Annexure 13: Help Your Client Make a Plan

Source: Kustner, 2011

Problem-solving: The Traffic Light Model: Stop, Think, Go

The traffic-light problem-solving model is a useful way to approach problematic situations. Sometimes people rush into ‘solving’ problems without thinking of the pros and cons of their actions. This model encourages people to stop, think and then act; thereby they make informed and well thought-out decisions in solving their problems.

**Stop**
Define the Problem: This is the most important step in the problem-solving model, and often requires the most time in counselling. This step involves gathering information and clarifying. It also involved breaking what seems to be a huge problem into its various parts or sub-problems (sometimes called partialising).

**Think**
Explore all Options: This step involves exploring all possible options to solve the problem (or, to start with, just one part of the problem, perhaps something that is reasonably achievable). Encourage the client to brainstorm as many solutions to their problem as possible, even if they seem silly. Continue until all ideas are exhausted. It is important that you as counsellor do not have a preconceived idea on what the solution should be.

**Do**
Look at alternatives and consider the consequences of each idea generated from the above brainstorming. Ask clients to look at the pros and cons of each solution. Usually the best solution is the one with the most advantages.

**Do**

**Select an Option, Make a Plan and Take Action:** Encourage the client to select the most effective option, according to whether it is practical, appropriate and realistic. Be patient and gently support the client to make their choice.

**Develop a Plan:** Ask the client to think about how they can put their choice into action. Ask who, what, when, how, and where questions so that the plan is specific, achievable, realistic and within a time-frame. It is sometimes helpful if the client writes their plan down.

**Take Action:** Acknowledge that this step is usually the most difficult for people. To help build the client’s confidence, it can be helpful to start with an action where the client has a relatively good chance of succeeding. Using role-play to ‘practice’ what the client will do and say and to anticipate possible reactions can also be helpful. Reassure the client that you will explore the outcome in the next session.

**Evaluate:** This is an important opportunity to see what worked, what didn’t work and why. Reassure clients that if they don’t succeed, to try, try again!

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**Information Every Counsellor Should Have**

To help the client evaluate options, you must have accurate and up-to-date information about.

- HIV/AIDS and STIs;
- Identity, gender and sexuality;
- Referral services available;
- Legal and human rights and an understanding of methods of redressing rights violations; and
- Community support services.