Weighted Problem Solving

A modified version of problem solving to help social workers or clients evaluate solutions.

1.) What is the problem?

Some helpful questions to ask are: What brings you in to see me? What are you hoping to get out of our work together? If you had no problems in your life, what would your life look like?

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2.) What are the needs of each participant?

What needs have to be met to solve the problem? Think holistically (biological, psychological, and sociological).

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3.) What are some solutions that will fit the needs?

Write down whatever comes to mind. This is not a time to evaluate the solutions, it's a time to generate as many as possible.

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4.) Weighted Evaluation:

For each solution, make a pros and cons list. For each item on the list, rate it on a scale from one to five for how important the item is (a one, not very important, to a five, very important). At the end of the exercise, add both the pros and cons lists, then minus the sum of the cons list from that of the pros. If problem solving with more than one person, have each person do this activity separately. Here's a simplified example:

Problem: Car broke down

Need: $500 for repairs

Solutions: Pick up extra shifts, apply for car repair assistance, ask family member for money

Weighted evaluation: Solution

Extra Shifts		Car Repair Assistance		Ask Family Member	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
(3) Can save $ in six weeks	Less time w/ kids (5)	(5) Don't have to pay back	Not sure if eligible (3)	Likely to get immediately (4)	Embarrassment (3)
	Increased childcare expense (4)	(5) Money within 1 week		(5) Interest free	Have to pay back (3)
Pros Total: 3	Cons Total: 9	Pros Total: 10	Cons Total: 3	Pros Total: 9	Cons Total: 6
3-9=-6		10-3= 7		9-6=3	

5.) Pick a solution and implement:
Here is where you analyze how to implement the solution that gained the most points in step four. If more than one person is in on the problem solving, compare how each evaluated the solutions and mediate to pick which one most fits the needs of each member. When considering how to implement a solution, think about the steps that need to be taken, the order they need to be taken in, and the time-limit for each step. Think about barriers to carrying-out the solution and what can be done to overcome barriers. Also, what opportunities are available in implementing the solution and how can they best be taken advantage of?

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6.) Evaluate the chosen solution:

Did the solution work? Did it solve the problem/meet needs? If no, is there another way the solution can be implemented to work? What steps seem to be working and which ones need improvement? It may be necessary to revert back to step four and pick the next high ranking solution. If the solutions don't seem to be working, it may be necessary to reexamine the problem, needs, and/or identify more solutions.

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