

Session 3

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To continue enhancing the family's positive perceptions of themselves and the intervention facilitator.

Objectives: Family members will be able to:

1. Experience appreciation for positive actions/statements made at home or during phone calls between sessions.
2. Demonstrate appreciation to each other for each person's contributions during Session 3.
3. Experience competence through active involvement in exercises during the session.

Goal 2: To create an environment to which the family would want to return because coming to the intervention sessions reduced conflict and minimized blame.

Objectives: Family members will be able to:

1. Identify the problems they are confronting at this time.
2. Relate Feeling Thermometer levels to each problem.
3. Select a problem to solve.
4. Learn the SMART problem-solving steps.
5. Apply the SMART steps to the selected problem.

Rationale

While the first and second sessions established a positive atmosphere in which family problem solving can flourish, the third session begins the process of problem solving itself. First, a step-by-step model of problem solving is presented, and it is in some ways a repetition in different form of the first session outline of what happens in the program. This repetition is intentional, so that the family receives multiple exposures to the message about an orderly process that can be used to resolve difficulties.

The second part of the session is devoted to developing a problem list, connecting that list to feelings using the Feeling Thermometer, and establishing priorities. Here family dysfunctions are minimized through a structured, task-oriented system. The family also functions as a problem-solving team that actually produces a joint product and experiences a success. The process used to build the prioritized problem list encourages individual contributions, reduces conflict, and makes it difficult for the family to become bogged down in power issues.

Support for a positive environment is maintained through the use of tokens and making notes in the family album. The contract to talk on the phone between sessions and the token-giving during those conversations is reviewed. The feeling connection continues to be explored through the Feeling Thermometer. As these families may well experience future crises, the intent is to make this first intervention successful and self-confidence building in hopes that they will return when needed.

Outline of Procedures (Tasks)

1. Review successful positive events, feelings, the homework activity, the use of tokens and the content of Session 2. Nurture a positive family climate.
2. Help the family understand the steps in family problem solving.
3. Identify a list of uncomfortable situations or problems and link to Feeling Thermometer.
4. Relate problems to reasons for running away.
5. Introduce SMART problem-solving steps.
6. Use the Feeling Thermometer to assess each family member's optimal rating for effective problem solving.
7. Identify the first problem to address.
8. Assign homework activities which involve rating three situations using the Feeling Thermometer, and, if applicable, continuing the phone conversations and adding a rating of the level of discomfort after each phone conversation using the Feeling Thermometer.
9. Give appreciation and schedule next appointment.

Materials

- Digital recorder
- Tokens
- Feeling Thermometer
- Family Album
- Newsprint and pens
- Paper and pencils
- **Coping Cards**
- Handouts:
 - **Feeling Thermometer** (Handout 5)
 - **Steps in Family Problem Solving** (Handout 12)
 - **Family Problems List** (Handout 13)
 - **Reasons for Leaving Home** (Handout 14)
 - **SMART Problem Solving Guidelines** (Handout 15)
 - **Applying SMART Problem Solving** (Handout 16)
 - **Rating 3 Situations** (Handout 17)
 - **Family Phone Call and Token Contract** (Handout 7)

Step-by-Step Procedures for Session 3

Task 1: Review Feelings, Tokens, Events, Session 2 and Homework Activities

Welcome and check feelings.

Welcome back. I'm glad to see you here. Thank you for meeting with me again.

I was really impressed with how well you worked last time. Also, it was evident that you care for each other. Could you see that in the last session?

Encourage sharing of positive perceptions of caring.

Remember the Feeling Thermometer?

Distribute copies of the Feeling Thermometer.

Tell me on a scale of zero to 100, where zero is completely comfortable and 100 is very uncomfortable, how do you feel right now?

Obtain readings and give out tokens for the family members' willingness to respond.

You will recall also that we used tokens to express appreciation to each other for the good things we saw people saying and doing or just because we wanted to compliment another family member.

We will use tokens every session. Here is your stack for today.

