

EXECUTIVE PLUS/STEP:
MANUALIZATION OF
PROBLEM SOLVING TRAINING AND
EMOTIONAL REGULATION TRAINING
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Problem Solving Workbook

SWAPS Basics

Defining a Problem: Examples

These are examples of a “problem”:

- You need to make a decision, and you don't know what's best.
- You want to visit a new friend, which calls for planning ahead, and you're not sure how.
- Something goes wrong, like you've forgotten your key, and you don't know how to make it right.
- You get overwhelmed, for example at a family gathering, and all you can think of is shouting.
- You've lost focus on what you set out to do; you're not “on task”.
- Something unexpected happens, like your car won't start when you need to get somewhere quickly.
- You experience distress, like finding yourself feeling very sad or angry.
- You harm someone, like hitting a person (for any reason) or calling them names.

S W A P S Worksheet

Initials: _____

Date: _____

Stop! Is there a problem? _____

What is the problem and should I try to solve it?

Alternative solutions?

Pick and Plan

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Satisfied with the outcome?

No, not at all

Somewhat

Mostly

Yes, very

SWAPS Basics

Step One: **STOP!** Is there a problem?

Kinds of changes that may signal problems for you or for anyone – changes in:

- Your emotional state, like noticing that you're nervous or afraid
- Your physical state, like beginning to feel your heart race
- Your cognitive state, like finding yourself confused
- Your income, like losing money on the stock market, or being denied on an application for benefits
- Your health, like getting sick or injured
- Your family life, like getting married or divorced, or having a child
- Other important parts of your life, like losing a job, moving, ending a relationship

Strategies that may help you say STOP!:

Use Time to Your Benefit

- Schedule periodic STOP! moments throughout the day. Ask yourself whether any of the types of changes listed above are going on in your life.
- Set your watch to beep to remind you to STOP!
- Be aware of time: Forgotten an appointment? Does a meal need to get made?
- Ask yourself questions periodically throughout the day:
 - Am I on task?
 - Should I STOP?
 - What goal am I working on now?

Use People to Your Benefit

- Pay attention to people's behaviors and emotional signals that may be saying STOP!
- Ask someone for help by giving you cues to STOP! (a wink, a clearing of the throat or other quiet ways of signaling you)

Use STOP! Logs

- Use STOP! Logs to write down moments during your day when you said STOP!
- Develop a list of situations where you may need to STOP! based on review of your STOP! Logs.
- Identify triggers/causes of problems based on your STOP Logs.

Other Good Ideas

- When you're doing something new for you, be prepared to STOP!
- Take a break for important questions – some call them existential questions, like: “Am I happy with my life? Am I on a good path?”
- Identify Emotional Regulation strategies that help you say STOP!
- Think of SWAPSing and STOP! moments as a life-long undertaking.

SWAPS Basics

Step Two: **W**hat is the problem and should I try to solve it?

- The key idea in Step 2 is clarification. Some people find it useful to first clear their minds, before going further. A few deep breaths can help.
 - One way to proceed is to ask, What is going on right now? If the answer is crystal clear, write it down.
 - If you can't come up with a definition of the problem right away, start by listing all the components or parts of the problem you're trying to define:
 - People involved
 - Sensations you're feeling
 - Emotions you feel
 - Behavior of others, your behavior
 - Triggers/causes
 - Worries you have
 - And, the like
 - Ask yourself, "Is there more to this problem?" Add to your definition of the problem as you go along, especially during Step 3 when you consider solutions.
 - Ask yourself, "Am I focused on the problem I need to address right now?" Make sure you've stayed on track and haven't been sidetracked as you considered how to best define the problem.
 - The final part of Step 2 is deciding if this is a problem you should try to solve. This may not be fully clear until you get to Step 3, but some problems obviously should be taken on right away, while others clearly can't be solved at all.

SWAPS Basics

Step Three: **A**lternative solutions – What are they?

Basic suggestions:

- Write down your ideas; or use a voice recorder.
- Set a time limit, say 15 minutes.
- Be specific.

Key aids to listing as many as possible of the alternative ways to solve the problem:

(1) Stay non-judgmental.

