# Problem Management Plus (PM+) Competencies

## 1. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (ENACT #1)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Engages in other activities (e.g., answers mobile, completes paperwork)<br>❑ Laughs at client<br>❑ Uses inappropriate facial expressions<br>❑ Inappropriate physical contact | ❑ Allows for silences<br>❑ Maintains appropriate eye contact<br>❑ Maintains open posture (body toward client)<br>❑ Continuously uses supportive body language (head nod) and utterances (uh huh)<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Varies body language during the session in relation to client's content and expressions |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour*    ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION (ENACT #2)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Interrupts client<br>❑ Asks many suggestive or leading closed-ended questions (e.g., 'You didn't really want to do that, right?')<br>❑ Corrects client (e.g., 'What you really mean…') or uses accusatory statements (e.g., 'You shouldn't have said that to your husband')<br>❑ Culturally and age-inappropriate language and terms | ❑ Uses open ended questions<br>❑ Summarising or paraphrasing statements<br>❑ Allows client to complete statements before responding<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Encourages client to continue explaining (e.g., 'Tell me more about…')<br>❑ Clarifies statements in first person (e.g., 'I heard you say,' 'I understood…')<br>❑ Matches rhythm to client's, allowing longer or shorter pauses based on client |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour*    ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 3. EXPLAIN AND PROMOTE CONFIDENTIALITY (ENACT #3)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❏ Forces client to disclose to helper or others<br>❏ Describes confidentiality inaccurately (e.g., 'I will only tell your family')<br>❏ Promises full confidentially without exceptions<br>❏ Minimises client's concerns about confidentiality (e.g., 'It doesn't matter if anyone else hears us') | ❏ Explains concept of confidentiality<br>❏ Lists exceptions for breaking confidentiality for self-harm or harm to others<br>❏ Explains why it can be important to break confidentiality<br>❏ *None of the above* | ❏ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❏ Details the referral process related to confidentiality and exceptions<br>❏ Asks questions to assess client's understanding of confidentiality<br>❏ Topics of discussion are appropriate to confidentiality of setting |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❏ **Level 1**<br>*any unhelpful behaviour* | ❏ **Level 2**<br>*no basic skills,*<br>*or some but not all basic skills* | ❏ **Level 3**<br>*all basic skills* | ❏ **Level 4**<br>*all basic helping skills*<br>*plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 4. RAPPORT BUILDING AND SELF-DISCLOSURE (ENACT #4)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❏ Dominates session describing a personal experience<br>❏ Minimises client's problems by describing how the helper has dealt with this<br>❏ Asks unnecessary embarrassing personal questions<br>❏ Discusses confidential information of other clients | ❏ Introduces self and explains role<br>❏ Makes casual, informal conversation<br>❏ Asks for client's introduction (e.g., 'What client prefers to be called')<br>❏ Shares general experience related to the client (e.g., about one's community/region)<br>❏ *None of the above* | ❏ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❏ Asks client's reflection on information that helper has shared<br>❏ Checks in on client's comfort |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❏ **Level 1**<br>*any unhelpful behaviour* | ❏ **Level 2**<br>*no basic skills,*<br>*or some but not all basic skills* | ❏ **Level 3**<br>*all basic skills* | ❏ **Level 4**<br>*all basic helping skills*<br>*plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 5.  EXPLORATION & NORMALIZATION OF FEELINGS (ENACT #5)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Makes statements that client's response is unusual or atypical for others in similar situations (e.g., 'People don't usually react this way')<br>❑ Minimises or dismisses client's feelings or emotions<br>❑ Forces client to describe emotions | ❑ Appropriately encourages client to share feelings<br>❑ Explains that others may share similar symptoms, reactions, and concerns, given similar experiences<br>❑ Asks client to reflect on the experience of sharing emotions<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Explores potential reasons for hesitance to share emotions<br>❑ Comments thoughtfully on client's facial expression to encourage emotional expression<br>❑ Validates emotional responses while reframing potential harmful emotional reactions |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 6.  DEMONSTRATE EMPATHY, WARMTH & GENUINENESS (ENACT #6)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Critical of client's concerns<br>❑ Dismissive of client's concerns<br>❑ Helper's emotional response appears inappropriate, fake or acting | ❑ Is warm, friendly, and genuine throughout session<br>❑ Continuously shows concern or care for the client (e.g., 'That sounds sad, can you tell me more about it?')<br>❑ Asks question to identify what emotions the client was feeling (e.g., 'I wonder if you felt sad or angry when this happened')<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Asks client to reflect on empathic statements from helper (e.g., 'What did you think when I said you sounded sad?') |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 7. ASSESSMENT OF HARM & DEVELOPING RESPONSE PLAN (ENACT #7)

