**FAMILY PROBLEM-SOLVING**

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| **Addresses all types of mental health problems** | **Used to Teach:** How to solve problems as a family in a productive and effective manner | **Patient Type:** Family |

**GOALS**
- Learn how to define problems that need to be addressed as a family
- Learn how to use a systemic problem-solving method (“SOLVE”) as a family
- Learn how to develop a family contract to outline expectations and natural rewards

**MATERIALS**
- Assessment Measure
- “Family SOLVE” worksheet (3-4 copies)
- “Family Contract”

**MAIN STEPS**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Assessment (Teen Alone)</strong></th>
<th>Hand teen the weekly assessment and review the results.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Review Practice Assignment (Teen Alone)</strong></td>
<td>Review at-home assignment and offer praise for completion. If an assignment was not completed, discuss barriers and review how the skill could have been used.</td>
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<td><strong>Set Family Agenda (Bring in Parents)</strong></td>
<td>Welcome parents into session. Provide praise for how well teen has been doing. Develop a family agenda with the understanding that topics will be talked about in the context of the skill section or later in the session unless a safety issue has been introduced.</td>
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<td><strong>Explain Importance of Family Problem-Solving</strong></td>
<td>Share that today you will be working on how to collaboratively solve problems as a family. Note that teens and parents often have different opinions about how to address issues that arise within their family. This can lead to stress, arguments, and strong negative emotions. When this occurs, the problem often remains unresolved. Share that you will be talking about how to use the “SOLVE” problem-solving method as a family today. This skill helps families generate multiple creative options to resolving difficulties in a calm and effective manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identify a Family Problem to SOLVE</strong></td>
<td>Help the teen and parent(s) identify and define the problem to work on in today’s session. The problem may be related to the agenda item. When identifying the problem, encourage family members to be specific, use kind words, and to avoid blaming one another (e.g., “Jack does not do his homework”). After the problem has been identified, help the family frame the problem in a way that it can be solved. To do this, frame the problem as a “how to” statement (e.g., “How to improve Jack’s homework compliance”).</td>
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| Introduce the “Family SOLVE” Worksheet | Present the Family SOLVE worksheet and go through each step in this problem-solving system. If the teen and parent have already learned the SOLVE in individual sessions, then this can be a quick review. If only the teen has learned SOLVE, ask the teen to present it to his/her/their parent(s) if willing.  

Example Script  
Each letter in the word “SOLVE” stands for a different step of the problem-solving process. **S** stands for **select a problem**: identify what the problem is. **O = Options**: make a list of ALL of the possible things a person with that problem could do, not just the ones you think would work. The bigger the list you make, the better the chance you have of solving the problem. **L= Likely Outcomes**: take the list you made up and decide what might happen when you try each of these “Options”. You can rate them in terms of whether you think things would get better or worse with each “Option”. **V = Very Best One**: narrow down your list to one “Option” or a combination of “Options” and pick the Very Best One(s) to do. **E = Evaluate**: decide whether the problem still exists. If it does, you go back to your “Options”, and pick the next “Very Best One” to try. You keep doing this until your problem is solved. Does that make sense? |
| Complete a “Family SOLVE” Worksheet Using the Identified Problem | Guide the teen/parent(s) through the problem-solving steps using the identified family problem.  

Share that the family members have already selected the problem to be solved, so the first step has been accomplished.  

Next, ask the teen and parent(s) to rotate generating options. Include options they have tried in the past that have and have not worked.  

Then, help the teen and parent(s) think through whether each option would be helpful (+), unhelpful (-), or both (+/-). Write out pros and cons of options on a separate piece of paper if needed. If the problem is not likely to be fully solved in session (which is very common), suggest “working on it in therapy” as an option to offer hope. Have teen and parent(s) choose the option(s) that may be most effective based on the options discussed. Review evaluation of the chosen solution.  

Example Script  
(S) You have already accomplished the first step, which is to select the problem.  

(O) Next, think of as many things a family with this problem could possibly do to solve it. This includes options you think would work AND those that you have tried that did not work. (Allow responses) Great work, let’s keep listing as many as you possibly can. To add important options that were not generated ask, “May I share an option?” |
Now let’s decide on the Likely Outcome of each option. Rate each one with a +, -, or a +/- depending on how helpful you think the outcome could be.

Next, we select the Very Best One(s) from your list of Options. Which option or combination of options would you pick based on your Likely Outcomes?

The last step is to evaluate. Give the option(s) selected a try and decide whether the problem still exists. If it does, go back to your “Options”, weigh them out, and pick the next “Very Best One” to try.

If helpful, a contract can be developed that specifies the plan agreed upon by the family members. Components of the contract should include: a) a description of the specific behaviors expected; b) natural rewards for compliance; and c) the period of time involved (e.g., a 1-week trial period). Share that any needed adjustments can be made next week, including adding consequences, if needed. All family members sign the contract and should be given a copy.

The “rewards” do not have to be material. They can reflect the absence of a stated problem or a natural reward (e.g., better grades, less parent nagging, better family communication, etc.). It is very common for teens to find loopholes the first time a contract is made, which is why a 1-week trial period is recommended. If the contract is unsuccessful, adjustments as well as consequences can be added. Review the “Limit Setting and Contracting” session for guidelines on best practices in creating a parent-teen contract.

Provide praise for hard work and ask teen and parent(s) to try out the options selected this week if the same problem arises.

Address any remaining concerns related to the agenda item. When possible, help the teen and parent(s) use CBT skills learned to date to devise more adaptive ways to think about or behave in the situation introduced.

Family sessions can be difficult for one or more family members. Take a few minutes to meet with a family member alone if needed.

Ask that the teen and parent(s) to practice Options selected from today’s session. If possible, also practice using this skill if a new problem arises or use with an existing problem. They can use a blank Family SOLVE worksheet to practice (provide a blank one). Ask them to bring it to the next session.

Provide praise for all of the hard work in session and schedule the next session.
FAMILY PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

Select problem: How to______________________________

Options

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________
4. ______________________________
5. ______________________________
6. ______________________________
7. ______________________________
8. ______________________________

Likely Outcome (+, -, +/-)

Teen

Evaluate: How well did it work?

1 2 3 4 5
not well very well

Circle the Very Best One

Adapted from: Clark, Lewinsohn, & Hops (1990)
FAMILY CONTRACT

Our Agreement:

Natural rewards if contract is followed:

Contract is good from_________ to ________ .

Signature_________________ Date_________

Signature_________________ Date_________

Signature_________________ Date_________