

PERSONNEL TRAINING SERIES

THE SODAS FRAMEWORK

Problem-Solving and
Decision-Making Processes for
Working with Transition-Aged
Youth and Young Adults



Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
Florida Department of Education
2007

Your feedback will be valued:

In order for us to continue to improve the usefulness and effectiveness of the Personnel Training Module Series, we value your feedback and suggestions. Please send comments and suggestions to Hewitt B. “Rusty” Clark, Ph.D., at clark@fmhi.usf.edu.

Some relevant Web sites:

Transition to Independence Process (TIP) system – University of South Florida
<http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu>

National Center on Youth Transition – University of South Florida
<http://ncyt.fmhi.usf.edu>

Transition Center – University of Florida
<http://www.thetransitioncenter.org>

Florida Department of Education
<http://www.fdoe.org>

This module was written by Karen Blase, Robin Wagner, & Hewitt B. “Rusty” Clark of the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

Authors’ Note

The authors wish to express their appreciation for the assistance of Athina Xakis, Boley Center Supervisor, the Transition to Independence Project and the Transition Facilitators in Pinellas County for their feedback and pilot testing of the material.

This evolving series of Training Modules for Personnel Serving Transition-Aged Youth and Young Adults is being developed and pilot tested by faculty and staff at the Florida Mental Health Institute within the University of South Florida (FMHI/USF) and in collaboration with personnel at the Boley Behavioral Health Centers, the Pinellas County Public School District, and other agencies in the Greater Tampa Bay area. This series of Training Modules is being funded by FMHI/USF and through grants awarded to FMHI/USF from the Florida Department of Education (Grant award numbers: 2002-03, 291-2623A-3C003; 2003-04, 291-2624A-4C003) and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (Field Initiated Research Grant number: 2001-04, H324C010043).

Robin Wagner is a Research Assistant at FMHI/USF and Karen Blase and Hewitt B. “Rusty” Clark are faculty at FMHI/USF.

For more information regarding the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) System and other transition issues, please visit our Web sites: <http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu> <http://ntacyt.fmhi.usf.edu> or contact Hewitt B. “Rusty” Clark, Ph.D., Nicole Deschênes, M.Ed., or Jordan Knab, Ed.S., Department of Child and Family Studies, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida, Tampa FL 33612. Email: clark@fmhi.usf.edu, deschenes@fmhi.usf.edu, jknab@fmhi.usf.edu.

Contact Information

Karen Blase, Ph.D. kblase@fmhi.usf.edu

Robin Wagner, M.A. rwagner@fmhi.usf.edu

Hewitt B. "Rusty" Clark, Ph.D. clark@fmhi.usf.edu

Jordan Knab, Ed.S. jknab@fmhi.usf.edu

Department of Child and Family Studies

Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute

University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33612

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Introduction





General Introduction to Personnel Training Modules

The transition period for youth and young adults struggling with emotional/behavioral difficulties (EBD) involves unique barriers that put this particular population at significantly greater risk for school failure, involvement with correctional authorities, and/or dependency on social services. These youth have the highest rate of dropout from secondary school among all disability groups (Marder & D’Amico, 1992). They also experience the poorest outcomes in employment and independent living and have higher rates of arrests and incarceration (Davis & Vander Stoep, 1996; Marder & D’Amico, 1992; Vander Stoep, Davis, & Collins, 2000). The youth who have or are at risk of EBD range from the adolescent girl who is suffering from severe depression due to previous sexual abuse to the adolescent boy who lives in a “war zone” type neighborhood and has been arrested recently for auto theft. Neither of these youths create a “poster child image” around which to rally support.

Given the needs of these transition-aged youth and young adults, it is important that transition facilitators, and others working with and on behalf of these young people, have the skills and tools to help youth as they navigate transition to adulthood.



Personnel Training Modules

The *Personnel Training Modules* have been developed to enhance the competencies of those who work with transition-aged youth and young adults. The modules make frequent reference to the transition facilitator and his or her role in assisting youth with EBD and utilizing the philosophy, values, skills, and processes in the modules. Although the primary audience for the materials is transition facilitators, the material also will be useful to anyone committed to working with youth and young adults in transition (e.g., teachers, mental health specialists, employment specialists, guidance counselors, parents, foster parents, vocational rehabilitation counselors, juvenile justice personnel).

Modules in the Series

Personnel Training Modules:

Module 1. Developing & Using Rationales

Module 2. Strength Discovery Assessment Process


Module 3. Career Transition

Problem solving and decision-making processes:

Module 4. The SCOCS Framework

Module 5. The SODAS Framework

Please visit our Web site (<http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu>) for additional modules.



For outcome measurements for youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties, please visit the reports section of

our Web site.

<http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu>



Issues of Cultural Diversity

It is important to acknowledge that the cultural orientation of young people and families intersects with the acceptability and applicability of processes and orientations to problem solving and conflict resolution. The skills and procedures in the modules have not been evaluated for use with diverse cultures. Therefore, it is very important for the transition facilitator to consider the youth and family culture when choosing an approach. It may be necessary to modify the language used and the processes so that they are acceptable and helpful to persons in diverse cultures. Some general recommendations for improving the cultural fit of these modules with the culture of the youth and family are to:

- Play an active role in examining your own beliefs and assumptions about different cultures and races
- Be aware that language barriers can play a significant role in exacerbating conflict
- Remain open to learning from each youth and family
- Ask permission of family members before involving them in a problem solving or decision making process (Briefly explain the process and ask them if this fits for them and would be helpful or feel okay to them. Then be sure to honor their decision.)
- Ask youth and/or parents (caregivers) who should be involved
- Educate yourself about the cultural orientation of the family, youth, or others involved in a negotiated decision making process like SCOCS. Some cultural orientations are more collectively oriented than individually oriented and you may need to modify your approach based on the cultural orientation of those involved.

