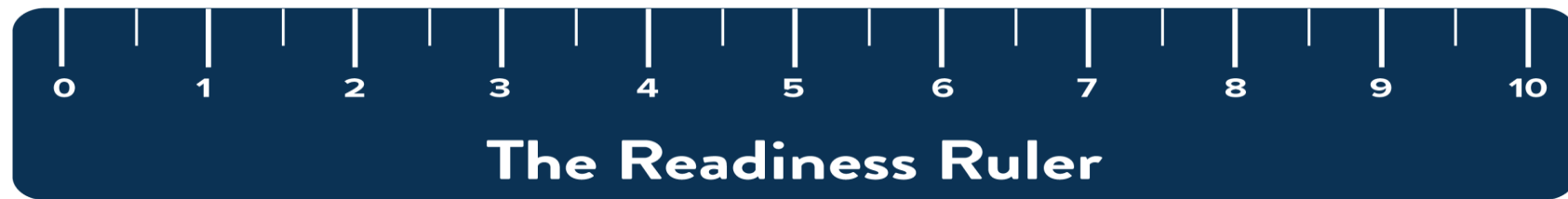
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*measures how willing a person is to take an action*



*measures how confident a person is in his / her ability to perform or take the action*



*measures how ready the person is to take the action*

# Step 7: Monitor and evaluate the outcome

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- Review all tasks on action plan on a set pre-determined schedule: Don't wait until the end date
- Inquire about:
  - Patient's satisfaction with their effort
  - Impact on mood, behavior, functioning, relationships, etc.
- Reframe "failures" as difficulties and opportunities to learn more
  - What *exactly* happened when you tried to implement the plan?
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
  - Is the goal realistic? Should it be more clear?
  - Have new obstacles come up?
  - Are the steps difficult? Why?
- When not reached, it is usually a poorly defined problem/goal, not truly relevant to the patient, or too large: Redefine and simplify
- Redefine the problem, modify the goal, simplify the action steps or choose a new problem/goal to implement



# PST Worksheet

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- Problem Solving Skills Worksheet

- 1. Define the problem you are having

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- 2. What do you want to change /What is your goal/ desired outcome?

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- 3. What can you do? Brainstorm for alternative solutions (No answer is good or bad here).

- a.

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- b.

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- c.

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- d.

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- 4. What are consequences of each choice? Weigh out your options (what has the most “pro’s” and the least “con’s”)

Solutions	Pros	Cons
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		

- 5. Choose the best solution for you at this time

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- 6. How are you going to implement and carry out the solution (what are the steps/objectives to reaching your goal)

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- 7. Monitor your goal and evaluate the outcome. Do you need to change solutions? Do you need to modify your plan? Do you need to change your time frame?

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**Questions?**

