Handout 2 - The Problem Solving Model

One way of assisting a client is by using a problem solving approach.

The problem solving model can provide the Case Worker with a means of finding and using whatever is useful within the different therapeutic models. Many Case Workers operate using an "eclectic" approach to helping people. To work effectively as an eclectic Case Worker it is better to be systematic and thoughtful about the ideas, methods and techniques that are borrowed from other therapeutic models rather than to randomly and thoughtlessly apply different theories. (Egan: 1994) The problem solving model assists with the effective application of an eclectic approach to casework.

The problem solving model contains 7 stages:

Stage 1: Initial Contact

Key Activities of the Case Worker include:

Listening, and engaging. Listening Skills include:

- Appropriate non verbal responses
- Body leaning forward
- Open body posture
- Eye contact
- Non verbal encouragers e.g. nod head
- Minimal verbal encouragers e.g. "ahhh" or "mmm"
- Appropriate arrangement of the room so that the client feel comfortable and safe

Engaging or establishing a trusting and open relationship. To do this the Worker needs to:

- Tell the client their name
- Ask the client what they prefer to be called
- Show interest in the client i.e., find out about hobbies, interests, friends etc
- Demonstrate a friendly attitude
- Demonstrate a non-judgemental attitude
- Show a capacity for honesty
- Ask appropriate and relevant questions
• Ask the right amount of questions
• Offer direction and leadership where needed

**Common Client Reactions:**

• Anxiety
• Fear
• Anger
• Attitude to Case Worker is strongly influenced by past experiences and what client has been told about community service practitioners
• Sense of helplessness
• Sense of hopelessness
• Defensive
• Resistant
• Sceptical
• Confusion

**Dealing with Client Responses**

• Ensure confidentiality
• Explore problem at client's pace
• Respect client's defences
• Acknowledge client's sense of betrayal with previous workers

**Stage 2: Problem/s Identification**

**Key Activities of the Case Worker include:**

• Finding out the client's views; what do they see as the problem/s
• Identifying the problem in terms of need rather than the solutions to the need
• Exploring the client's strengths or the good things in their lives
• Developing a working alliance with the client
• Brokering other services if casework is unacceptable or inappropriate

**Stage 3: Identifying Possible Solutions**
Key Activities of the Case Worker include:

- Collecting all ideas regardless of their merit. This means trying to get a large number of ideas gathered rather than high quality or feasible solutions. The Case Worker must refrain from evaluating and clarifying the ideas until the next stage in the process.

Client Responses to Stages 2 and 3

- Difficulty understanding Case Worker's processes
- Denial of problems
- Denial of dependency
- Aggression
- Fright
- Flight
- Acting out
- Ambivalence
- Overwhelmed by problems and pours out concerns to worker

Dealing with Client Responses

- Accept client's defences and work with them not against them
- Demonstrate a professional approach to problem solving
- Pinpoint the problems that concern the client the most
- Clarify how client and worker can work together to tackle the problems
- Acknowledge if the client is working with the Case Worker because of coercion, for example, because of a court referral. Stay with their betrayal, hear it and listen to their story. Do not move on before the client is ready and trust has been established.

Stage 4: Developing a Case Plan

Key Activities of the Case Worker include:

- Clarify the meaning of each proposed solution
- Asking the client which alternatives they prefer
- Exploring the client preferred solutions in terms of positive and negative effects upon themselves and significant others
- Considering the solutions in terms of what the client may want to achieve both in the short and long-term
• Determining the client’s goals

• Working out achievable tasks for the client. Some tasks may need to be shared with the Case Worker. Decide upon these tasks and work out a who, what and when action plan

• Breaking down longer term goals into sub goals or stepping stones to the larger goal

• Working out goals and expressing these in measurable terms so they can be evaluated. The SMART principle can help here (specific, measurable, achievable/appropriate, realistic and time-framed)

**Stage 5: Action Phase**

**Key Activities of the Case Worker include:**

• Reinforcing positive changes with praise and recognition

• Rewarding or celebrating achievements

• Organising sessions to discuss progress and to provide guidance and assistance for the client

**Client Response to Stages 4 and 5**

• Defences are lowered

• Develops a closeness to Case Worker

• Client talks freely about the past

• Client feels safe to ventilate emotions and to recount painful experiences

• May start to model behaviour, speech and dress on the Case Worker

**Dealing with Client Responses**

• Support client through painful recounts

• Offer alternative strategies if planned solutions to problems do not work

• Offer alternative ways of dealing with problems rather than destructive, defensive or resistant behaviours

**Stage 6: Monitor and Review**

**Key Activities of the Case Worker include:**

• Taking time with the client to review the progress of the case plan

• Assessing what is working well and why
• Assessing what isn’t working well and why
• Setting new goals and tasks to reflect this evaluation

**Client Responses**

• As the client moves through this phase, they will begin to separate from the worker and become increasingly independent
• Develops a clearer sense of identify
• Becomes more realistic about problems
• Despite movement forward, the client may experience some regression to previous ineffective behaviours
• Looks better and sounds better

**Dealing with Client Responses**

• Support independence
• Anticipate some regression
• Help to reframe any setbacks - help client identify the learning in the regression and reframe the experience positively. This gives the client permission to make some mistakes and not feel that they have to get new behaviour perfect first time around.

**Stage 7: Termination or Transfer**

**Key Activities of the Case Worker include:**

• At this point, the client prepares to move on because they have reached their goals or to another service which is better able to respond to different or changing needs
• This stage can be a time of celebration of achievement but also some sense of loss for the clients. Time must be allowed for these feelings to be expressed and processed with the Case Worker

**Client Responses**

• Sense of loss or ambivalence
• Memories of past losses may be rekindled
• Depression
• Act out
• May create a crisis to keep Case Worker engaged
• May try to make the worker feel guilty "People always desert me!"
• Dealing with Client Responses
• Prepare for termination in advance
• Help client to discuss the sense of loss
• Review the client's achievements

Source:

• Bolton, Robert 1979 People Skills Prentice Hall New Jersey.