Below are some resources and readings that will help you adapt your approach.

Web Sites and Contact Details

Transition to Independence
Process System
<http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu>

National Center on Youth
Transition
<http://ncyt.fmhi.usf.edu>

Our Contact Information

Hewitt B. “Rusty” Clark, Ph.D.
Professor and Director
TIP System Development &
Evaluation
clark@fmhi.usf.edu

Nicole Deschênes, M.Ed.
Project Director
National Center on Youth
Transition
deschenes@fmhi.usf.edu

Jordan Knab, Ed.S.
Project Director
TIP System Implementation:
Florida Initiative Transition to
Independence Process
jknab@fmhi.usf.edu

Department of Child & Family
Studies
Florida Mental Health Institute
University of South Florida
13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
MHC 2332 Tampa, Florida
33612-3807

Selected Readings & Resources

- Collier, M. J. (2003). Understanding cultural identities in intercultural communication: A ten-step inventory. In L.A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (pp. 412-429). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Hernandez, M., & Isaacs, T. (1998). *Promoting Cultural Competencies in Children's Mental Health Services*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Stewart, E. C., & Bennet, M. J. (1991). *American cultural patterns: A cross-cultural perspective*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1994). Managing intercultural conflicts effectively. In L. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: a reader* (7th ed., pp. 360–372). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Yoshida, T. (1994). Interpersonal versus non-interpersonal realities. In R.W. Brislin & T. Yoshida (Eds.). *Improving intercultural interactions: modules for cross-cultural training programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

TIP Operations Manual

It is extremely important for a reader to review the Transition to Independence Process: TIP System Development & Operations Manual prior to studying the *Personnel Training Modules*. The TIP Operations Manual provides a conceptual framework and specific principles that should guide one's work with youth and young adults with EBD. Our Web site addresses are provided at the end of this introduction for the reader's access to each of the *Personnel Training Modules*.



Modules Format

The modules are designed to build from one to the next and, therefore, should be presented and learned in the order listed above. Skills and processes learned in earlier modules (e.g., strength discovery process and rationales) are incorporated into the subsequent modules (e.g., problem solving and negotiated decision making).

Common formats are used across the *Personnel Training Modules*. Each module begins with an introduction, a connection to the TIP System and TIP Guidelines, a statement of the learning objectives, and a narrative description of the values, skills, and procedures related to the process being taught. The description includes a definition of the process, guidelines for its use, common challenges in utilizing the process, and examples of the process as it may be used by a transition facilitator or other personnel working with a transition-aged youth or young adult.

Appendices, which follow the narrative section of the module, contain forms that will be useful in implementing the processes and include helpful quick references and worksheets to use with young people and that they can have for their personal use. The appendices also contain the pre/post tests that each reader can utilize for a self-assessment of knowledge acquisition or that can be utilized by supervisors or trainers as they assess the quality of the training they provide on these modules.

Competency-Based Training Available

Behavior Rehearsal Manuals have been developed to accompany the *Personnel Training Modules* to ensure that adequate practice and feedback is provided to meet the standards for competency-based training. Members of the ***TIP Program Development and Evaluation Team*** can provide competency-based training utilizing the *Personnel Training Modules* and the Behavior Rehearsal Manuals and assist an organization in building its capacity for training current and future personnel designated to work with youth and young adults with challenges.

Introduction to Modules on Problem Solving/Decision Making

The mission of the Transition to Independence Process of (TIP) system is to assist young people with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties (EBD) in making a successful transition to adulthood with all young persons achieving, within their potential, their goals in the transition domains of education, employment, living situation, and community life.

The mission of the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) system is to assist young people with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties (EBD) in making a successful transition into adulthood, with all young persons achieving, within their potential, their goals in the transition domains of employment, education, living situation, and community life. The TIP system is driven by seven guidelines at the practice, program, and system levels functioning. The third TIP System Guideline that specifically ties into this module is “develop personal choice and social responsibility with young people” (Clark, 2003, p. 5). An essential element of this guideline is “encourage problem solving methods, decision making, and evaluation of impact on self and others” (Clark, 2003, p. 5). (*The TIP System Development and Operations Manual* and other articles and documents related to transition issues, program development, research, and evaluation are available through the TIP system Web site: <http://tip.fmhi.usf.edu>.)

As mentioned in the general introduction, this module makes frequent reference to the transition facilitator as the main person who works with the young person. Although the primary audience for this material is transition facilitators, the competencies have been shown to be extremely useful for others who work with youth in transition (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors, parents, job coaches).

This training module was designed to teach those who work with transition-aged youth and young adults how to use frameworks that teach problem solving/decision making skills, so the outcomes this population experience can improve and lead to a higher quality of life for the young person by improving the likelihood that youth will make decisions that are beneficial to themselves and considerate of others.



Module Objectives

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Explain what SODAS is, including the definition for each letter of the framework
- Identify the population or types of situations for which SODAS would be used
- Practice an example on “How to teach a young person to use SODAS”
- Identify the benefits of youth using the SODAS process



Negotiated Decision Making: The SODAS Approach



Introduction to the SODAS Framework

Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties

- Have the highest rate of dropout from secondary school among all disability groups
- Experience the poorest outcomes in employment and independent living
- Have the highest rates of arrests and incarceration

Making decisions and solving problems are integral parts of every person's daily life. Life is filled with decisions, both simple and complex, and individuals are required to make decisions regardless of whether or not the individual helped create or invite the situations that present themselves. When good decisions are not made or problems are not properly solved, poor outcomes usually follow.

