

## Problem Solving Competencies

### 1. RECOGNISING SOLVABLE & UNSOLVABLE PROBLEMS

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blames client for problems (e.g., 'You got yourself into this situation, it's your job to get yourself out') <input type="checkbox"/> Says all of client's problems are too difficult or cannot be solved	<input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorms with client on new or previous problems client has mentioned <input type="checkbox"/> Lists out problems with client <input type="checkbox"/> Describes or gives examples on difference between solvable and unsolvable problems <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitates client to prioritise problems <input type="checkbox"/> Checks-in with client to clarify if prioritised problems are solvable or unsolvable	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 2. SELECTING THE PROBLEM

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chooses problem for the client <input type="checkbox"/> Selects problem that is out of the client's control	<input type="checkbox"/> Works with client to select a specific problem that is in the client's control <input type="checkbox"/> Asks for client feedback on selected problem (e.g., 'Do you feel comfortable to start defining this problem?') <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Explains each step of selecting a problem clearly to the client	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 3. DEFINING THE PROBLEM AND GOAL

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tells the client the problem is hopeless <input type="checkbox"/> Mocks client for potential goals (e.g., 'That goal is impossible, why would you think of that?')	<input type="checkbox"/> Generates some ideas with client to define the problem and goal <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes a specific definition of the problem with client <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on practical elements of the problem that can be influenced <input type="checkbox"/> Motivates and prompts client to imagine the problem as solved <input type="checkbox"/> Works with client to break problem in small pieces or steps to make it more specific	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> any unhelpful behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill
Notes:			

### 4. BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Asks suggestive questions about solutions brainstormed by client (e.g., 'That is not really how you want to solve it, is it?') <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages the use of unobtainable solutions <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses only on solutions that "fix the entire problem" <input type="checkbox"/> Tells client how to solve the problem (e.g., 'You should...')	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitates client to come up with 1 or 2 "practical" solutions <input type="checkbox"/> Unrealistic or unhelpful solutions are eliminated <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Works with client to freely brainstorm as many solutions as possible without judgement (e.g., silly, realistic) <input type="checkbox"/> Actively prompts client to encourage brainstorming (e.g., 'What would you recommend a friend to do in your position?')	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> any unhelpful behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill
Notes:			

## 5. CHOOSING A SOLUTION

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chooses an unrealistic solution or a solution with a negative impact (e.g., 'Run away from home') <input type="checkbox"/> Tells client what solution to choose <input type="checkbox"/> Judges client for the chosen solution (e.g., 'That will never work')	<input type="checkbox"/> Removes unrealistic solutions <input type="checkbox"/> Helps client select an achievable solution with least negative impact and most potential to be helpful <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Finds out how client has previously solved problems and discusses what works and does not work <input type="checkbox"/> Discusses (dis)advantages OR positive & negative consequences of ALL listed solutions	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> any unhelpful behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill
Notes:			

## 6. IMPLEMENTING A SOLUTION

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tells client what to do <input type="checkbox"/> Creates barriers for client or discourages client from trying (e.g., 'Your husband would never allow this') <input type="checkbox"/> Criticises client's input <input type="checkbox"/> Dismisses barriers or does not problem-solve with them	<input type="checkbox"/> Creates an action plan with steps that are specific and measurable <input type="checkbox"/> Sets a timeline for the action plan <input type="checkbox"/> Remains encouraging and helpful <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Sets reminders <input type="checkbox"/> Discusses potential barriers to implementation of the action plan <input type="checkbox"/> Helps client create an alternative plan	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> any unhelpful behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> all basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill
Notes:			

## 7. EVALUATING OUTCOMES OF IMPLEMENTING A SOLUTION

Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blames or scolds client for incomplete tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Tells client what should and shouldn't have been done (e.g., 'It's your fault, you should've been braver')	<input type="checkbox"/> Discusses implementation of action plan <input type="checkbox"/> Praises client for any attempt to implement action plan, even if not successful <input type="checkbox"/> Explores and normalises any challenges client mentions <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> If not (completely) successful, adapts action plan accordingly (e.g., setting more effective reminders) <input type="checkbox"/> Chooses new problem or solution that is more feasible as needed <input type="checkbox"/> If client was successful, discusses steps to continue managing problem	
Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

**Acknowledgement.** These competencies were informed by research described in: Pedersen, G. A., Lakshmin, P., Schafer, A., Watts, S., Carswell, K., Willhoite, A., Ottman, K., van 't Hof, E., & Kohrt, B. A. (2020). Common factors in psychological treatments delivered by non-specialists in low- and middle-income countries: Manual review of competencies. *Journal of behavioral and cognitive therapy*, 30(3), 165–186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbct.2020.06.001>

The following documents supported development of competency descriptions:

