

Solution-Focused Techniques

Building Solutions in Child Welfare (Partnerships for Safety)

Insoo Kim Berg

We face an increasing number of complex situations that challenge our skills, compassion and sense of mission, and our desire to make a difference. “Multi-problems” cases, substance abuses, repeated crises in children and families test our limits. Along with shrinking resources, changing demands on client-worker relationships demand innovative, client-driven, and cost-effective interventions.

Based on Solution-Focused Therapy, this training will challenge you in thinking about effective interventions and provide you with innovative techniques you can use immediately. Through lecture, videotape examples of child protective services investigations, foster care cases, handouts, exercises, and discussions, you will learn skills that you can use immediately in the following areas:

- Thinking from out of the box in child welfare
- Working assumptions about child welfare – Where did it come from?
- Evidence-based child welfare practice – Common sense approach
- Investigation for abuse vs. Assessment for safety
- Strategies for engaging clients quickly and respectfully
- How to turn “investigation” into a collaborative, joint effort
- Negotiation of what the client wants
- What do we (agency, community) want?
- Useful and frequently used tools
- Ways to get there fast by going slow
- When to close a case
- Multiple investigation cases
- “Removing” children respectfully and with hope

About Insoo Kim Berg

Insoo is the co-developer of the popular Solution-Focused Brief Therapy model. She lectures extensively around the world. Many of her seven books and 30 papers have been translated in 10 languages. Most recent books include: *Family Based Services* (94); *Solutions Step by Step* (with Reuss, 97); *Interviewing for Solutions* (with DeJong, 98); *Building Solutions in Child Protective Services* (with Kelly, 2000); and *Tales of Solutions* (with Dolan, 2001) and she is currently working on a book on working with children.

Solution-Focused Techniques

Building Solutions with Mandated Clients

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Self Check:

Make sure to set aside your personal biases against the client, if any.

Make sure your personal attitude is positive and hopeful.

Set aside whatever you might have heard about the client from others. Be open to hearing the client's view.

Find a way to maintain a "not-knowing" position.

I. Assess the Person first, Not the Problem.

A. Connect with the person by:

- Find out what is important to the client
- Find out the person's aspirations and dreams
- Find out who is important to the client

B. Find out how to face the problem together with the client by:

- Putting yourself one-step behind the client (at least side-by-side)
- Find out what the client is able to do toward what he wants (exception)

II. Assess for Sustainable Solution

A. Find out the details of what the client wants (not what he doesn't want)

B. Past successes, recent successes in different social contexts

C. What does the client need to do to repeat the exception?

- Ask: "How did you know to do that?"
- Useful questions – open-ended questions, miracle question, exception finding question.
- Always ask questions (open-ended), not tell them what to do.

III. Help the Client to Assess his/her own Progress Toward the Goal

A. Ask many variations of scaling questions

B. Ask what is the next small step to achieve the desirable small level

C. Find out how significant others would rate the client's progress

D. Ask client what it will take to get there (to 10, for example)

E. Ask relationship questions (What would _____ say where you are?)

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Questions Lead-In

The most difficult part of mastering a new concept is how to get started. The following are some suggestions for beginning to feel comfortable using Solution-Building conversations.

Stay with WH questions (What, When, Who, Where, And How. Avoid using Why).

What does ____ expect to come out of your coming to this meeting?

What part do you agree with and what part do you disagree with?

What needs to come out of this meeting today so that you can say this is helpful?

What tells you that you are at 5?

Tell me about the time when you were more productive? What was different then?

How do you know what to do next?

What do you know about him that tells you that he can do this?

How would that be helpful?

What has been changed, even a little, since you made this appointment?

Tentative Language (Perhaps, it seems, suppose, it appears, it sounds like, could it be...)

I am not sure about this. What do you suppose...?

Do you suppose...?

It sounds like what you really want is...?

Suppose your son (boss, etc) changed, what difference would that make (between you and him)?

How will things be different then?

Relationship Questions

What would your best friend (boss, mother, etc) say what you are like when you are calmer?

What would ____ notice different about you that will tell her things are better for you?

What would ____ (your best friend) say how you are different when you are successful?

Personal Meaning and Language

You are clear about not doing it. What does it mean to you? What about it is so important?

So, how would that be helpful to you to (drink more, stay in bed, not go to work, etc.)?

Can you explain that again, what different would it make for you?

You must have a good reason to..."

What Else? (For more and more details from the client – up to 4 or 5 times)

What else would it take for you to stop drinking and stay stopped?

What would it take for you to...? What would ____ say it would take for you to ...?

How can you tell it will work? Good, what else tells you that it will work?

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Avoiding “WHY” Questions

- So, how do you decide to come back? **NOT** Why did you come back?
- What is it about living there that is good for you? **NOT** Why do you like living there?
- So, what would you do instead of losing your temper? **NOT** Why would you lose your temper.
- So, how would you react? **NOT** Why would you react that way?
- How come? **NOT** Why?
- How come you don't do that with your boss? **NOT** Why don't you do that with your boss?
- Where (or How) did you learn that? **NOT** Why did you learn that?

Useful Language Skills

- Building a “yes set” and ways to maintain it
- “Not-Knowing” skills
- The other person's key words
- Tentative language (collaborative, negotiation)
- Use of HOW questions
- Suppose...(pause)
- Instead (goal negotiation)
- “Difference” or “different” questions
- Self-complimenting vs praise
- “how did (do) you do it?” (Admiring commiseration)
- How come? Instead of “why” question
- How helpful is that? How would that be helpful?
- What different would it make?
- You must have a good reason for...?
- Relationship question

Focusing on Exceptions

- Exceptions shrink problems. (Ask about details.)
- Exceptions demonstrate client abilities. (How do you suppose you did this?)
- Exceptions point toward solutions. (What would it take to repeat this?)
- Exceptions focus on what is possible. (You already know what to do.)

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Scaling Questions

- What tells you that you are at 8?
- How long did it take you to get to 8?
- How is 8 different than say, when you were at 5?
- What do you need to do to keep your 8?
- How come it's not -1?
- Suppose I ask your best friend (son, mother, etc) what would ____ say you are at on the same scale?
- What would it take to move 1 point higher?
- When you move up 1 point higher, what would be different in your life? With your child?
- How would your (family life, safety, health, depression, etc) be a little bit better?

Working Assumptions About Children

We believe all children want to:

- Have their parents be proud of them
- Please their parents and other adults
- Be accepted as a part of a social group
- Be active and involved in activities with others
- Learn new things
- Be surprised and surprise others
- Voice their opinions and choices
- Make choices when given an opportunity

Working Assumptions About Parents

We believe all parents want to:

- Be proud of their children
- Have a positive influence on their child
- Hear good news about their child and what the child is good at
- Give their child a good education and a chance to succeed
- See their child's future is better than theirs
- Have a good relationship with their child
- Be hopeful about their child
- Feel they are good parents