Unfortunately, the population of youth with emotional/behavioral difficulties (EBD) experiences some of the poorest outcomes across all populations with disabilities. Literature clearly shows the history as well as the current poor outcomes for this population as they transition into adulthood. These youth have the highest rate of dropout from secondary school among all disability groups (Marder & D'Amico, 1992). They also experience the poorest outcomes in employment and independent living and have higher rates of arrests and incarceration (Davis & Vander Stoep, 1996; Marder & D'Amico, 1992; Vander Stoep, Davis, & Collins, 2000).

If young people are to make a successful transition into adulthood, they must be able to communicate competently and work cooperatively with others in order to affect their outcomes positively. They need to be able to express their own opinions and beliefs effectively; to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others who differ from them in background, needs, or experiences; and to become skilled at reasoned disagreement, negotiation, and compromise as methods of solving problems when their own needs or interests conflict with those of others (Elias & Clabby, 1989). Young people need skills that enable them to think clearly and make thoughtful decisions by considering the advantages and disadvantages of different options, which help lead to a feasible solution applicable to the problem at hand. If youth with EBD make better decisions and resolve problems, they can feel empowered instead of victimized and are more likely to create positive outcomes to improve their quality of life.



Problem Solving: The SODAS Framework

One decision-making and problem-solving process that was shown to be effective in working with youth and young adults is **SODAS** (Kifer, Lewis, Green & Phillips, 1974). The beauty of the SODAS process is that it can be used by the transition facilitators in their own professional and personal lives, used with their young people, and modeled and taught to the young people for use in their own everyday living to improve the quality of choices and decision making.

In Brief

The SODAS Framework

- Situation
- Options
- Disadvantages
- Advantages
- Solution

Table 1: SODAS Problem-Solving Method

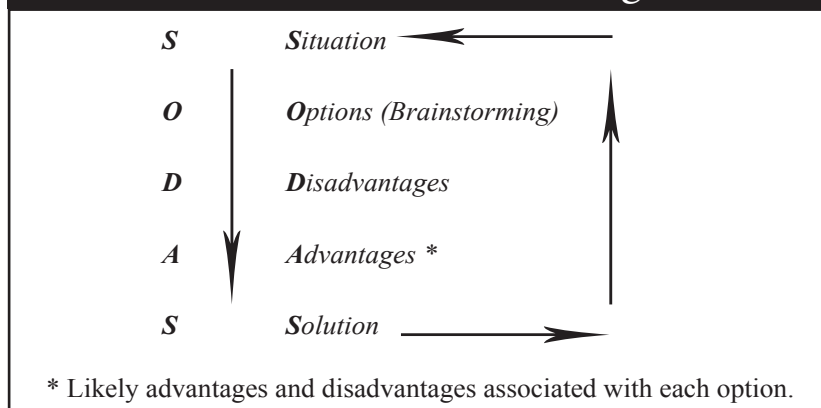


Table 1 illustrates the components of this relatively simple method. The first step involves working with the youth in describing as clearly as possible the current **situation**. With the situation defined, a brainstorming process is undertaken to generate as many **options** (i.e., approaches, actions) to the situation as possible. This process of generating options should be judgment-free, not eliminating or refuting any of the options that you or the young person put on the table. Research has shown that generating options before evaluating or discussing the options results in better quality options and more creative ideas.

The next steps involve listing all the likely **advantages** and **disadvantages** for the young person related to each option. Once this is accomplished for each of the options, the young person is in a better position to make an informed decision. The choice that the young person makes represents a **solution**. The arrows on Table 1 illustrate the reality that every “solution” (i.e., actions taken or not) creates a “new situation,” which may or may not need to be problem-solved or call for more decision-making.

This decision-making and problem-solving process can set the occasion for self-evaluation by the young person about the impact of his/her actions on self and others. Thus, SODAS can be a valuable teaching tool as well as a method that many young people begin to adopt as a way to approach simple and complex problem situations that come their way.

The first step in negotiated decision-making involves developing a clear behavioral description of the **Situation** from the perspectives of both people.

With this brief overview in mind, let's consider each step in more detail.



SODAS Process Components

A specific review of each step in the SODAS process is provided below in order to assist transition facilitators in guiding the young person through the process. A specific review of each step in the SODAS process is provided below in order to assist transition facilitators in guiding the young person through the process.

1. S = Situation

The role of the transition facilitator is to get a very clear and complete picture of the situation before moving on to soliciting options to address the situation. Below are examples of the questions that can help elicit a complete behavioral description of the situation. The transition facilitator should summarize the emerging description of the situation along the way so that the youth has the opportunity to react, confirm, or correct the transition facilitator's perceptions.

- What is the problem? Get at the specifics of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Make the situation as clear and as behavioral as possible.
- What are the feelings involved with the situation? What are the young person's feelings? What do family members feel when the problem occurs? How do others feel, such as friends, employers, teachers, etc.?
- Questions – What stops you from...? How do you feel when...? What happens after you...? What exactly was said when...?

At the end of the Situation phase, the transition facilitator should be able to summarize the emerging description of the situation along the way so that the youth has the opportunity to react, confirm, or correct the transition facilitator's perceptions.

2. O = Options

(Help the youth generate possible options. Be objective.)

The transition facilitator's role in this stage is to help the youth generate a number of possible options to address the situation or solve the problem. The transition facilitator should accept all the options generated for further evaluation in the later stages of SODAS and should reinforce the youth for coming up with ideas. Below are some questions and guidelines that may be helpful in generating options.

- What could be done to solve the problem? How can you achieve your goals? What do you want to do?
- What else could you do? What about...? We have _____ on the list; how about considering _____?

