

What is Problem-Solving Therapy?



Problem-solving therapy refers to a psychological treatment that helps to teach you to effectively manage the negative effects of stressful events that can occur in life. Such stressors can be rather large, such as getting a divorce, experiencing the death of a loved one, losing a job, or having a chronic medical illness like cancer or heart disease. Negative stress can also result from the accumulation of multiple “minor” occurrences, such as ongoing family problems, financial difficulties, constantly dealing with traffic jams, or tense relationships with co-workers or a boss. When such stressful problems either create psychological problems or exacerbate existing medical problems, such as coping with cancer or difficulties adhering to a medication regimen, problem-solving therapy may be of help, either as a sole intervention or in combination with other approaches. Problem-solving therapy can also help people who have more complex problems, such as “wanting to find one’s personal meaning of life.” You can work with your psychologist to best determine how problem-solving therapy can be of help to you.

Problem-solving therapy has been found to be *effective* for a wide range of problems, including:

- Major depressive disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Emotional distress
- Suicidal ideation
- Relationship difficulties
- Certain personality disorders
- Poor quality of life and emotional distress related to medical illness, such as cancer or diabetes

Problem-solving therapy can provide training in *adaptive problem-solving skills* as a means of better resolving and/or coping with stressful problems. Such skills include:

- Making effective decisions.
- Generating creative means of dealing with problems.
- Accurately identifying barriers to reaching one’s goals.

In general, the *goals of problem-solving therapy* are to help you to:

- To identify which types of stressors tend to trigger emotions, such as sadness, tension, and anger.
- Better understand and manage negative emotions.
- Become more hopeful about your abilities to deal with difficult problems in life.
- Be more accepting of problems that are unsolvable.
- Be more planful and systematic in the way you attempt to resolve stressful problems.
- Be less avoidant when problems occur.
- Be less impulsive about wanting a “quick fix” solution.

Problem-solving therapy is thought to be an effective therapy approach because it helps people deal more effectively with the wide range of difficulties and stressful problems that occur in everyday living. A large body of scientific evidence indicates that negative stressful events are a significant contributor to health and mental health disorders. Problem-solving therapy is geared to assist individuals cope more effectively with stressful life problems and can therefore decrease psychological and emotional difficulties, as well as improve the quality of life of individuals suffering from a major medical illness.