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Does not ask about self-harm<br>❑ Lectures client with religious or legal reasons against self-harm (e.g., 'This is sin, or this is against the law')<br>❑ Expresses disbelief (e.g., accuses client of discussing self-harm to get attention; states others would not actually harm the client or client's children)<br>❑ Encourages client not to tell anyone else about self-harm or harm to others | ❑ Asks about self-harm or harm to others, or explores harm if raised by client<br>❑ Asks about current intent, means, or prior attempts<br>❑ Asks about risk and/or protective factors<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ If indicated, helps client to develop safety plan (e.g., coping strategies and help seeking) |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1**<br>*any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2**<br>*no basic skills,*<br>*or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3**<br>*all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4**<br>*all basic helping skills*<br>*plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 8. INTRODUCING AND EXPLAINING SLOW BREATHING

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Forces client to practise breathing strategy<br>❑ Criticizes client on performance ('That's all wrong; you need to do it this way')<br>❑ Rushes through practice or uses a loud or harsh voice<br>❑ Gives nonspecific unhelpful suggestions (e.g., 'Try breathing better') | ❑ Explains benefit of slow breathing<br>❑ Demonstrates technique, including appropriate hand placement (e.g., on stomach)<br>❑ Guides client through breathing practice, checking comfort level at each step<br>❑ Paces breathing steps with counting for inhale, holding, and exhale<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Reassures client that this does not need to be done perfectly (e.g., 'This takes practice, you will know what feels comfortable for you')<br>❑ Praises client for practising and normalizes any difficulties or challenges with the practice<br>❑ Adapts strategy as needed to ensure client's comfort<br>❑ Uses metaphors that are understandable to the client (e.g., balloon metaphor) |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1**<br>*any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2**<br>*no basic skills,*<br>*or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3**<br>*all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4**<br>*all basic helping skills*<br>*plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 9. LISTING AND DISTINGUISHING SOLVABLE AND UNSOLVABLE PROBLEMS

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Blames client for problems (e.g., 'You made this problem for yourself') <br> ❑ Says all of client's problems are too difficult or cannot be solved <br> ❑ Tells client what their problems are without client's input <br> ❑ Incorrectly explains what are solvable and unsolvable problems | ❑ Supports client to list their own problems <br> ❑ Uses a brainstorming process to identify additional problems <br> ❑ Explains the concept of solvable and unsolvable problems <br> ❑ Helps client identify which of their problems are solvable and unsolvable <br> ❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills* <br> ❑ Helps client reframe unsolvable problems into solvable problems <br> ❑ Discusses how addressing solvable problems can improve the client's wellbeing |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1** <br> *any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2** <br> *no basic skills,* <br> *or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3** <br> *all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4** <br> *all basic helping skills* <br> *plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 10. CHOOSING A PROBLEM

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Chooses problem for the client <br> ❑ Allows client to choose unsolvable problem <br> ❑ Criticizes client's choice of the most important problem (e.g., 'That problem isn't important, focus on something else') <br> ❑ Fails to identify a single problem to focus on | ❑ Works with client to rank or prioritise which solvable problems could be addressed <br> ❑ Works with client to select a single specific problem that is solvable <br> ❑ Asks for client's feedback on the selected problem (e.g., 'Do you feel comfortable to start working on this problem') <br> ❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills* <br> ❑ Helps client explore how their life would be different if the selected problem were addressed <br> ❑ Helps client identify alternative problem if barriers are encountered addressing the selected problem |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

| ❑ **Level 1** <br> *any unhelpful behaviour* | ❑ **Level 2** <br> *no basic skills,* <br> *or some but not all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 3** <br> *all basic skills* | ❑ **Level 4** <br> *all basic helping skills* <br> *plus any advanced skill* |
|---|---|---|---|

Notes:

## 11. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

| Check all behaviours demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Starts defining the problem without having made selection of a single problem<br>❑ Provides complex or confusing definition of problem that does not have clear actions to take<br>❑ Tells client the problem is hopeless<br>❑ Minimises the problem (e.g., 'Solving this problem is easy. Let's focus on something more challenging') | ❑ Establishes a specific brief definition of the problem<br>❑ The definition includes description of things that can be changed and for which the client can take action<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ If a problem has many parts, break it down and deal with each part separately<br>❑ Asks the client to imagine what their life would be like if the problem were solved |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 12. BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

| Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Directly gives solutions to the client rather than have client generate own solutions<br>❑ Makes judgements about brainstormed solutions (e.g., 'That is good,' or 'that is bad')<br>❑ Asks suggestive or leading questions about solutions (e.g., 'That isn't really how you want to solve it, is it?') | ❑ Encourage the client to think of as many possible solutions as they can<br>❑ Encourages client to think of solutions they can do by themselves as well as those with support from others<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Uses the friend strategy (e.g., 'What would you tell a friend if they had this problem?')<br>❑ Prompts client to think of existing personal strengths, resources, and social support in order to brainstorm more solutions |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 13. CHOOSING HELPFUL STRATEGIES

| Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Chooses a solution that is unrealistic or potentially harmful (e.g., 'You should run away from home') <br> ❑ Tells client what solution to choose <br> ❑ Is critical of client for chosen solution (e.g., 'I would have chosen something else. What you chose may not work') | ❑ From the list of potential solutions, helps client choose solutions that are helpful to influence the problem <br> ❑ Helps client discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different listed solutions <br> ❑ Helps client consider what solutions are achievable within the client's financial, personal, and social resources <br> ❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills* <br> ❑ Explores how client has solved similar problems in the past and discuss what did or did not work <br> ❑ Explores alternative solutions that could be used if selected solution becomes too difficult |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 14. DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE SOLUTION

| Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Tells client what steps to do achieve the solution <br> ❑ Discourages client by identifying barriers for carrying out the action plan (e.g., 'Your wife will never let you do this') <br> ❑ Criticizes the client's proposed action steps for the solution (e.g., 'You aren't thinking through all the steps') <br> ❑ Dismisses concerns raised by the client about the action plan (e.g., 'That's easy to do. I've seen lots of people do it. Stop worrying') | ❑ Helps client create an action plan with specific steps <br> ❑ Helps client pick the day, time, and location for when to do steps in the action plan <br> ❑ Discusses what resources would be needed to carry out the actions (e.g., transportation, childcare, a supportive friend) <br> ❑ Maintains a positive and encouraging attitude throughout discussing the action plan <br> ❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills* <br> ❑ Suggests ways the client can remind themself to carry out the plan (e.g., notes, calendar, phone reminders, connecting it with other activities) <br> ❑ Discusses alternative strategies if barriers are encountered when carrying out the action plan <br> ❑ Helps client create plan for managing distress during the action plan (e.g., 'You can use your breathing exercise before talking to your relative') <br> ❑ Helps the client order the action steps if multiple interconnected actions are needed |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour* ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills* ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills* ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 15. GET GOING, KEEP DOING

| Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Makes activity schedule without client's input<br>❑ Schedules activities that are vague, unachievable, or potentially harmful to improve mood<br>❑ Blames client for lack of motivation, energy, or will power to implement Get Going, Keep Doing activities | ❑ Explains the inactivity cycle<br>❑ Helps the client brainstorm enjoyable activities that improve their mood<br>❑ Helps the client to choose an activity that is enjoyable and achievable within the next week<br>❑ Helps the client schedule when (days and times) they will complete the activity or task in the next week<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Help the client to break down the activity or task into very small and manageable steps<br>❑ Discuss reminders the client can use to help them complete their activity<br>❑ Connects enjoyable activity with other events or commitments<br>❑ Reviews potential barriers or challenges to doing the enjoyable activity |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour*    ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

## 16. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SUPPORT

| Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category. | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours** | **Basic helping skills** | **Advanced helping skills** |
| ❑ Discourages client from contacting other people about their problem<br>❑ Tells the client whom to contact rather than following client's preferences<br>❑ Criticizes client for difficulties in communicating with family, friends, or community members | ❑ Explains meaning and benefits of strengthening social support<br>❑ Supports client to identify multiple sources of social support<br>❑ Works with client to select whom from the social support network would be helpful<br>❑ Encourages client to contact social support persons<br>❑ *None of the above* | ❑ *Completes all Basic Helping Skills*<br>❑ Schedules action plan with client including when and whom to reach out to for support<br>❑ Discusses overcoming barriers and challenges when contacting persons for social support<br>❑ Role plays with client how to ask selected person for support<br>❑ Recommends skills and techniques to support relationship goals |

Check the level that best applies (only one level should be checked)

❑ **Level 1** *any unhelpful behaviour*    ❑ **Level 2** *no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 3** *all basic skills*    ❑ **Level 4** *all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill*

Notes:

This scale and competencies are 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
- Pedersen GA, Gebrekristos F, Eloul L, Golden S, Hemmo M, Akhtar A, Schafer A, Kohrt BA. (2021). Development of a tool to assess competencies of Problem Management Plus facilitators using observed standardised role plays: The EQUIP Competency Rating Scale for Problem Management Plus. *Intervention*, 19(1):107–117. https://www.interventionjournal.org/text.asp?2021/19/1/107/312725
- Gebrekristos F, Eloul L, Golden S. (2021). A field report on the pilot implementation of Problem Management Plus with lay providers in an Eritrean refugee setting in Ethiopia. *Intervention*, 19(1):101–106. https://doi.org/10.4103/INTV.INTV_39_20
- Hemmo M, Akhtar A, Kohrt BA, Pedersen D, Alkamel AF, Sölch CM, Schafer A, Spaaij J, Bryant R, Morina N. (2025). Piloting competency assessments for an evidence-based brief psychological intervention with Arabic-speaking non-specialists in Switzerland. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 12:e72. https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2025.10023
- McBride KA, Harrison S, Mahata S, Pfeffer K, Cardamone F, Ngigi T, Kohrt BA, Pedersen GA, Greene C, Viljoen D, Muneghina O, Brown AD. (2021). Building mental health and psychosocial support capacity during a pandemic: The process of adapting Problem Management Plus for remote training and implementation during COVID-19 in New York City, Europe and East Africa. *Intervention*, 19(1):37–47. https://doi.org/10.4103/INTV.INTV_30_20

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