3. D = Disadvantages

A = Advantages

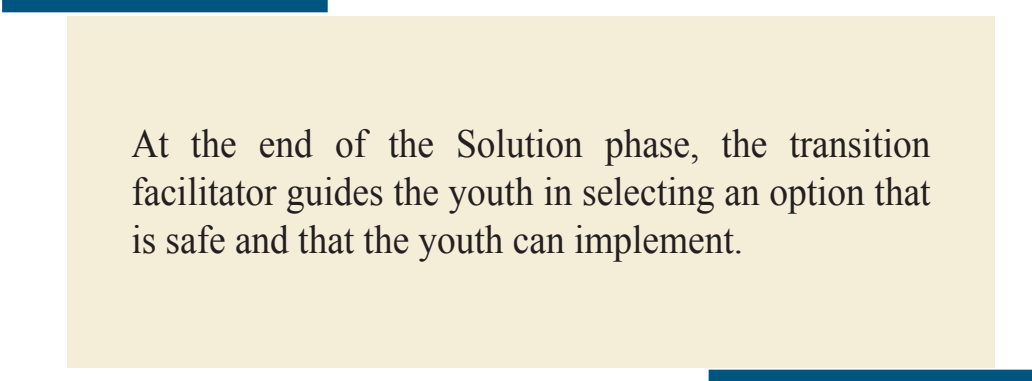
The transition facilitator's role is to help the youth explore the realistic advantages and disadvantages of **each option**. This may involve revising options as they are explored. Below are sample questions and prompts that may assist the transition facilitator as this part of the process unfolds.

- What are the positives? What are the possible benefits? What are the advantages? Why are those things important to you?
- What are the negatives? What are the drawbacks/disadvantages? What potential danger or harm could come of this option? Why are those things important?
- How might family members and other people who support you feel or be affected? What might happen for you as a result of their feelings or the impact on them? How about other people (e.g., employers, friends, teachers)? What might happen right away? How about a week or a month from now? What if you changed the option a little?

4. S = Solution

In this stage of the process, the transition facilitator guides the youth in selecting an option that is safe and that the youth can implement. It is important that the transition facilitator only guides and does not direct the process. The choice must be owned by the youth. The transition facilitator also offers and encourages practicing the interactions in which the youth will need to engage in order to implement the plan with comfort and success. Below are some sample questions and prompts that can be used to help the youth select an option as the “solution.”

- Remember the situation identified in the beginning. Will the selected option help resolve the situation?
- How feasible is the option? Can it be done? Can the young person and his/her support system “pull it off”?
- How to do it? Get at the specifics of who, what, when, where, and how regarding the actual implementation of the selected option. Again, options and strategies may be refined as you go.
- Practice? Options involving human interaction may need to be rehearsed/role-played to make sure the young person, family members, and/or people who support the young person know what they are going to say and do. What if the person does or says X or Y? Anticipate it. Practice it. Reinforce appropriate behavior as it is rehearsed. Plan for the future.



At the end of the Solution phase, the transition facilitator guides the youth in selecting an option that is safe and that the youth can implement.



Follow-Up

Transition facilitators should be aware of an additional important step in this process: follow-up. Follow-up includes asking and discovering: Whether or not the plan was implemented? What happened when the plan was tried? If it was not implemented, maybe the problem was not so critical after all, or maybe the young person just wanted time to talk with the transition facilitator, or maybe he/she is still not comfortable with the option selected or the implementation. If the plan was implemented, follow-up includes offering descriptive praise for engaging in the problem-solving/decision-making process and for following through with the option that was selected. Did the solution help resolve the situation? If it did not, use this opportunity to teach the young person how to persist and to normalize the experience that many people go through in trying multiple options until an actual satisfactory solution is found. Try to help him/her see this experience as a learning opportunity, instead of a failure. Remind him/her of the phrase “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again.” Following-up with the young person is an important part of the process because it provides great opportunities to reconnect with the young person about the situation he/she previously problem-solved, obtain new information for further problem-solving/decision-making, as well as give descriptive praise for effort made and encourage persistence toward reaching the goal.

Checking in with the youth as he or she enacts a solution is critical in order to:

- Establish concrete next steps and timelines
- Provide support
- Help the youth deal with unanticipated consequences or actions of others
- Practice skills needed to implement the solution
- Encourage the youth to actually follow-through with the solution



Challenges in Applying SODAS

When using SODAS, there are some common challenges that transition facilitators often face. After the situation is identified, the next step is to objectively list possible options to the situation.

Youth Participation

Facilitators sometimes find it challenging to get youth to participate in this process. The goal is to identify several possible options together with the young person by brainstorming so that he/she can see more than one way of approaching the situation. When the young person does not openly participate in this process, the facilitator needs to help elicit possible options from the young person. The goal is to have the young person very involved in creating or helping to create options, rather than having the facilitator come up with all the options. Although some young people lack experience with the brainstorming process or seem reluctant to participate, it is important for the transition facilitator to try to get the young person involved in the process. This may include teaching him/her how to brainstorm, praising any attempts to participate, or fostering interest in listing options by asking direct questions.

When a young person does not participate in this process, even with the transition facilitator's best efforts to help the individual, it may be necessary for the transition facilitator to take a more active role in listing options. The transition facilitator may need to make some suggestions, remembering that the suggestions should be person-centered and should draw from the information gained in the strength discovery process.

Transition Facilitator Maintaining Nonjudgmental Openness

Another challenge for transition facilitators in the area of listing options is staying open and objective. Sometimes the young person will list an option that the transition facilitator sees as dangerous, silly, extreme, or impossible to implement. It is very important that the young person is encouraged for any attempt he/she may make to list an option, no matter how unreasonable the options may seem to the transition facilitator. By allowing the young person to list possible options, the transition facilitator is not approving or condoning any of the options, so the transition facilitator should not make statements, such as, "That is a good one, but I don't know about that one. Do you really think that is a good idea?" Remember, this step is designed to generate options.