Give out twenty tokens to each family member. Remember to reward them occasionally for giving a token to someone else.

Review homework activity.

Your homework activity was to continue using the Feeling Thermometer and tokens and to analyze a situation by looking at your beliefs, expectations, rules, roles and perceptions. How did that go?

Encourage responses and use tokens to shape behavior. Ignore negative behavior. Redirect toward desired behavior and reward any small movement toward the desired end. Reinforce any use of the tools discussed in the previous session.

If no problem analysis took place, search for accepting and rewarding things to say. For example, "Wanting to wait until you felt really good at analyzing can be helpful. That way you don't make a rash move without careful planning."

It sounds like you really wanted to do a good job at analyzing a problem situation. Let's hear what else happened at home and in your lives during the past week.

Discuss successful event from past week.

I would like each family member to tell me about a successful event that took place between our last session and today's meeting.

It could be something related to solving a problem at home, preventing a problem from getting

started, something you did you are proud of, or something that makes life better for you.

Go around and have each person report on one event. Give out tokens as appropriate and encourage others to show appreciation for positive things family members did or said.

If someone does not come up with a success, use prompts around different areas—friends, work, achievements. If needed, use prompts that force reports—e.g., “Which are you more pleased with, the amount of effort you spend at work or how well you have been a good example to your children?” If you are still unsuccessful at obtaining a response, you can say, “I appreciate you being honest about how you see things at this time. Such honesty is often hard to find.”

As you know, the purpose of these sessions is to help you live together in a positive and healthy way and to prevent running away.

We do that by showing you how to cope with uncomfortable situations. Last time we focused on analyzing your problem by looking at how beliefs, expectations, family roles and rules, and people’s perceptions influence or get in the way of solving problems. The focus was on changing your thoughts and perceptions in order to solve or cope with uncomfortable situations.

Today, we are going to focus on another tool that can help you in coping with uncomfortable situations.

Before we get into the session, here is your Family Album. Look inside where you listed your family strengths.

Hand them the family album and give them a moment to read the strengths.

Before we get into today’s session I want to let you know that if you attempt to solve a problem following this program’s guidance and you don’t succeed, it is not a failure. You are still trying and it shows that you care for each other. Eventually, you will succeed. It takes practice.

You did a great job last time, and this session should be a good one today.

Task 2: Understanding the Steps in Family Problem Solving

Begin to review problem-solving steps.

Do you remember some of the factors that keep a person from running away?

Obtain family members’ ideas and give out tokens for close approximations.

The factors are feeling good about oneself, being able to recognize your feelings in upsetting situations, having a plan to fix these situations, knowing people who can help you, and agreeing to control runaway actions.

I’d like to review the first three steps on this handout with you.

*Distribute **Steps in Family Problem Solving** (Handout 12).*

NOTE: Review only Steps 1 through 3 because those are steps that you have already worked on. If needed, remind the family of the list of family strengths.

These are some important steps to take when you are trying to cope with a problem or an uncomfortable situation. The first three steps are things that we have already done together.

Step 1 focuses on creating a positive working atmosphere. As you start thinking about your problems, it is important to maintain a positive atmosphere because this will allow you to work on problems in a calmer and smoother manner.

What are some ways that we can create and maintain a positive atmosphere today as we start talking about problems?

Encourage responses. Praise members for their suggestions by giving tokens.

Those were some great ideas. Thank you. I can see that you care about each other and want to maintain a positive environment as we talk about things that may be uncomfortable. Please try to keep these things in mind when you try to solve problems at home together as well.

Write responses on newspaper.

NOTE: If it's not brought up by family members, highlight the following: stay connected to family strengths and what the family members appreciate and like about each other; stay connected to optimal Feeling Thermometer ratings; give each other tokens for positive words or actions.

Step 2 asks that you identify a current uncomfortable situation and rate your feelings about it. We have been doing this all along. This is important because we want to be clear on what it is that's bringing up your Feeling Thermometer and where your Feeling thermometer is. We will do more of this today.

