SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

Trauma Recovery Innovations
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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SPR Field Operations Guide, National Center for PTSD and National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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Mollie Forrester, Rebecca Sladek, & Rosemary Whitright
TRAINING OUTLINE

Background and Rationale

Components
   Assessment
   Core Skills

Wrap-Up and Application

SPR BACKGROUND
Our primary task in this crisis is to promote resilience.

Remember that resilience is the most common outcome of crises.

SPR is an intervention to promote resilience.

SPR’s goals reflect this focus, including...

- Protecting mental health
- Enhancing ability to address one’s own needs
- Teaching skills to promote recovery
- Preventing maladaptive behaviors
SPR is not a treatment for mental health disorders.

It is NOT:

- Therapy
- Focused on pathology
- Psychodynamic or psychoanalytic exploration
- Debriefing

SPR is an evidence-informed, flexible intervention.

SPR’s principles and techniques are:

- Based on research on trauma, risk, & resilience
- Applicable to & practical in a variety of settings
- Appropriate for people & families across the lifespan
- Culturally aware
SPR is different from Psychological First Aid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological First Aid</th>
<th>Skills for Psychological Recovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addresses safety concerns</td>
<td>Presumes physical safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered during or right after the crisis</td>
<td>Delivered in later phases of crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically one session</td>
<td>Typically multiple sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on stabilization</td>
<td>Focused on teaching specific skills</td>
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SPR is appropriate for many, but not all.

- People in **chronic phase** of crisis
- Not a **danger** to self/others
- Not acutely **psychotic** or severely **cognitively disabled**
### SPR draws on good listening and clinical skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🎧</td>
<td>Active listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❤️</td>
<td>Empathy and validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🏋️‍♂️</td>
<td>Emphasizing and building strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🌍</td>
<td>Cultural awareness &amp; humility</td>
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### SPR has some similarities to cognitive behavioral therapy.

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<tr>
<td>🕒</td>
<td>Focuses on the present moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📚</td>
<td>Emphasizes skill building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🖤</td>
<td>Assumes that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are connected</td>
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</table>
SPR includes 5 individually-tailored skill modules.

Skill 1: Building Problem-Solving Skills
Skill 2: Promoting Positive Activities
Skill 3: Managing Reactions
Skill 4: Promoting Helpful Thinking
Skill 5: Rebuilding Healthy Social Connections

The course of SPR is both flexible and structured.

First session: Introductions, assessment & planning, teach & practice a skill

Follow-up sessions: Review homework, re-assess, teach & practice a skill

Complete 1-5 sessions as needed.
**Structure of first session**

*Introduce self and SPR*

- Collaborative **assessment and skill selection**

*Teach new skill:*
1. **Present** rationale for new skill
2. **Teach & practice** new skill
3. **Assign homework**

→ **Summarize & discuss follow-up**

**Structure of follow-up sessions**

*Review homework (practicing skill)*

- Collaborative **assessment and skill selection**

*Use same skill:*
1. **Review** skill rationale
2. **Apply** skill to new domain
3. **Assign homework**

*Teach new skill:*
1. **Present** rationale for new skill
2. **Teach & practice** new skill
3. **Assign homework**

→ **Summarize & discuss follow-up**
Structure of final session

Review *homework* (practicing skill)

- Review *rationale* for skills taught
- Review *accomplishments* and areas for *continued practice*
- Discuss what to do *if they need more help* in the future

**ASSESSMENT**
STEP 1: Identify needs and concerns.

*Rationale:* After a crisis there are numerous demands and concerns. Gathering information is needed to target support.

- Does the person need a referral to a higher level or different type of care?
- What are the person’s main needs, concerns, and priorities?

**WHEN TO MAKE A REFERRAL**

- Primary concern is physical health
- Immediate safety need(s)
- Acute psychosis or cognitive impairment
- Acute mental health disorder
STEP 2: Prioritize areas to address.

“What do you want to work on?”

“Which problem is bothering you most?”

“Is there one that’s getting worse?”

“Is there one we need to deal with sooner than the others?”

“Are you preparing for something that we can help you plan for?”

STEP 3: Collaboratively make an action plan.

Choose the most appropriate SPR skill(s)

Agree on a tentative number of meetings

Make referrals if needed
### SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

#### SKILL SELECTION TOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenting Concern</th>
<th>Primary Skill</th>
<th>Secondary Skill</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A difficult but solvable problem</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Social Connections, Helpful Thinking</td>
</tr>
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<td>Intense or repeatedly upsetting reactions</td>
<td>Managing Reactions</td>
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<td>Not knowing how to connect with friends or family</td>
<td>Social Connections</td>
<td>Healthy Activities, Helpful Thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not having enough people that care about them</td>
<td>Social Connections</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling depressed, sad, or withdrawn</td>
<td>Healthy Activities</td>
<td>Problem Solving, Social Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upsetting thoughts that make them feel bad or stop them from having more positive thoughts</td>
<td>Helpful Thinking</td>
<td>Managing Reactions, Healthy Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A serious physical, mental health, or substance abuse problem</td>
<td>Problem Solving (with referral)</td>
<td>Social Connections, Helpful Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant current hardships or adversities</td>
<td>Problem Solving (with referral)</td>
<td>Social Connections, Helpful Thinking</td>
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#### CORE SKILL 1:

**Building Problem-Solving Skills**
WHEN TO USE

“I’m really overwhelmed.”