The next step will be more evaluative and will incorporate the identification of advantages and disadvantages of each option. This important step of identifying options helps the young person realize that there are a number of ways to approach situations in his/her life and can help them in thinking of the many options they may have in dealing with any given situation. By the young person being open and thinking of a number of possible solutions, he or she can learn how to think through a situation before he/she acts instead of impulsively reacting to the situation and creating a negative outcome. In addition, the young person can learn that sometimes seemingly poor options can be changed to become more realistic and beneficial.

Transition Facilitator Acknowledging Advantages of Unfavorable Options

The next step involves identifying the advantages and disadvantages of each option that the young person has listed. One of the challenges transition facilitators face with this step is that they find it difficult to acknowledge the advantages of negative behavior. For example, let's say the young person listed getting high as one option for dealing with a situation and the young person says that one of the advantages of getting high is that it makes him or her feel good.

Typically, transition facilitators want to counter that advantage with a negative, saying, "Well, it may feel good, but it is really bad for you," instead of just saying something like, "Well, yes I suppose that is an advantage" or "Okay, that could be an advantage," and moving on. There are several benefits to being open to hear what the young person sees as advantages to certain options. First, it helps the young person to feel that the facilitator understands him/her and is not taking a position of talking down to him/her. Second, it can help the transition facilitator learn about what reinforcements the young person receives for engaging in certain options. This information can help the transition facilitator to understand the "driving force" of certain behaviors. This can be important information when intervening with inappropriate behavior because the transition facilitator has an understanding of why the young person behaves in certain ways. For example, prior to the young person telling the transition facilitator that he/she does drugs because they make him or her feel good, the transition facilitator may have thought that the young person did drugs because of peer pressure.

The way the transition facilitator may have intervened when he or she thought that peer pressure was the reason the young person did drugs would probably be very different than if it is for recreational use or to escape his/her problems. By allowing the young person to express his or her view of advantages, even to options that involve negative behavior, the transition facilitator is not agreeing that it is necessarily a healthy advantage—simply hearing what the young person sees as an advantage and acknowledging his/her perspective. As the young person participates in identifying the disadvantages related to the negative behavior, it may become apparent to the youth that these disadvantages, both short-term and longer-term, outweigh the advantages.

Not Listening to Youth's Input on Options

Another challenge transition facilitators face is the tendency to skip over the disadvantages of the option that the transition facilitator likes. For instance, the young person has identified not hanging out with his/her friends after school as an option to avoid stealing from a store from which he/she was caught shoplifting. The transition facilitator sees that option as the best, so when the young person starts to identify the disadvantages of that option, the transition facilitator does not acknowledge the disadvantages but tries to help the young person see the strength of the advantages, moving quickly past any disadvantages that the young person may see with this option.

The information that the young person may share about disadvantages to certain options can be vital to the implementation of the solution. If a solution is chosen without the disadvantages being acknowledged and dealt with, the probability of the solution actually working is very low. When the young person shares information about the disadvantages, the transition facilitator needs to hear what he/she is saying and acknowledge those challenges.

Because there are challenges does not mean that the option is unreasonable. It may in fact be a viable option, but the young person may need help in dealing with the drawbacks of that solution in order to apply it to the problem successfully.

Young Person Selects a Harmful Option as Solution

If a young person selects a solution that is harmful, it is crucial that the transition facilitator discusses the potential harmful consequences involved with this option and dissuades the young person from engaging in any behavior that could be harmful to him/herself or to another. If the young person persists that he/she will engage in behavior that could cause harm, the transition facilitator must inform the young person that the transition facilitator will have to break confidentiality due to potential harm and will be notifying the proper authorities. In such a case, the transition facilitator is responsible for following up immediately with his/her supervisor and ensuring that the proper authorities are informed of the potential harm (e.g., young person's parents, any individual who may be a target of the young person's harmful actions, police, teachers, principal, etc.)



How to Teach SODAS to Youth

In addition to going through the SODAS process with youth, it is also vital that the transition facilitator teach SODAS to youth. There will be times in the life of a young person when the transition facilitator is not available, yet the young person is facing a problem and needs to identify a good solution. If the young person is comfortable going through the SODAS process, he/she will be better able to problem-solve and make a decision on his/her own when others are not available to help.

Initiating the Teaching of SODAS Process to Youth

Teaching SODAS to youth should occur during a separate session after the transition facilitator has gone through SODAS a time or two in previous sessions to help the youth problem solve situations that he/she was facing. Thus, the youth is already somewhat familiar with this process. A good time to teach SODAS is in the absence of a real problem so that the transition facilitator can explain SODAS procedurally and then refer back to SODAS using an example to walk through the process. Transition facilitators should not attempt to teach youth how to use SODAS in the context of a problem.

The transition facilitator should explain what SODAS is, what it stands for, and how it helps the young person. The transition facilitator should start by explaining to the young person that SODAS is a process for helping him/her to solve problems and help him/her make decisions that can lead to the young person getting the things he/she wants in life. The transition facilitator may want to have a short discussion about problem solving/decision making, discussing the challenge of making good decisions especially in the midst of pressures, like an employer raising his voice at him/her, a parent telling him/her “no” to a request, friends pressuring him/her to do something illegal, etc. Next, the transition facilitator should explain what each letter of SODAS stands for and then expand on each letter to explain the steps, walking the young person through an example that is relevant to him/her, checking with him/her to ensure he/she is following the transition facilitator through the steps.

Remember that the young person may not have a working knowledge of some terms that seem very common to most people; some young people may not know what an option is, or if they know what an option is, they may not know how it fits the context of this process. So although he/she may be able to define “option,” he/she may not know how to identify different options for his/her situation. It may be necessary to use other words that mean the same thing; for example, advantages may also be explained as “the good things that could happen if you did this option,” etc.

