**EC-PST Vignettes**

**Toolkit #1: Planful Problem Solving: Fostering Effective Problem-Solving and Use of PST Worksheets**

1. Effectively managing stressful life problems requires a planful approach. The set of skills required to do this require both learning and practice and include four planful problem-solving skills. We teach you these skills and help you practice them in your everyday life by completing PST planful problem-solving worksheets. The four skills are *problem definition, generating alternatives, decision-making and solution implementation and verification.*
2. Through *problem definition,* or the clarifying the nature of a problem, you learn how to set a realistic problem-solving goal, and identify those obstacles that are currently from preventing you from reaching your goals. For example, if you want to raise your GPA, we will figure out a realistic GPA that you can achieve and identify the very real obstacles that are currently preventing you from reaching that.
3. The second one is *generation of alternatives,* in which we teach you to use your creative skills to brainstorm different types of solutions. For example, if you are struggling to talk to your roommate about cleaning up after themselves, you can use the brainstorming tool to discover that there are many ways to get closer to your goal and get past the obstacles in your way.
4. For the third skill (*decision making)* you will learn how to look at the likely consequences of different solution ideas and develop an action plan that is geared toward achieving the problem-solving goal. Using the GPA example again, you can develop an action plan that represents the best solution match for you.
5. The last skill *is solution implementation and verification,* involves carrying out the action plan, monitoring and evaluating the consequences of the plan, and determining whether one’s problem-solving efforts have been successful. Using the roommate example, once you have figured out the best solution, you can carry it out, see what happens, and evaluate if the outcome is what you wanted.

**Toolkit #2: Problem-Solving Multitasking Toolkit: Overcoming Brain Overload**

1. All of the tools in this toolkit are designed to be used to help you organize an overwhelming amount of information with regard to a challenging problem and will be used in conjunction with all the other toolkits.
2. Through “externalization” you will experience how writing things down, recording messages for yourself on your iPhone, or talking through a difficult problem helps you to be less overwhelmed. Try getting the brain overload you are experiencing with a difficult problem “out of your head” and onto paper and you may notice that the thinking part of your brain can better understand and begin to organize this challenging problem or goal. For example, trying to talk to your parents about your current relationship may be really hard. Let’s write down all of the thoughts, feelings, and concerns that are contributing to your experience of being overwhelmed as a way to being to begin to organize all of this information
3. Through visualization, you learn to use visual imagery to help understand and clarify a current problem or goal. One way is to try picturing the problem in your imagination to help you better define it. You can also use visualization to rehearse how you’ll carry out a solution or action plan that you have developed. Finally, you can use visualization to help calm you when you experience strong emotions associated with stress.
4. We teach you the use of “simplification” to break down a large or complex problem to make it more manageable. For example, consider how you would begin to break down a complex situation like getting into medical school into smaller pieces to accomplish one at a time.

**Toolkit #3: Enhancing Motivation for Action: Overcoming Reduced Motivation and Feelings of Hopelessness**

1. When facing a stressful problem or daunting goal, it can be hard to believe that there are ways to effectively manage the stress, reach a goal, or solve the problem. One tool that can help uses visualization in a special way to give you a glimpse of the future. Try imagining what it would be like at a moment in time in the future when a stressful problem you are facing is largely resolved and the obstacles overcome, such as talking making a change in your plan for a career. This won’t immediately solve the problem but will give you an experience of what it would feel like to reach your goal and experience a “light at the end of the tunnel.” We all need a picture in our head of what we are working toward. We will continue to practice doing this together.

**Toolkit # 4: Stop and Slow Down: Overcoming Emotional Dysregulation**

1. This important toolkit is referred to as the “SSTA” method. It stands for:

S = Stop (and be aware of what you are experiencing)

S = Slow down and take a moment to “turn down the volume of strong emotions.” You can take a few deep breaths, or use other techniques, so you can still listen to your feelings which give you important information, but allow your brain to keep working. Ultimately, you will need to think carefully and planfully about an action plan that gives you the best chance of reaching your goals or solving a problem.

Only after reducing intense emotional arousal and “turning down the volume,” can you planfully and carefully,

T = Think, and

A = act.

**Using Tools Together to Complete a PST Worksheet**

P:     So the goal I wrote down is to get my sister to abstain from drinking completely, because I used visualization for motivation to help me picture where I wanted to go with my problem. In my visualization for motivation, I was relaxed, and happy and saw my sister as sober too. But I know that she doesn’t see herself as an “alcoholic” like me.

T:      And it’s really tough if you focus on trying to change her mind. That might be what we call an unrealistic goal. Let’s discuss for a moment the visualization you just described to me with regard to a future point in time when the problem is largely resolved.

P: You mean the part where I was happy and relaxed?

T: Yes. What was going on in this image you had of a future point in time? Describe the scene for me.

P: My sister and I are having coffee and planning a garden at our place and I was thinking “we can actually do this!”

T:      Is it necessary for your roommate to fully embrace abstinence and label herself as alcoholic in order for you to do this project?”

P: No, but I would need to do it with someone reliable, who I could count on, that wouldn’t go on a binge and leave me with the whole project

T: Okay. Have you asked your sister if this is something she would want to do with you and commit to it?

P: Oh, gosh… (starts crying). Here I go, starting to cry

T: This might be a good time to use the Stop and Slow down tool to give you some balance so we can continue to complete the PST worksheet together.

P: Okay…Okay (makes a yoga position with her hands over her head and takes several long breaths with her eyes closed)

“T:      What are these important feelings telling you?

P:     I’m scared she won’t follow through and I’m afraid to tell her that because she may think I don’t trust her and feel bad. . . that’s why I it would be an easier solution of she committed to total sobriety, like me.

T:      Great . . . good insight. Of course, though, that’s just one solution. After we define the problem, list your goals and barriers; we’ll also think of many others and list them on your PST worksheet.