“I feel so helpless.”

“I’m demoralized.”

“I feel like I don’t have any control over my situation.”

CASE EXAMPLE

“I’m really overwhelmed.”
Rationale: Structured problem-solving helps when overwhelmed

“People can feel overwhelmed by their problems after a crisis.”

“Problem-solving is a helpful skill that you can learn!”

“I’d like to show you four steps that can help you solve problems.”

“This approach can get you better solutions and make you feel more in control and competent.

STEP 1: Define the problem/decide ownership.

Describe the problem concretely and in detail.

“I’m working 12-hour days and can’t get my notes done. I’m exhausted and overwhelmed.”

“I talked to my supervisor about cutting back, but we just don’t have the coverage.”
STEP 1: Define the problem/decide ownership.

If the problem is complex, break it down into manageable chunks and pick one.

- Getting notes done
- Working 12-hour days
- Lack of attending support
- Feelings of exhaustion

STEP 1: Define the problem/decide ownership.

Is this...

- A problem that the person is having? Person can work to solve it
- A problem that someone else is having? Someone else needs to work to solve it
STEP 2: Set the goal.

Clarify needs and concerns

“I want __________________________”
“I need __________________________”
“I feel concerned that _______________”
“I am afraid that ___________________”

STEP 2: Set the goal.

“I want to be able to finish most of my notes before leaving work”
“I need to have more time in the day where I can feasibly write notes”
“I feel concerned that I won’t be able to get time between patients”
“I am afraid that my supervisor won’t have my back”
STEP 3: Brainstorm.

Write down all possible options.

- Come in a little earlier and stay a little later
- Talk to supervisor about what to do
- Spend 5 minutes writing notes between patients
- Make more efficient Epic templates

STEP 4: Evaluate and choose the best solutions.

- Come in a little earlier and stay a little later

**PROS**
- Get more notes done
- Doesn’t rely on patient load being light

**CONS**
- Get less sleep
- Get less time to decompress
CORE SKILL 2: Promoting Positive Activities

WHEN TO USE

“I’ve been feeling really down-I just don’t feel excited about things anymore.”

“My routine has gone out the window.”

“I don’t get to do anything I like anymore.”
CASE EXAMPLE

“I’ve been feeling really down - I just don’t feel excited about things anymore.”

Rationale: Positive activities improve mood & sense of control

“A crisis can really mess up your routine and make you feel bad.”

“It can be hard to do things that make you feel good and things that are important to you.”

“I’d like to show you how to get back to doing those things or find new things to do.”

“This approach can help you feel better and more in control.”
STEP 1: Identify and plan one or more activities.

Review a list of activities.

- Create
  - Draw a picture
  - Paint a portrait
  - Take a photograph
- Doodle / sketch
- Organise photographs
- Make a photograph album
- Start a scrapbook
- Finish a project
- Do some sewing / knitting

- Kindness
  - Help a friend / neighbor / stranger
  - Make a gift for someone
  - Try a random act of kindness
  - Do someone a favour
  - Teach somebody a skill
  - Do something nice for someone
  - Plan a surprise for someone
  - Make a list of your good points
  - Make a list of things or people you are grateful for

- Plan
  - Set a goal
  - Create a budget
  - Make a 5 year plan
  - Make a ‘to do’ list
  - Make a ‘bucket list’
  - Make a shopping list

- Write
  - Write a letter with compliments
  - Write a letter to your politician
  - Write an angry letter
  - Write a grateful letter
  - Write a ‘Thank you’ card
  - Write a journal / diary
  - Write your CV
  - Start writing a book

- Self care
  - Take a bath
  - Take a shower
  - Wash your hair
  - Give yourself a facial
  - Trim your nails
  - Sunbathe (wear sunscreen)
  - Take a nap

Have the person generate ideas, considering pre-COVID activities:

- Take a Zoom exercise class
- Have a backyard picnic
- Read a new novel
- Plan a vacation

STEP 2: Schedule activities in a calendar.

Help the person consider things that increase the likelihood that they will do each activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Weds</th>
<th>Thurs</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
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CORE SKILL 3: Managing Reactions
WHEN TO USE

“I’m having nightmares about a patient.”