The Young Person Should Practice Each Step

The young person should then explain each step back to the transition facilitator. After the transition facilitator has walked the young person through SODAS, the transition facilitator should allow him/her to go back and explain each step of the process so that the transition facilitator can verify if he/she understands each step. Next, switch roles and have the young person be the transition facilitator and have him/her walk the transition facilitator through a problem in his/her life using the SODAS process. When the young person acts as the transition facilitator and the transition facilitator as the young person, the transition facilitator (acting as the young person) should try to use something from his/her own life that is relevant but not too personal, so that the young person feels it is important to go through the process with him/her.

The transition facilitator should give the young person a copy of the SODAS sheets found in the appendix of this module and several blank copies of the worksheet so that he/she will have these to use when he/she needs them. The young person and the transition facilitator should agree on a place where the young person will keep this information so that it is accessible when he/she needs to utilize it. It may be helpful to create a small, easy-to-carry, laminated card with the SODAS steps printed on it.

The transition facilitator may want to walk through a scenario with the young person to increase the probability of the youth remembering to use the SODAS process. For example, “Let’s say you get in a fight with your mom; you can either react and do what you feel like doing in the moment, or you can stay cool and think out your options. In that moment, remember where you have put your SODAS information, get it out, and go through the steps to see if there is a better way to handle the situation.”

Transition Facilitator Follows Up with Young Person

After the transition facilitator has taught the young person SODAS, the transition facilitator should follow-up with the young person to see if he/she has tried to use it. The transition facilitator should ask how it went, reinforce the young person’s initiative, and make sure the young person does not have any concerns or unanswered questions in regard to using the process. If the young person has not used it but the transition facilitator knows of situations where it may have been helpful, the transition facilitator should discuss how going through the SODAS process could have been beneficial in that situation.



Example of Using SODAS
with a Young Person





Teaching SODAS to a Young Person

The following example of a SODAS problem solving session is provided in order to give transition facilitators an idea of the kinds of prompts that are useful in guiding the discussion. The use of guiding statements and asking thoughtful questions creates the opportunity for the young person to own the solution and learn to think about possibilities and the resulting outcomes. Of course, no example can possibly illustrate the many permutations and paths that a problem-solving session can take. Experience is the best teacher along with feedback from the young person, from colleagues, and from the supervisor.

The transition facilitator in this example has assisted the youth in getting a part-time job at a fast-food franchise. The youth really likes the job and the paycheck, so the transition facilitator is surprised when the youth says he is going to quit his job. [When youth suddenly change their plans and activities, it can be a signal to the transition facilitator that a problem may have arisen and that SODAS might be a useful tool.]

The transition facilitator will want to teach the youth the SODAS acronym and process so he or she can use this strategy independently in the future. The transition facilitator can do this in a separate session, as noted previously, or the transition facilitator can teach SODAS as it is used in a situation with the youth. This example provides the transition facilitator with some ideas about how to introduce the concept of problem solving and each of the components of SODAS in the context of solving the problem.



Introducing SODAS in Context

TF: Well, sometimes when you are making a big decision it helps to take a step back and think about it. Other kids tell us that learning problem solving has helped them make good decisions about their futures. Is it okay if we spend a few minutes talking about work and problem solving? Great!

S = Situation

(Line up narrative like SCOCS)

TF: One of the first steps is really understanding what's happening for you right now. And if you are bouncing ideas off of someone else, being really clear helps the other person be more supportive and understanding. So let's see if we can get a clear picture of the situation. That means you can tell me about why you are making the decision to quit, and I will just ask you some questions so I can understand what you are thinking about and why you are going to quit your job. Okay?

Y: I guess.

TF: So you are really thinking about quitting your job? What's up with that? Last week you were pretty happy with that paycheck.

Y: Yeah, but I can get another job.

TF: Is something bothering you about your job? Starting a new job can be a real challenge sometimes. Lots to learn, new people. *[Do: Offer empathy and prompts and be curious. Don't: Lecture or argue about how hard it is to get a new job.]*

Y: Yeah, well some people think they can just push you around, and I don't have to take that crap.

TF: Sounds tough. Who's pushing you around? Your boss?

Y: Naw, it's this other guy, Frank, who keeps raggin' on me.

TF: What's his problem?

- Y:** He's always telling me what to do when I know what I'm supposed to be doing. Anyway, he is not the boss.
- TF:** So, like what kinds of things does he say? *[Do: Gently ask questions to get all the information, much like a "reporter" discovering who, what, when, where, and how often. Try to get at the specifics by using words like "what did he say" or "what did you do." Words such as "do" and "say" are more likely to elicit behavioral descriptions. Such behavioral descriptions help you see what is happening for the youth. You and the youth need a very clear picture of what's happening in order to generate options and evaluate them.]*
- Y:** [The youth goes on to describe being called stupid and told to hurry up.]
- TF:** So, Frank is on your case a lot about moving faster and is calling you "stupid," but your boss says you are doing okay. And this is happening a bunch of times every time you have to work with Frank?
- Y:** Yeah, and I don't have to take it, so I am leaving that job.

O = Options

- TF:** Okay, so I think I've got a clear picture of your **situation**. The next step in problem solving is getting a bunch of different ideas on the table about what you can do about the situation. People call these **options** because what you are doing is thinking about the different choices you could make before you do something. Sometimes our first ideas are great, but sometimes we can come up with better ones when we take time to think. Let's see what we can do together to come up with more ideas. I'll keep track of them on paper for us *[or let the youth do this]*.
- TF:** So one choice you could make is that you definitely can quit. So "quit my job" is the first idea. *[It is a challenge for many adults to just accept an option that the adult does not feel is a good one. But remember that at the end of the day the youth WILL make his or her own decision. By letting options stand for examination, you show you respect the youth's opinion, you keep the dialogue going, and you create the opportunity for the youth to learn to solve problems more systematically and carefully. But it does not mean that the youth will choose the same path you would choose!]*
- TF:** What else could you do?
- Y:** I could meet him in the parking lot and tell him to back off or he's gonna hear from me!