- Write down all the alternative solutions you can think of.
- If you hear yourself saying No to an idea, write it down anyway. That's a practical way of being non-judgmental.
- Don't linger to think at length about what you just wrote; move on to the next idea quickly.
- If you're SWAPSing in the group, don't discuss an idea, just offer it.
- Don't be afraid to list similar or the same things twice, you can eliminate duplicate ideas later.

(2) Reach outside your own mind.

- Review the components of the problem from Step 2.
- If you're doing this in the group, turn to members who haven't contributed and ask, "Any ideas?"
- If you get stuck, take a break or review the components of the problem again.

(3) Think about your goals and priorities in dealing with this situation.

- Ask yourself: "What is my ultimate goal?"
- Refer to the components of the problem and decide if there are priorities in solving the problem.

(4) Relax. The list you generate is not the final step; it's only part of the process.

SWAPS Basics

Step Four: **P**ick and Plan!

Step 4 is really two steps: First you pick what you think is the best way to solve the problem, and then you plan a way to get it done.

Picking the best alternative:

- Write down again your ultimate goal.
- Take each option on your list and ask four questions:
 - Will it help me achieve or at least get closer to my goal?
 - Is it feasible?
 - Can I afford the costs (financial, emotional, cognitive, fatigue, time)?
 - What are the benefits, and do they outweigh the costs?
- Don't be afraid to discard an alternative.
- Be open to unusual alternatives.
- When the list gets shorter, compare one alternative to another, using the four questions.
- If you encounter difficulty, ask for help from someone you trust.
- Pick something! You can always come back to the problem and SWAPS it again.

Planning to get it done:

- What are the actions needed in getting this done?
- If you need to act now or you can take all the actions right now, do it now!
- If you can't do it now or can't take all the actions now, schedule each needed action. Use your Daily Planner to set a date and time.
- If you can't schedule every part of the solution, schedule what you can and place the remaining needed actions on your To Do List.
- If you can't do any of the above, either eliminate it as the "best alternative" and choose another, OR back up to a prior step and re-SWAPS, so that you emerge with a good alternative solution that allows a feasible plan to be developed.

SWAPS Basics

Step Five: **Satisfied?**

After you have carried out Steps 1 to 4, you need to determine if you are satisfied with your plan. If you are not satisfied with your plan, you should repeat Steps 2, 3 or 4 until you are satisfied. If you are satisfied with your plan, you need to carry it out.

After you have done the things that you planned to do to solve the problem, ask yourself if you are satisfied with the outcome. If the problem remains unsolved or gets worse or the situation changes, this is a STOP! moment and you need to go through the SWAPS process again.

Sample SWAPS

Initials: JD

Date: 11/14/2019

1) STOP is there a problem? Having difficulty dealing with unpleasant or distracting stimuli like noise and people or things close to me.

2) What is the problem? And should I try to solve it?

- It makes it difficult for me to concentrate and do mental work
- I get irritable and tense and very impatient
- I have fear and panic and disorientation
- I can't always avoid it
- It is a problem even when there is nothing going on and I don't have a task to do
- My work environment is even more stimulating/distracting than group

3) Alternatives and Options

4) Pick and Plan

1. Make a conscious effort to structure your activities so that you can avoid noise, especially when you are most susceptible	Yes – start this weekend
2. Ask your supervisors at work for a separate space & more noise control/silence	No
3. Use noise cancelling headphones	Yes – start this weekend
4. Avoid noisy environments as much as possible, especially when you need to focus	Yes – already doing
5. Earplugs	No
6. Use a baseball bat to get people out of your way	No
7. Listen to music	No
8. Threaten others who get in your way	No
9. Expose yourself to small amounts of noise gradually	Y – doing in attention training
10. Do an Emotional Cycle	Y – done
11. Listen to a book on tape	No
12. Use relaxation/breathing strategies	Yes – already doing
13. Take breaks from noisy environments	Yes – already doing
14. Use tranquilizers	Yes – will talk to my doctor at my appointment on November 3 rd .

5) Are you Satisfied? Yes.