Step 3 is what we focused on last week. As we discussed, one way to cope with uncomfortable situations is to look at how thoughts, beliefs, family roles and rules, expectations and perceptions affect the situation. You want to consider if there is any way to change your thinking about the situation. Remember, when we have happy and helpful thoughts, the Feeling Thermometer goes down.

Today we are going to work on **Step 4**. I will be introducing you to a new skill called SMART and then we will apply it to a current problem in your life.

Task 3: Identify Uncomfortable Situations and Link to Feeling Thermometer

*Distribute the **Family Problems List** (Handout 13) and pencils.*

We have been talking about uncomfortable situations in your lives in the past two sessions. Let's make a new list right now so that we can pick from this list and work on solving one problem at a time.

What are some of the stressors or problems you are facing right now as a family? Please write down three to four family problems or situations that put you between 40 and 100 on the Feeling Thermometer. These can be the same or different as the things we've talked about in the last two sessions.

Please try to be clear and specific. For example, rather than simply saying, "We don't get

along,” say what it is you don’t you get along about. For example, “We disagree about [TEEN’S NAME] going out with [NAME OF GIRLFRIEND/BOYFRIEND].” Try to state the problem in one sentence.

Allow a few minutes for each family member to complete the list on their own.

Family Problem List Example	Rating
1. Mom yells at me to keep my room clean.	50
2. I am flunking math.	90
3. My father doesn’t like my friend Alex.	65
4. My mother is too nosy about my boyfriend.	80
5. My mother wants me to be in too early on the weekend.	80
6. I want some spending money each week. My parents say they can’t afford it.	70

Now let’s go around and each person give me one problem at a time. I’ll write them on newsprint. If someone has already given a problem on your list, go on to the next one.

Select a person to start. Go around obtaining one problem at a time. Do not duplicate. Number the problems as you write them on the newsprint. Try to use the family member’s words, but help clarify the problem before putting it up on newsprint. If you change the wording, ask the family member if this new way of phrasing the problem is OK. Keep going around until there are no more problems to list.

NOTE: *The family members may list the same basic problem but perceive it very differently. For example, suppose the problem is that the teen stays out past the time that has been set for a curfew. Dad sees the teen as irresponsible and immature. Mom believes the behavior is because the teen doesn’t love her. Older brother thinks his sister stays out too late because her boyfriend is a bad influence. The teen doesn’t consider her time of arrival as “late” because all her friends come in at that time. When problems are being discussed, the facilitator can reframe the problem definition so that the problem is stated in terms of behaviors—what people can observe—rather than forcing family members to agree with the interpretations of others. If too many problems are unclear and you are running short on time, move on to the next activity. You can work on clarifying the problem as you go.*

That’s a good list.

You can see the problems that your family has come up with and how much discomfort these problems cause for the different members of the family. Some problems are more uncomfortable than others.

Next we want to figure out which problem you would like to work on first. Perhaps we can start with one that put you between 40 and 60 on the Feeling Thermometer.

Before we do that, I want to know one thing: are these problems clear to you?

If anyone is confused about a problem, seek clarification from all the family members until a consensus arises.

Great work! We will come back to this list in just a little bit.

Task 4: Relate Problems to Reasons for Running Away.

Your family is not alone. Here is a list of common reasons teenagers run away from home.

*Distribute **Reasons for Leaving Home** (Handout 14) to family members. Review the reasons on the handout, allowing family members to identify things that are similar to the problems on their family list. If reviewing the list causes family members to name additional family problems, add these to the newsprint list and gather Feeling Thermometer Ratings on each one.*

Give out tokens to acknowledge the family's work in identifying problems.

Now we can see what the top issues are for your family. Before the end of our session today, we'll be choosing one of these things to work on first.

Clarify and discuss. Give out tokens.

*Refer back to the **Steps in Family Problem Solving** handout.*

We have worked so far on creating a positive atmosphere and coming up with a list of family problems to deal with. These are the first two steps in problem solving.