- TF:** Okay, so another option is to confront him in the parking lot, and it sounds like you think threatening him would be an option?
- Y:** Yeah, but I wouldn't really do othing'.
- TF:** Well, let's write that one down too, "meet him in the parking lot and tell him to back off or he's gonna hear from you." *[Again, avoid lecturing. Notice that the transition facilitator labeled the behavior as confrontational and threatening but went back to a behavioral description in the youth's words of the option. Sometimes you can help the youth build on an option that at first seems problematic.]*
- TF:** Any other ideas?
- Y:** Nope. *[Some youth can be frustrated by the process or feel "put on the spot" to come up with other options. Offering ideas and empathy is appropriate.]*
- TF:** I know it can be frustrating to think through this stuff and that right now you just want to quit. But hang in with me for minute and let's see what we can come up with. Okay?
- Y:** I guess.
- TF:** So you can quit or you can meet him in the parking lot and talk to him. Do you think talking to your boss about it is an option?
- Y:** No way am I gonna rat him out. That would so not be cool.
- TF:** Okay, let's take that off the table for now then.

Or

- TF:** Well, it doesn't sound like you are too excited about that idea, but how about if we leave it on the list for now? *[Use your own judgment, given the youth's reaction, about whether or not to pursue an option in the next phase.]*
- TF:** What else could you do? *[The conversation continues until the youth and transition facilitator feel they have a few good ideas to explore. More options can arise as the disadvantages and advantages are pursued. It is best to generate a few options before beginning to examine advantages and disadvantages of each so that the youth can contrast and compare the advantages and disadvantages].*

D = Disadvantages and A = Advantages

TF: You've done a great job of coming up with options! *[Remember to praise the youth for engaging in the process!]* Well, at this point, you've got three **options** or choices for yourself:

1. Quit your job.
2. Talk to Frank in the parking lot and tell him to back off.
3. Ignore Frank and just go on with your work.

The next step is to take a look at each of these and see what the positives and negatives or the upside and downside is for each of them. By looking at the **disadvantages and advantages** you can choose the consequences you want to deal with and pick a solution that makes the most sense to you. Every idea has its good points and bad points.

TF: What are the advantages of that idea? *Or; What good things might happen if you choose that idea? Or; What are the benefits of quitting? [Use language that fits for the youth].*

Y: Well, I won't have to take that crap anymore.

TF: So are you saying you would feel relieved and less frustrated because you wouldn't have to put up with Frank's comments on the job? *[Do: Explore the emotional side of the choices. This can be a great opportunity to broaden a youth's emotional vocabulary as well as giving the youth an opportunity to confirm what you are saying or correct you.]*

Y: Yeah, and I wouldn't be so pissed off!

TF: Any other positives to quitting?

Y: Well, I would have more time to spend with my friends instead of working.

TF: And that could be a lot of fun couldn't it? So, you would be free from Frank's bugging you and you could spend more time with your friends if you quit your job. *[Summarize as you go.]* Anything else good about it?

Y: That's all I can think of now.

TF: What about the downside of quitting....anything you might not like about quitting?

- Y:** Well, I wouldn't have any money to spend.
- TF:** What do you like to spend your money on?
- Y:** Food, movies, and my girlfriend.
- TF:** So, while you might have more time to spend with your friends, you might not have as much money to spend. So less food, fewer movies, and less money to spend on your girlfriend are part of the picture if you quit your job.
- Y:** But I can get another job, a better one.
- TF:** Okay, let's put that back up with the advantages of quitting, you might get a better job. Any disadvantages of having to look for work?
- Y:** I might not find work right away.
- TF:** That's true. So it might take a while to get back to having spending money. Are you thinking of quitting right away?
- Y:** Yeah, tomorrow.
- TF:** Hmm. I wonder if your boss will give you a good recommendation if you quit all of a sudden. What do you think he says about employees who up and quit without any notice? Why is that hard on him? *[Part of teaching youth to think about consequences involves helping them learn to consider the point of view of other people and the likely outcomes that result from the impact of their behavior on others].*
- Y:** Maybe not but what if I told him I was quitting in a week?
- TF:** That would help him out because then instead of thinking, "Man this kid is trouble and not very responsible, I hope he doesn't screw the next boss." He might think, "Well, at least he didn't just quit and not show up for work and leave me hanging...that was pretty responsible of him. I think I can give him a good recommendation." *[Some transition facilitators find it effective to "role play" what others might say or think to make the youth's impact on others more real to the youth.]*
- TF:** So maybe you've changed that first idea a little by saying you are going to quit but you will give your boss at least a week's notice? Good thinking. *[Options frequently get modified and improved as the advantages and disadvantages are explored.]*
- Y:** Yeah, that sounds good. Maybe I won't even quit until I get me a new job!

TF: Wow! There's an idea. Why does that sound good to you?

The transition facilitator and the youth continue to review each option, the advantages and disadvantages, and make revisions as they go. At the end of this section, the youth or the transition facilitator can summarize each option and the advantages and disadvantages in order for the youth to choose a **solution**. Sometimes the youth clearly gets very committed to an option along the way. There is no rigid rule that says you must go through every option if in fact the youth has settled on a safe option along the way.

S = Solution

TF: You have done a terrific job of thinking things through. You had more than one option to think about, and you came up with pretty real advantages and disadvantages for each one! Now it's time for you to choose your option and the advantages and disadvantages that go with it. *[Youths don't always realize that while they can choose any option, they may not be in control of the consequences of their choice. So reminding them that they are choosing an option and the attendant disadvantages and advantages can be helpful and educational.]*

Y: I think I better get me a new job first and then quit!

