# POOCH OVERVIEW

POOCH is a problem solving process that can be used in any number of different contexts. It is a broad framework that can be applied to intentional conversations with young people who are asking for help with an issue of concern. Each stage of the process has certain questions that need to be addressed before moving on to the next stage, although it is not uncommon to move back and forward through the stages as the process progresses.

The POOCH process is like a funnel. Often, a young person comes to ask for help with a problem they are experiencing. As they talk about it they begin to feel better and get some clarity, often resulting in a plan of action. Through this process the listener gains an understanding of the person and the problem, placing themselves in a better position to be of help. Once there is a shared and agreed understanding of the problem the various options available and the possible outcomes of each option can be explored. Then a choice or plan can be made to try this solution. The plan can then be carried out and the progress of this reviewed at a later time.
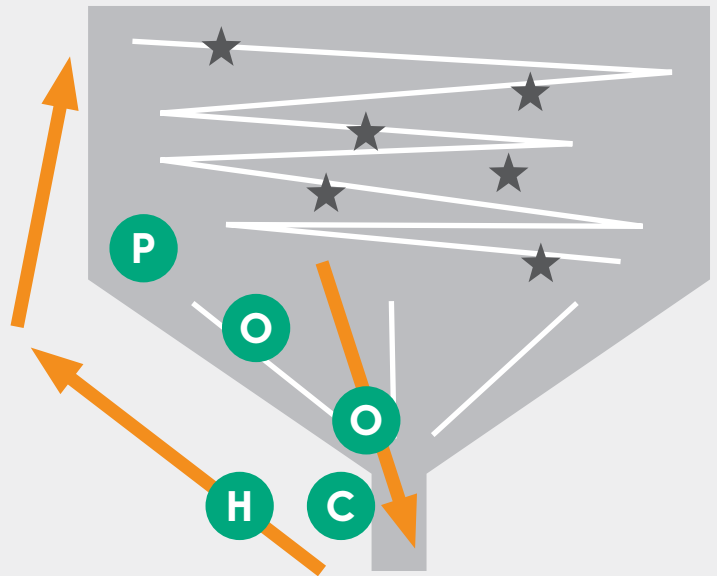
PROBLEM SOLVING ORIENTATION[5]

Different people approach a problem in different ways. For some their approach is positive and generates options for solution, while for others, their negative approach can lead to frustration and a poorer outcome.

+ PEOPLE WITH A *POSITIVE* PROBLEM ORIENTATION TEND TO:

- Believe that problems are solvable (optimism).
- Appraise a problem as a challenge rather than a threat.
- Believe in their personal ability to solve problems successfully (self-efficacy).
- Believe that successful problem solving takes time, effort and persistence.
- Commit themselves to solving problems, rather than avoiding them.

− PEOPLE WITH A *NEGATIVE* PROBLEM ORIENTATION TEND TO:

- Become frustrated and upset when confronted with problems in living (low frustration tolerance).
- Blame themselves for the problem and think that it means there is something wrong with them (e.g. thinks that they are abnormal, incompetent, stupid, bad or unlucky).
- View a problem as a significant threat to their wellbeing (physical, emotional, social, and economic). The person minimises the benefits of solving the problem and exaggerates the harms or losses that may result from failure to solve the problem effectively.
- Doubt their personal ability to solve problems successfully (low self-efficacy), and regard problems as unsolvable, resulting in avoidance of the problem or waiting for someone else to solve it.

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5 Based on Mynor-Wallis's Problem-Solving Treatment for anxiety and depression. Mynors Wallis L. *Problem-solving Treatment For Anxiety and Depression: A Practical Guide,* University of Southhampton; 2005.

POOCH OVERVIEW

THE STAGES OF THE POOCH PROCESS

While supporting a young person through the POOCH process some communication skills should be more prominent and purposefully applied than others, so that the goals of each stage can be achieved. Here is a guide to what can be helpful at each stage.

P

Identify the
PROBLEM

At this first stage of the process the main goals are to identify:

- What is the problem or issue?
- What is the nature of the problem? What is it like to have this problem?
- Whose problem is it? Who else needs to be involved? What other factors are involved?
- How many different ways can the problem be understood and explored?

Encourage the young person to think and speak freely using encouragers, reflection, paraphrasing and open questions.

O

Explore the
OPTIONS

Once the nature of the problem is well understood by the person and the listener, it is then time to explore different ways to resolve it. At this stage, it is important to work out:

- What has already been tried?
- What other options have been considered but not tried?
- What hasn't been thought of yet? (Brainstorm – no matter how crazy it seems).
- What would the situation or circumstances look like if the problem was resolved? What would the steps be from where things are at now, to this preferred future?

Ask direct, open questions to facilitate this process, and complement this with reflection and paraphrasing to clarify the nature of the options being discussed.

O

Discuss the
OUTCOMES

Once all the options have been identified, the possible outcomes of all these options need to be evaluated. This is basically a risk assessment of each of the options with the view to determining which is the most likely to succeed. Some questions that might be asked at this stage are:

- What are the consequences of pursuing each option? Are you prepared to live with those consequences?
- What are the pros and cons of each option?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in each option? (A SWOT analysis).

Continue to ask direct, open questions and seek to clarify the potential outcomes of each of the options through reflection and paraphrasing.

C

CHOOSE
an option

Once all the outcomes have been identified it is time to choose a course of action to pursue if the problem is to be resolved. Once a decision has been made:

- Re-look at consequences of that option.
- Work out what "Action 1" is.
- Set a reward for carrying out "Action 1", regardless of the outcome of this first step (just for being brave).
- Set a time to get together to talk about how it went.

Help the young person to make their choice through the use of more closed questions than has been used in the previous stages. Open questions, reflections and paraphrases will also be helpful at this point.

H

HOW
did it go?

This is the review stage of the process. Review the choice that was made and how it went (particularly "Action 1"), as well as the process that was used to make the choice. At this stage, it is important to find out:

- How did "Action 1" go?
- What worked and didn't work?
- Do we have to work out a new "Action 1" or are we on track to keep going as planned?
- Do we need to work out a whole new plan and start our POOCH process all over again?

Find out from the other person how things have gone with "Action 1" of their plan. This involves encouraging the other person to talk about it with encouragers, reflections, paraphrasing and open questions.