Ask a family member to record the top problems in the family album.

Will you please write in the family album what the top problems are?

This list will remind you how to go about finding the areas your family wants to work on.

Task 5: Introduce the SMART Problem-Solving Model.

*Distribute **SMART Problem Solving Guidelines** (Handout 15).*

I would like to introduce you now to what we call SMART problem solving. SMART problem solving refers to brainstorming different choices and selecting the best one.

Sometimes you can change a situation if you look at the different choices that you have for ways to handle it and then choose the best option. For instance, you may be stressed because you don't have a job. You want to be employed. There may be different steps that you can take to change the situation—for example, tell everyone you know you are looking for a job, look online, go to different stores and apply, etc.

To get us started, let's go over the steps on the **SMART Problem Solving Guidelines** to be sure we are clear on all of them. We are going to follow these steps in planning a solution to some of the problems you are facing.

Explain the five steps for SMART Problem-Solving.

NOTE: Step 3 in the SMART model is more elaborated in this text versus the handout provided to family members in order to provide more information for the facilitator to review with the family.

Step 1: S = State the problem.

- Is the problem stated clearly? (Writing it down will help you define it clearly.)
- What's your rating on the Feeling Thermometer when you think about the problem?

Step 2: M = Make a goal.

- Exactly what do you want to accomplish? What do you want to change from the way it is now?
- Is the goal stated clearly?
- Is it specific, so you can for sure tell when you have achieved it? (Again, writing it down will help.)

Step 3: A = Actions. List the actions you might take to achieve the goal and the pros and cons of each possible action.

- When you are trying to solve a problem, try to come up with a bunch of solutions. It's best to have at least three actions to choose from if possible.
- Then ask yourself if each action is stated clearly.
- Once you list the options, then you want to look at the pluses and minuses of each possibility.

Here is an example:

Louise thinks she might be pregnant, but she is afraid to tell her mother.

One solution she came up with was to get tested to see if she really is pregnant. A plus for getting tested is that she would know if she was, in fact, pregnant before she told anyone.

Minuses are that she doesn't know where to go to get tested, the doctor's visit might cost money she doesn't have, and the doctor might tell her mother.

Another option Louise came up with was telling her mother. A plus is that her mother would know what to do and could help her find out for sure. Louise believes her mother would want to protect her. But minuses are that her mother also would be furious with her; her mother would ground her and stop her from seeing her boyfriend; and her mother would make Louise work to pay for any bills that were involved.

Is this clear? Have you got the idea of how it works?

Answer any questions.

Let's go on with the steps.

Step 4: R = Reach a decision about which actions you could take.

- What is the best course of action, the one with the most pros and the fewest cons?
- What is going to be your plan for taking the action? What are the specific steps?
- What things can get in the way of taking this action and being successful with it? Is there anything you know about for sure that will make it difficult? Is there anything that might go wrong?
- What are your plans for dealing with these barriers, so they don't keep you from taking the action you want to?

Step 5: T = Try it and review it.

- Did the action work out as you expected? Completely? Partly?
- Would you do anything differently if you were starting again?
- Do you need to find a new action that will move you forward toward achieving your goal?

I know that was a lot of information. Please don't feel as if you have to remember it all. We will practice each of these steps together so it will be clear, and you will have a worksheet to help you.

Task 6: Assess Optimal Feeling Thermometer Ratings for Effective Problem-Solving.

I would like to ask you one more question before we move on to the next activity. You remember that in our first session I asked each of you where you need to be on the Feeling Thermometer to be at your best? Does everyone remember his or her number?

Ask family members to share. Give out tokens.

NOTE: Family members can keep the same general optimal performance number given in the first session or change their rating.

Now, where do you need to be on the Feeling Thermometer for you to be able to apply these SMART problem-solving steps?

Facilitate a discussion about the impact a high level of discomfort has on SMART problem solving.