TF: Okay, so let's review the advantages and disadvantages of that choice: The good news is that you would continue to have spending money and, if you give notice, you stand a better chance of getting a good recommendation from your employer. The bad news is that you are going to have even less free time because you are going to be working AND looking for a new job. Anything else to think about?

Y: Can you help me find a new job?

TF: Sure, you can use all the skills you learned in getting the job you have now, and I can help with leads, reviewing your applications, and transportation to interviews. How does that sound?

Y: Good.

TF: When it comes time to give notice do you want to practice what to say to your boss so he will be more likely to feel okay about it and how to ask for a reference for the future?

Y: I can handle it by myself.

TF: I'm sure you can, but if you change your mind about a run through let me know and we can talk it over. Let's set a specific time to get back together and go over some job-hunting steps for your next job. Do you still get a newspaper at home?

Follow-up

The transition facilitator makes a phone call to the youth at home the day after the youth was to implement the plan. It may have gone well, and if so, might sound like this:

TF: So, how did it go when you told your boss you would have to quit?

Y: Pretty good. He said he was glad I gave some notice. And when I asked him for a reference he said he could do that.

TF: Good for you for following through with the plan and making that problem solving you did pay off. Do you want to get together to start on the job search?

Or it might not have gone well and might sound like this:

TF: So, how did it go when you told your boss you were going to quit?

Y: Man, that sucker told me I could just leave right after my shift. That really ticked me off.

TF: Wow! That's too bad. But good for you for doing the right thing and giving notice. You can be proud of the problem solving you did even if it didn't quite play out the way we hoped it would. Did he seem upset with you? *[When the outcome is not what was hoped for or expected, the transition facilitator is in some ways back into SODAS and is beginning to redefine the current situation and perhaps embark on a new plan or a new part of the plan.]*




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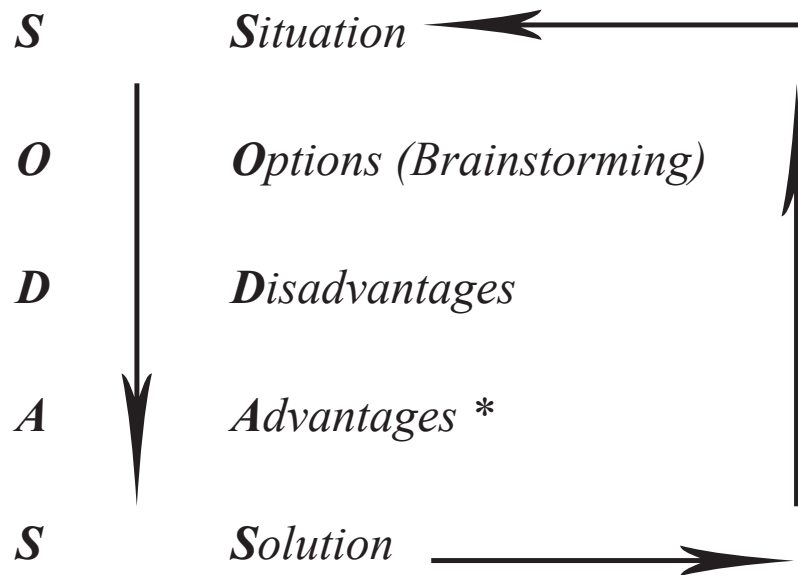


Appendix

This appendix includes the following forms to assist you in learning and practicing the SCOCS method.

- Diagram of SODAS method
 - Components Checklist
 - Components Worksheet
 - Pretest–Posttest: Rationales/SCOCS/SODAS
- 

Negotiated Decision Making: SODAS Framework Problem-Solving Method



* Likely advantages and disadvantages associated with each option.

Negotiated Decision Making: SODAS Framework

Components Checklist

Preparation

_____ Introduces SODAS and explains the process and benefits

SODAS Components

_____ Defines situation/summary (asks questions, encourages youth to talk, expresses empathy, reflective statements, summarizes periodically)

_____ Options (asks youth first, provides additional alternatives, waits to explore advantages and disadvantages)

_____ Disadvantages (asks youth nonjudgmental reaction, provides additional disadvantages if needed)

_____ Consequences (explores advantages and disadvantages and how these do or do not address the concerns or criteria)

_____ Advantages (asks youth, nonjudgmental reaction, provides additional advantages if needed)

_____ Solution (youth makes final decision, transition facilitator offers role-playing, verbal support, and reassurance)

_____ Follow-up (expression of interest and encouragement, arranges specific follow-up, inquires about the implementation of solution)

Was the quality of the interaction appropriate for the situation?

- Maintain a pleasant and steady voice tone
- Express enthusiasm where appropriate
- Use facial expressions/eye contact/body language to match
- Be brief (avoid lecturing)
- Solicit youth's input throughout interactions
- Acknowledge youth's input (e.g., head nods)
- Remain nonjudgmental
- Set limits and expectations, as necessary

Negotiated Decision Making: SODAS Framework

Components Worksheet

Participants:

Date:

Transition Facilitator:

Situation:

Criteria for Concern:

Options:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Disadvantages and Relation to Concerns and Criteria for Each Option:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Advantages and Relation to concerns and Criteria for Each Option::

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Solution:

Follow-up:

Negotiated Decision Making: SODAS Framework

Pretest–Posttest: Rationales/SCOCS/SODAS

Name: _____

Date: _____

Rationales

1. Explain what a rationale is.
2. Explain the function of using rationales and the benefits of using them.
3. Identify which type of rationale should be used most frequently.
4. Explain the three guidelines of developing an effective rationale.
5. Give an example of a rationale and a nonrationale.

SODAS

1. Explain what SODAS is.
2. Give the definition for each letter of the framework.
3. Identify the population or types of situations for which SODAS would be used.

SCOCS

1. Explain what SCOCS is.
2. Give the definition for each letter of the framework.
3. Identify the population or types of situations for which SCOCS would be used.