Chapter 8.
Problem Solving

In the previous sections you learned how your unhelpful thought patterns lead you to feel depressed, angry, or overwhelmed. When you are feeling this way, it is often hard to see potential solutions that will help change the situation into a more positive or hopeful one. In this section, you will learn a five step techniques that will facilitate the development of more alternatives and options for managing a situation or solving a problem. For example:

Sally is a recent widow who recently started to attend a grief support group at the suggestion of her friend Luisa. Luisa provides Sally’s transportation each week since Sally does not drive. This week, Luisa told Sally that she could not take her. Sally ended the conversation feeling alone and sad.

Step 1: Defining the problem

The first task is to define the problem as specifically as possible. This step can often be the most challenging and you may find that several different problems are embedded into one. Sort out each problem and pick the one that appears to carry the greatest distress.

Sally lists her problems:

1. getting to the support group.
2. finding an alternative activity.
3. managing her feelings of loneliness and sadness.
Sally decides that she is quite committed to getting to the support group and feels more distressed about having no transportation than the other two problems listed.

**Step 2: Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is the step where you propose potential solutions to a problem. The key to brainstorming is NOT to evaluate each potential solution, but just allow suggestions to be presented. Sally came up with the following options to address the problem of getting to her support group:

1. I can walk to the Senior Center.
2. I can ask a neighbor for a ride.
3. I can drive myself.
4. I can call taxi.
5. I can ask my daughter for a ride.
6. I can invite the support group to my house.
7. I can call a support group member and ask him/her for a ride.
8. I can NOT go.

**Step 3: Evaluate solutions**

This step allows you to evaluate the solutions based on any criteria you want to use. For example, you may evaluate whether you have time to devote to one solution or another, or you may evaluate each solution based on money, energy, or how much help you would need from other people, etc. As you examine each item from your brainstorm list, you may find that some of the alternative you propose may seem unrealistic, and therefore will get a lower rating than others. In rating the options you may assign numbers to them, or you
may choose to just use + or -'s to represent your evaluation. Sally’s rating is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can walk to the Senior Center.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can ask a neighbor for a ride.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I can drive myself.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can call a taxi.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I can ask my daughter for a ride.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I can invite the support group to my house.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I can call a support group member and ask him/her for a ride</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I can NOT go.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, Sally’s possible solutions, in order, look like this:

1. I can ask a neighbor for a ride.

2. I can call a support group member and ask him/her for a ride.

3. I can call a taxi.

4. I can walk to the Senior Center.

5. I can invite the support group to my house.

6. I can ask my daughter for a ride.

7. I can drive myself.

8. I can NOT go.

You can see from Sally’s rating that she believes that asking a neighbor for a ride is her #1 choice, followed by asking a fellow support group member, and then calling a taxi, and so on.
Step 4: Select one alternative

Now you are ready to try the first alternative.

After Sally decided that asking her neighbor for a ride was the best option, she called her and found out that her car was not working.

Step 5: Select another alternative

Step 5 allows you to go back to your list of options and select another alternative.

When Sally could not find her list of support group members’ phone numbers, she remembered that the Senior Center is just six blocks away, so she decided to walk.

Now, go through an example of your own

Think about the last time you were faced with a situation where you believed that you had no way of solving it. Write that example below. Even if this situation has been resolved, use it as your example, so you can practice the set of steps without being pressured by the immediate emotions or beliefs that accompany it.

Step 1: What was the problem? What did you need to solve?
Step 2: Brainstorm solutions. Remember, do not worry about the quality of each solution. Just write down whatever comes to mind:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 3: Evaluate and rank your choices. Start by picking out the most realistic, then the second, then the third, and so on.

What criteria are you going to use to rank order your choices?
Step 4: Choose an alternative.

What are you willing to try?

What happened?
What thoughts do you have about the way you solved your problem?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How are you feeling about your problem now?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

**Step 5: Choose another alternative, if needed.**

What alternative are you willing to try now?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What happened?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What thoughts do you have about the way you solved your problem?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How are you feeling about your problem now?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
Summary and Review

What were the key points brought up in this chapter?

1. 

2. 

3. 

What skills did I learn?

1. 

2. 

3. 

What assignments might help me practice these skills?

1. 

2. 

3.
Additional thoughts or questions I have about this material.
Chapter 9.
Imagery

Imagery is another tool to manage intense feelings as you create a “picture” of the stressful situation and its possible solutions in your mind. The relaxation exercise you learned demonstrated one type of imagery. Recall that you were asked to select a safe place you could visit for a short while in your imagination. These same visualization skills can help challenge your perceptions of the outcomes of stressful situations and manage these intense emotions.

Identifying negative beliefs through imagery

A. Think about a particular situation that has produced intense, negative emotions. Briefly describe that event below:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

B. What emotions were present?

________________________________________________________________________

C. Now sit back, placing your arms and legs in a comfortable position, and put yourself back in the situation. Try to capture all of the components of the situation, the people, the sights, the sound, the colors, etc. Try to determine what was specifically problematic for you; isolate the thoughts you had. Record
those thoughts in the center column of one of the extra UTDs you have from your therapist, or you can create your own.

D. The intensity of your images probably caused you to “revisit” the upsetting situation. take a moment now to think of some calming images before we continue.

**Challenging negative beliefs through imagery**

A. Let’s go back to the stressful situation you just visited through imagery. Review your negative thoughts. Did you find that you catastrophized any of your perceived outcomes? On the space below, record your thoughts about the outcome of the situation.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How strongly do you believe this outcome will occur (from 0 - 100%).

________________________________________________________________________

B. Sit back and return to the situation, this time picturing the outcome as you perceive it will happen. What do you see? Describe it below:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Do your original perceptions seem likely?

How strongly do you believe your original outcome at this moment (from 0 - 100%)?
C. Can you replace the unhelpful beliefs in column 2 of the UTD with more helpful ones (column 4)? Do it now.

D. What about your emotions? Record any changes in your emotions considering your new perceptions (column 5).

Imagery can also be useful in helping you to prepare for a stressful event. For example, if you find yourself become anxious or sad about a meeting with someone try the imagery exercise to practice and plan the kinds of things you’d like to say. Imagery skills also come in handy when you want to practice being assertive before you are placed in a “face to face” situation.
Summary and Review

What were the key points brought up in this chapter?

1. 

2. 

3. 

What skills did I learn?

1. 

2. 

3. 

What assignments might help me practice these skills?

1. 

2. 

3. 
Additional thoughts or questions I have about this material.