- Dawson KS, Watts S, Carswell K, et al. Improving access to evidence-based interventions for young adolescents: early adolescent skills for emotions (EASE). World Psychiatry. 2019
- Murray L, Dorsey S, Skavenski S, Metz K: Common Elements Treatment Approach (CETA) Counselor Manual (Adult): Lebanon. 2017. <https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-andinstitutes/global-mental-health/our-projects/by-intervention/>
- Verhey R, Turner JB, Chibanda D: The Friendship Bench: Training Manual for Health Promoters. Harare, Zimbabwe. King's College London, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Northwestern University, Zimbabwe AIDS Prevention Project ZAPP UZ, University of Bristol, ZEE Bags, Nectar Chris Imherz, Zimbabwe Health Training Support, The Funding Network, MISEREOR. <https://www.friendshipbenchzimbabwe.org/project-resources>
- World Health Organization: Problem Management Plus (PM+): Individual psychological help for adults impaired by distress in communities exposed to adversity. Generic field-trial version 1.0. Geneva, 2016. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-MSD-MER-16.2>

See full acknowledgements and copyright information on <https://equipcompetency.org/>

## Competency descriptions and abbreviated instructions for standardized role plays

If using standardized role plays, the following descriptions and prompts can be used when eliciting different competencies. For full details on performing standardized role plays see <https://equipcompetency.org/>

### 1. Recognising solvable and unsolvable problems

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### 2. Selecting the problem

The helper teaches and works with the client to apply the new strategy of managing problems and explain each step clearly. The helper explains the positive effect of this strategy by relating to the client’s negative feelings that were identified in the assessment. Now, the helper works with the client to create a list of problems the client may be experiencing and then help choose one practical, solvable and easy problem to work on, that is in the client’s control. It can be helpful to support the client to use the hand-out in this process. Helper encourages choosing a problem on the list that is easy, to support the client successfully solving it independently.

#### SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY

**Trainer prompts helper:** “Today I will be a client that has a series of problems. Your role is to help that client identify a problem. You should encourage the client to speak freely about what is happening and help summarize the problems they discuss into a ‘problem list’ and choose one problem to work on.”

*Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.*

**Role-play features** the “client” describing multiple problems in a variety of ways (e.g., “I have three children and I am alone to keep the household clean, to bring and prepare the food. There is not enough food at the house.”)

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been rated OR allotted time has been reached (5-15 min).

#### Should *not*

- Blame client for problems
- Ignore problems brought up by client
- Force client to work on very difficult (potentially unsolvable) problem

#### Should

- With client, make a list of problems client is having
- With client, choose one practical, solvable, and easy problem to work on
- Explain each step clearly
- Relate to client’s feelings

### 3. ESTABLISHING A SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE GOAL

Helper works with client to establish a specific and brief definition of the problem. Helper encourages the client to choose one problem, and if needed to break it down into smaller parts and deal with each separately. Helper and client should work with a practical problem that can be influenced or controlled by the client. Helper works with client to create a goal, prompting and motivating the client to imagine the problem as solved (e.g., “If this problem was solved, how would the situation look? How would your life be different if you did not have this problem?”). Helper describes the goal in behavioural terms and work with client to determine possible barriers to ensure goal is achievable and follows directly from the defined problem.

#### SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY

**Trainer prompts helper:** “A client has made a list of problems and chosen a problem with the helper. I will act as the client who has returned to explore how to address the problem. Your role is to work with the client to address the problem by working together to establish a specific and brief definition of the problem, and a goal which is realistic and achievable.”

*Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.*

**Role-play features** helper and client working together to create a defined problem statement and a goal.

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been rated OR allotted time has been reached (5-15 min).

**Should not**

- State that goal cannot be reached, or client is hopeless
- Mock client’s goals
- Define big or uncontrollable problems
- Stay vague in the definition

**Should**

- Establish a specific and brief definition of the problem
- Motivate and prompt client to imagine the problem as solved
- Focus on practical elements of the problem that can be influenced
- If needed, break down the problem into smaller parts and deal with each separately

**4.BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS**

Helper works with the client to brainstorm as many solutions as possible. Helper withholds judgement and encourage the client to consider all solutions and ideas, including those that may not be healthy or achievable. The helper uses techniques, such as questioning or prompting, to support the client in brainstorming and avoid telling the client solutions. If possible, solutions should be written down.

**SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY**

**Trainer prompts helper:** “A client has defined a problem and a goal. Using your training in problem management, support the client in brainstorming solutions to manage his/her problem and achieve their goal.”

*Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.*

**Role-play features** helper starting with a defined problem statement and goal created from the previous two role-plays.

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been **rated below** OR allotted time has been reached (5-15 min).