“Whenever I even think about going back to the ICU, I panic.”

“When I think about what happened, I can’t stop crying.”

CASE EXAMPLE

“I’m having nightmares about a patient.”

“Whenever I even think about going back to the ICU, I panic.”

“When I think about what happened, I can’t stop crying.”
Rationale: Feeling your feelings helps with reminders

“Having strong reactions to reminders of the crisis is normal.”

“Finding healthy ways to feel your feelings about the hard thing that happened can help the reactions get better.”

“Over time, using these strategies can improve your self-confidence, functioning, and your coping strategies.”

STEP 1: Identify distressing reactions and their triggers.

Pick the most distressing reaction.

“I’m having nightmares about a patient.”

“Whenever I even think about going back to the ICU, I panic.”

“When I think about what happened, I can’t stop crying.”
STEP 1: Identify distressing reactions and their triggers.

Discuss triggers for that reaction.

- Watching the news
- Talking to friends
- Morbidity & mortality review

“When I think about what happened, I can’t stop crying.”

STEP 2: Teach skills to address distressing reactions.

Skill 1: Breathing

Get comfortable
Breathe in through your nose for 5, expanding your belly
Hold for 5
Exhale slowly for 7 while you say a soothing word
STEP 2: Teach skills to address distressing reactions.

Skill 2: Writing Exercise
- Set aside 30 minutes
- Write about whatever is distressing you
- Give yourself space to feel your emotions
- Consider the things you did to help yourself or others
- Repeat, building in new helpful thoughts

STEP 3: Create a plan to manage a distressing reaction.

Practice good, culturally-aware self-care to reduce your reactivity to triggers.
- Meet basic needs (eating, sleeping, health)
- Regularly do positive activities
- Talk to social supporters about feelings
STEP 3: Create a plan to manage a distressing reaction.

Have a plan to deal with triggers as they come up.

- Differentiate between the current trigger & the past event
- Can also use helpful thinking core skill
- Write about how you feel

Give yourself time to recover after the trigger

- Use the breathing skill or practice relaxation
- Do a positive activity
- Talk to social supporters about how you feel
CORE SKILL 4: Promoting Helpful Thinking

WHEN TO USE

“I’ll never feel better.”

“It was my fault that that patient died - I should have done more.”

“Our efforts were for nothing.”
CASE EXAMPLE

“Our efforts were for nothing.”

Rationale: Changing thoughts changes mood and reactions

“Having negative thoughts related to what happened is normal.”

“These negative thoughts can lead to negative emotions and bodily reactions.”

“I’d like to show you four steps to help you address unhelpful thoughts.

“This can change your thinking and help your mood and bodily reactions.”
STEP 1: Identify unhelpful thoughts.

Situation $\rightarrow$ Painful Emotions

*Ask:* What thought goes along with the situation & emotions?

Situation $\rightarrow$ Thoughts $\rightarrow$ Painful Emotions

See a news story about COVID cases going up

“Our efforts were for nothing.”

Despair, sadness
STEP 2: Identify helpful thoughts.

Ask yourself: What would be more helpful thoughts? What would I say to a friend in this situation? What do I have control over?

Our efforts helped save some people’s lives.

I can’t control other people’s behavior.

STEP 2: Identify helpful thoughts.

Watch out for Pollyanna thoughts!

I’ll be fine!

Cheer up—things aren’t that bad.
STEP 3: Rehearse helpful thoughts.

Imagine the trigger situation and say the helpful thought **out loud**.

Imagine hearing about cases going up → “I can’t control other people’s behavior. My efforts did help save some people’s lives.”

STEP 4: Assign practice of helpful thoughts.

Next time you’re in a trigger situation, **practice the thought**.

Hear about cases going up → “I can’t control other people’s behavior. My efforts did help save some people’s lives.”
CORE SKILL 5:
Rebuilding Healthy Social Connections

WHEN TO USE
“\textit{I miss my family so much.}”
“\textit{I really wish I could do more to help others.}”
“\textit{I don’t have anyone to talk to when I’m stressed.}”
CASE EXAMPLE

“I don’t have anyone to talk to when I’m stressed.”

Rationale: Reflecting on support helps ensure needs are met

“Social support can be a big source of strength after a crisis.”

“It can be helpful to reflect on your resources and needs regarding social support.”

“I’d like to go through an exercise together to help you reflect on this.”

“This can help make sure you’re getting your emotional and practical needs met.”
STEP 1: Make a social connections map.

- Robert (friend)
- Luz (girlfriend)
- Jamie (mom)
- Reggie (friend)
- Jenn (coworker)
- Kathleen (sister)

STEP 2: Review the social connections map.

Who are your most important connections right now?
STEP 2: Review the social connections map.

With whom can you share your feelings?

With whom do you want to be in touch in the next couple weeks?
STEP 2: Review the social connections map.

