Use Of A Structured Problem Solving Approach After A Traumatic Brain Injury

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What Is Problem Solving?
The process of working through details of a Problem to reach a Solution.
Defining A “Problem”

- You need to make a decision
- You need to plan ahead
- You need to deal with something unexpected
- Something goes wrong
- You are overwhelmed, confused, or don’t know what to do
- You experience distress (*getting upset, angry, anxious, sad, etc.*)
- You cause harm to others
- You lose focus or get “off track”
Executive Dysfunction

- Awareness
- Impulsivity
- Emotions
- Judgement

A Frontal Lobe Issue

- Thought Flexibility
- Reasoning
- Social Skills
Making Quick Decisions Without Considering Possible Outcomes
Unable To Decide Between Choices
Tries To Solve Problems In Ways That Don’t Make Sense
Gets Stuck On One Idea &
Becomes Unable To Consider Other Ideas
How Can We Help Individuals With A Brain Injury Improve Their Problem Solving Skills?
SWAPS: The Mantra

- **Stop!** Is there a problem?

- **What** is the problem and should I try to solve it?

- **Alternative solutions** - what are they?

- **Pick and Plan**

- **Satisfied with the plan or the outcome?**

STEP ONE: Stop! Is There A Problem?

- Give yourself time to recognize if there is a problem
- Changes that may signal a problem:
  - Emotional State
  - Physical State
  - Cognitive State
  - Health
  - Family Life
  - Income
  - Other Life Changes
STEP TWO: What Is The Problem & Should I Try To Solve It?

- Find clarification by assessing the components
- Ask yourself:
  - Is there more to this problem?
  - Am I focused on the problem I need to address right now?
- Sometimes you may see that there really isn’t a problem at all, just a momentary glitch in your life.
STEP THREE: Alternative Solutions

What are they?

- Brainstorm
- Come up with as many solutions as possible
- Stay non-judgmental and think clearly
- Be specific
STEP FOUR: Pick and Plan

❖ Picking the best alternative:
  ➢ Will it help me solve the problem?
  ➢ Is it feasible?
  ➢ Can I afford the costs? – financially, emotionally, cognitively, time
  ➢ What are the benefits, and do they outweigh the cost?

❖ Planning to get it done:
  ➢ What actions are needed?
  ➢ If needing to act now, DO IT NOW!
  ➢ If you can’t do it now, schedule when you can
  ➢ Put actions on a “To Do List”
  ➢ If you can’t do any of the above, eliminate it as a solution or re-SWAPS
STEP FIVE: Satisfied With The Plan? Satisfied With The Outcome?

- **Determine if you are satisfied with your plan**
  - Unsatisfied – repeat steps 2, 3 and/or 4 until satisfaction
  - Satisfied – carry out your plan

- **Determine if you are satisfied with the outcome**
  - If the problem remains unsolved, gets worse or changes, go through the SWAPS process again
Kyra’s Use Of SWAPS

Coming from Philadelphia one evening, I needed to take two buses to get home. I was on the first bus and it was running late. I got off the first bus and needed to cross the street to catch the second bus. As I waited for the light to change, my second bus drove by and I missed it. The next bus wasn’t going to be there for another hour. My anxiety was triggered. It started to get dark and desolate. There was no place to sit and I’m unable to stand for too long because of severe knee pain. I didn’t have money and didn’t have anybody to pick me up.
STOP! Is There A Problem?

YES!
What Is The Problem & Should I Try To Solve It?

- The next bus isn’t scheduled to arrive for another hour
- Suffer from severe arthritis making it difficult to stand for too long
- Anxiety is increasing
- Safety concerns: dark and desolate
- Did not have money to take a taxi
- Did not have anybody to pick me up
Alternative Solutions: What Are They?

1. Risk the possibility of falling and push through the pain and wait an hour for the next bus.
2. Take a different bus, that runs more frequently, to the mall and taking a third bus from there.
3. Look out for the next car that stops at the red light, knock on their window and ask to hitch a ride home.
4. Call 911.
5. Use coping skills to calm my anxiety and walk to the restaurant across the street to see if there is anybody in there that can assist me.
6. Run across the street to try and get the bus to stop.
Solution #5:

Use coping skills to calm my anxiety and walk to the restaurant across the street and see if there is anybody in there that can assist me.

Coping Skills = acknowledge and label emotion, mindful breathing, doing the opposite of your emotional urges, rationalize
Satisfied With The Plan?  With The Outcome?

❖ Satisfied with your plan?
  ➢ NO – repeat steps 2, 3 and/or 4 until satisfaction
  ➢ YES – carry out your plan

❖ Satisfied with the outcome?
  ➢ Problem remains unsolved – SWAPS it again
“SWAPS has helped me to organize my thoughts.”

“It helps me to focus on solutions for real life problems.”

“It helps me to focus more.”

“I use it to stay organized when preparing food in the kitchen.”

“I can come up with more solutions by helping me to think more flexibly.”

“In the community, it helps with making rational decisions.”
SWAPS Worksheet

Initials: ________________________
Date: ________________________

Stop! Is there a problem? ________________________

What is the problem and should I try to solve it?

Alternative solutions?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 

Pick and Plan

Satisfied with the outcome?

No, not at all Somewhat Mostly Yes, very