**Should not**

- Judge client for ‘silly,’ unhealthy, or ineffective solutions
- Give direct advice for solutions without client input
- Encourage the use of unachievable solutions

**Should**

- Brainstorm as many solutions as possible with client without judgment
- Encourage client to consider all identified solutions
- Prompt client with questions to support brainstorming

**5.CHOOSING A SOLUTION**

Helper works with the client to choose a one or more solution to help achieve the goal for the selected problem. Helper works with client to remove unhelpful and unachievable solutions from the list, evaluating short-term and long-term consequences and comparing the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. Consider barriers to implementing each (e.g., solutions that may cause disagreements at home); ensure the solution is achievable within the client’s resources. Encourages client to select a solution that has the lowest potential negative impact and is most achievable and helpful (e.g., Which idea would be most helpful and easy to try?). The client’s previous solutions to managing problems should be considered to help understand what works and what doesn’t work.

**SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY**

**Trainer prompts helper:** “A client worked with you to brainstorm multiple solutions to manage their problem. Your role is to work with the client to choose one or more solution(s) that work(s) best to manage his/her problem. Remember to compare and evaluate solutions.”

*Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.*

**Role-play features** helper starting with the solution list from brainstorming, the defined problem, and the goal created from the previous two role-plays.

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been rated OR allotted time has been reached (5-15 min).

Should not	Should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Choose an unrealistic solution or one with negative impact</li> <li>● Tell client what solution to use</li> <li>● Judge client for any solution chosen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with client on choosing and evaluating solutions</li> <li>● Evaluate each solution and remove those that are not helpful or achievable</li> <li>● Weigh pros and cons for realistic solutions, reflect on short and long-term consequences</li> <li>● Discuss client’s previous solutions to identify what works and doesn’t work</li> <li>● Discuss barriers and select solution that has least negative impact (no harm) and most likely success</li> <li>● If client chooses an unhelpful solution or one with negative consequences, helper directly addresses concerns</li> </ul>

**6.IMPLEMENTING A SOLUTION**

Helper works with the client to outline the necessary steps (create an ‘action plan’) to successfully implement the solution and reach her/his goal. Specific, small steps should be created (using SMART goals), such as selecting a time of the week, using a calendar or writing it out, creating reminders and thinking of any internal and external challenges that may occur (e.g., weather is too rainy to exercise (external); client begins to worry when asking for help (internal)), and determine what resources are needed to carry out the action plan (e.g. time, materials, social support). Helper assists client in creating a ‘Plan B’ to work around barriers if needed. Helper may also use role-plays or other activities in-session to prepare the client for carrying out her/his solution.

**SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY**

**Trainer prompts helper:** “A client has chosen a solution to reach their goal. Your role is to help the client make an action plan to successfully implement the solution. Remember to consider challenges that may arise.”

*Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.*

**Role-play features** helper starting with the chosen solution from previous role-play.

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been rated OR 5 allotted time has been reached (5-15 min)

Should not	Should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tell client what to do</li> <li>● Criticize the client’s input or dismiss barriers</li> <li>● Make a plan that is too vague, difficult, or complicated for client to follow</li> <li>● Choose a plan for the client without input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a detailed action plan with specific, small steps to help client successfully implement solution and reach her/his goal</li> <li>● Work with client to think of any challenges or barriers and determine what is needed to carry out the action plan</li> <li>● When applicable, create an alternative plan around potential barrier</li> <li>● Discuss the resources and aids which will help the client achieve their goal</li> </ul>

**7.EVALUATING OUTCOMES OF IMPLEMENTING A SOLUTION**

[Follow-up session to Competency #5] Helper should work with the client to evaluate the outcome to implementing the solution. Helper should review all tasks assigned from the action plan in previous session, praising client for successes, including the attempt to carry out the action plan. Helper should normalise and explore reasons for difficulties that may have kept tasks from being completed, help the client problem-solve these, and encourage the client to try the tasks again.

Helper may check-in with the client about their feelings when reviewing successes and difficulties. If a solution was implemented successfully, helper should discuss next steps to continue managing the problem.

**SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE-PLAY**

**Trainer prompts helper:** “Last week, you created an action plan for your client to implement the solution\_\_\_\_\_ and complete the following steps\_\_\_\_\_. In this follow-up session, your role is to evaluate the outcome, exploring successes and barriers to implementing the solution.”

Trainer or another trained actor should act as the client for this role-play.

**Role-play features** helper starting with reviewing the action plan from previous role-play.

**Role-play should stop** once competency has been **appraised by rating below** OR allotted time has been reached (5-15 min).

Should <i>not</i>	Should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scold or blame client for incomplete tasks</li> <li>● Lose hope in the client’s future success in implementing the solution</li> <li>● Lecture client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review all action plan tasks assigned from previous session</li> <li>● Praise client for successes</li> <li>● Normalise and explore reasons for difficulties</li> <li>● If necessary, adapt action plan OR choose new problem/solution that is feasible</li> <li>● Encourage client to try again the following week OR if successful, discuss next steps for managing the problem</li> </ul>