Who might need your help or support right now?

Consider who and what is missing or needs to be changed.

Reach out more

Someone else to share feelings with
STEP 3: Make a social support plan.

Reach out to Reggie to support him.

Check in regularly with Kathleen, Robert, Jamie, and Luz.

Talk to Kathleen when upset.

Reach out to Jenn more.

LAST THOUGHTS & RESOURCES
Managing acute distress can promote long-term resilience.

*We intervene to:*

Build capacity to face crises with tolerable levels of distress.

Build resilience to surges

---

Managing acute distress can promote long-term resilience.

*We intervene to:*

Build capacity to face crises with tolerable levels of distress.

Build resilience to surges
What it means to be resilient.

“It’s to be adapting and accommodating, rather than resistant to, the suffering. I think that’s what it is to live through hardship for sustained periods of time.”

- Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Columbia University

New York Times, April 21, 2020

RESOURCES

Skills for Psychological Recovery Field Guide:
https://www.nctsn.org/resources/skills-for-psychological-recovery

Skills for Psychological Recovery Online Training:
https://www.nctsn.org/resources/skills-psychological-recovery-spr-online

UW Department of Psychiatry COVID Resources:
https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/

This American Life Episode about COVID in Detroit:
https://www.thisamericanlife.org/709/the-reprieve
**Skills for Psychological Recovery**

**Skill Selection Tool**

Skills for Psychological Recovery is a program that uses skill modules to build resilience and enhance coping following a disaster. It is usually offered in 1-4 sessions. The full manual and worksheets for each skill are available at tiny.cc/vemod.

**Presenting Concern** | **Primary Skill** | **Secondary Skill**
--- | --- | ---
Adverse but soluble problem | Problem Solving | Social Connections, Helpful Thinking
Intense or repeatedly upsetting reactions | Managing Reactions | Social Connections, Helpful Thinking
Not knowing how to connect with family members | Problem Solving | Social Connections, Helpful Thinking
Not having enough people that care about them | Social Connections | Helpful Activities, Social Connections
Feeling depressed, sad, or withdrawn | Social Connections | Helpful Activities, Problem Solving
Unsettling thoughts that make them feel bad or stop them from having more positive thoughts | Helpful Thinking | Managing Reactions, Helpful Activities
A serious physical, mental health, or substance abuse problem | Problem Solving (with therapist) | Social Connections, Helpful Thinking
Significant current hardships or adversities | Problem Solving (with therapist) | Social Connections, Helpful Thinking

**Skill Summary**

Skills for Psychological Recovery is a program that uses skill modules to build resilience and enhance coping following a disaster. It is usually offered in 1-4 sessions. The full manual and worksheets for each skill are available at tiny.cc/vemod.

**Conduct an assessment.**
1. Identify needs and concerns
2. Prioritize areas to address
3. Collaboratively make an action plan
4. Teach skills to address distressing reactions
5. Create a plan for distressing reactions

**Build problem-solving skills.**
1. Define the problem and decide ownership
2. Assess the situation
3. Develop a list of possible solutions
4. Evaluate and choose the best solutions
5. Monitor progress and adjust as necessary

**Promote healthy activities.**
1. Identify and plan one or more activities
2. Schedule activities in a calendar
3. Help the client consider things that will increase the likelihood that they will do what they can help them
4. Evaluate and choose the best solutions
5. Monitor progress and adjust as necessary

**Promote healthy thinking.**
1. Identify unhelpful thoughts
2. Identify helpful thoughts
3. Relate unhelpful thoughts to what they say that helps or stops them having more positive thoughts

**Promote helpful thinking.**
1. Identify unhelpful thoughts
2. Identify helpful thoughts
3. Relate unhelpful thoughts to what they say that helps or stops them having more positive thoughts

**Rebuild social connections.**
1. Develop a social connections map
2. Review the social connections map
3. Make a social support plan

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**Skills for Psychological Recovery**

**Cheat Sheet**

Skills for Psychological Recovery is a program that uses collaborative assessment and five individually-tailored skill modules to build resilience and enhance coping following a disaster. It is usually offered in 1-4 sessions, depending on the needs of the client. This cheat sheet was developed based on the resources developed by the National Center for PTSD and the National Center for Traumatic Stress at the National Institute of Mental Health. The worksheets for each skill are available at tiny.cc/vemod.

**Conduct an assessment.**
1. Identify needs and concerns
2. Prioritize areas to address
3. Collaboratively make an action plan
4. List skills to address distressing reactions
5. Create a plan for distressing reactions

**Build problem-solving skills.**
1. Define the problem and decide ownership
2. Assess the situation
3. Develop a list of possible solutions
4. Evaluate and choose the best solutions
5. Monitor progress and adjust as necessary

**Promote healthy activities.**
1. Identify and plan one or more activities
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