Typically, extreme discomfort, and sometimes extreme comfort, may cause us to "jump into" an action. So it is important to try to be at our "best rating" when we are trying to solve a stressor or problem.

Are each of you at your optimal point right now in order to problem solve? Where is your Feeling Thermometer right now?

If family members are within their ideal ratings, continue with the SMART activity. If not, spend some time helping family members come back to ideal level. This may include doing breathing exercises, taking a break or any other immediate coping skill they can use at that moment.

Task 7: Identify the First Problem to Address

OK, now let's choose from one of the problems on your list to practice SMART problem solving. We will follow the steps and apply them to this problem.

*Help the family identify a problem to solve. Distribute the **Applying SMART Problem Solving** handout (Handout 16).*

Now that you have learned what the SMART model means, let's apply it to the specific problem you identified as a family. It's important to remember that this is not a moment to see who is at fault, it is an activity to learn to be proactive about solutions.

Work through each of the steps, applying the questions to the specific problem identified by the family.

Be mindful of each family member's feeling thermometer level and guide them in every step. If family goes on a tangent, redirect them to the SMART model.

That was very good. I'm sure these ideas are going to help you in working on this problem. SMART Problem Solving is a skill you can use in many different situations.

NOTE: If there is time left, you can apply SMART to another problem from the family list.

Task 8: Assign the Homework Activities

Explain homework assignments.

*Assign the first homework activity, by distributing a second copy of the **Applying SMART Problem Solving** handout.*

This is the same form we just completed. For this week's homework, I would like you to continue applying SMART to a problem. The problem can be one we listed earlier today or something new.

Assign the second homework activity.

I would also like you to use the Feeling Thermometer to rate three situations. These three situations could be situations that come up in the family between now and when we meet again, or they could be situations that have happened recently that are still bothering you.

(If the teen is not living at home yet) Since you may not have as much contact with each other while [TEEN'S NAME] is in the shelter, you can include situations that came up recently, perhaps before [TEEN'S NAME] ran away or came to the shelter. You could also use situations that occur during phone conversations you have with each other during the week. You'll rate a total of three situations.

*Distribute **Rating 3 Situations** (Handout 17).*

When we come back together, I would like to know what Feeling Thermometer levels you experienced (or think you would experience) for each of these situations.

Distribute a Feeling Thermometer to each person and answer any questions about the homework.

Assign phone conversations (if applicable).

As part of keeping the positive feelings going, you're going to continue the phone conversations and giving "verbal tokens" during the week until we meet again.

Here is your new contract.

*Distribute copies of the **Family Phone Call and Token Contract**. If it worked for parents to call the adolescent last time, continue that strategy. Otherwise, make adjustments that address any problems the family had in completing the phone conversations the previous week.*

What are two conversations you'd like to have this coming week? Let's prepare ahead for at least two days.

We're going to add one more thing to do this week. After each conversation, write your rating on the Feeling Thermometer in the last column. How uncomfortable or comfortable was the conversation for you?

Remember, 100 is the most uncomfortable, and zero is no discomfort at all. "Uncomfortable" can refer to many different feelings, such as angry, nervous, scared, unsettled—and "comfortable" can refer to many positive feelings such as happy, relaxed, satisfied, etc.

Any questions?

Answer any questions family members may have.

Task 9: Give Appreciation and Schedule Next Appointment.

I want to end up today's session with giving appreciation to family members. I'll start...

Give a compliment to each person. Ideas include appreciation for being active, insightful, hardworking, open, analytic, supportive, friendly, warm and understanding. Make sure your compliments are genuine.

Then encourage the family members to show appreciation and give tokens.

You really worked hard today on selecting problems, finding out what feeling levels go with them, and working through the SMART problem-solving steps.

You are a great family. I really enjoy working with you.

Thank you very much for all your effort, your strengths, and the way you care for each other.

I will see you next time on _____ (date) at _____ (time). Please remember to give me at least 24 hours' notice if you need to cancel our session.

Thank you.

END OF SESSION 3