

You Can't Re-Arrange the Furniture Unless You're Invited into the House

A Toolbox of Relationship-Building Strategies
for School Psychologists



John J. Murphy, Ph.D.

E: jmurphy@uca.edu Web: www.drjohnmurphy.com

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Project MATCH (The Power of Relationships)

- < Compared three different treatment approaches studied (CBT, 12-step, and Motivational Interviewing)
- < Largest study ever conducted on the treatment of problem drinking

< **NO difference** in outcome between approaches.

The client's rating of the client-counselor alliance was the **best predictor** of:

- < Treatment participation;
- < Drinking behavior during treatment;
- < Drinking at 12-month follow-up.

Project MATCH Group (1997). Matching alcoholism treatment to client heterogeneity. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 58, 7-29.

TDCRP (The Power of Relationships)

- < Compared four approaches (CBT, IPT, Drug, Placebo)
- < Most sophisticated clinical trial ever conducted

Results (Drumroll, please)...

< **No difference** in outcome between approaches (**again**). The *client's* rating of the **alliance** at the second session was the **best predictor** of outcome across conditions (**again**).

Elkin, I. et al. (1989). The NIMH TDCRP: General effectiveness of treatments. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 46, 971-82.

What distinguishes top-performing practitioners from others?



Research clearly shows that top-performing practitioners—defined by client outcomes—are *better at building client-practitioner alliances* than others. The stronger the alliance, the better the outcomes. A strong alliance results largely from the client's perception of validation, understanding, and respect from the practitioner.

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More info and examples of workshop strategies can be found in *Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools*, 3rd ed. (Murphy, 2015) as indicated by the book icon (📖) and corresponding page numbers throughout the slides.

These **value-added strategies** will enhance the success of anything else you do with students, teachers, and parents.



Strategy 1: Ambassador Mindset



(SFCIS book, pages 72-73)

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few. —Shunryu Suzuki

Research says: Clients who view themselves as



inferior to their helpers are more likely to hold back their input and engagement and to be less hopeful about outcomes than clients who view themselves as more equal to their helpers.

Effective practitioners (and ambassadors) *listen, look, and learn* before offering advice.



Strategy 2: Listening



(SFCIS book, pages 73-76)



**To listen well is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well. —Chinese Proverb*

**When you listen generously to people, they can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time. And when you listen deeply, you can know yourself in everyone. —Rachel Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom*

**If you listen only for problems, you shortchange people. Everyone has something going for him or her. Your job is to spot people's resources and help them invest these resources in managing problem situations. —Gerald Egan, The Skilled Helper*

Strategy 3: Respectful Curiosity



(SFCIS book, pages 76-78)

Nobody likes a know-it-all. —Mary Murphy

“Curious & Tentative” vs. “Absolute & Certain”



Expressions of respectful curiosity:

- I'm not sure if this makes sense, but . . .
- Could it be that . . . ?
- I'm wondering . . .
- What do you think might happen if you . . . ?



Scenario 1. The Certain Practitioner: When we met last week, you said your teachers were too strict and they didn't care about you. I've thought about that, along with some other things we discussed. You've got your teachers all wrong [statement of certainty]. They actually care a lot about you. It is precisely because they care about you that they take the time and effort to make sure you do your homework and get good grades. [The phrase “it is precisely because” implies absolute truth.] Do you understand?

Scenario 2. The Curious Practitioner (*italicized words indicate 'curiosity'*) When we met last week, you said that your teachers were too strict and they didn't care about you. *I'm wondering* if there could be any other possible explanations for what your teachers are doing [statement of curiosity]. *I'm not sure* if this is on target [tentative statement], but I'll let you decide. *Could it be that* one of the reasons your teachers get on your case about turning in homework and getting good grades is because they *might* actually care about you enough to remind you to turn it in, so you can get better grades? *I don't know*, what do you think?

Murphy, J. J. (2015). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Strategy 4: Asking Permission

- Ask parents' permission to explore delicate topics, take notes, obtain their input/signature on forms, etc. (easy opportunities to show respect and promote cooperation)

Examples: "Is it okay with you if I make some notes as we talk?"; "I'd like to ask about differences in parenting between you and your husband if you're okay with that"; "I'm not trying to put you on the spot, but we can use any ideas on how we can better help your daughter at school. Can you help us with that?"

Non-Examples: ...?



Strategy 5: Validation



(SFCIS book, pages 78-80)



Validation...

- Accepts people's feelings and perceptions at face value ("accept" does not mean "agree")
- Assumes they're doing the best they can under the circumstances
- Frees people to focus on building solutions vs. defending or justifying themselves, their feelings, etc.

Strategy 6: Complimenting



(SFCIS book, pages 85-86)

Compliment people on *anything* (courage, coping, perseverance, commitment to improving things, attending a meeting, etc.)

- *Direct* (commenting directly on a person's actions or attributes)

- *Indirect* (folding compliments into questions)



In a study where people were asked what their helpers did that was most beneficial to them, their top answer was "they complimented me on what I did well."

Strategy 7: Change-Focused Questions



(SFCIS book, pages 81-85)

- Ask vs. Tell (Asking vs. telling gives people a voice in their care and opportunities to develop their own ideas and reach their own conclusions



Ask open-ended questions about...

- Resilience and coping (How have you kept things from getting worse?)
- Previous experiences (What has worked with similar problems?)
- Solution ideas (What do you think might help turn things around?)

“People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others.”



-Blaise Pascal
(1623-1662)

Strategy 8: Using the Language of Hope

Good words. That's where ideas begin.

—Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan

**Empowerment*

- What can you do. . . ?

**Qualification*

- often vs. constant, some times vs. always

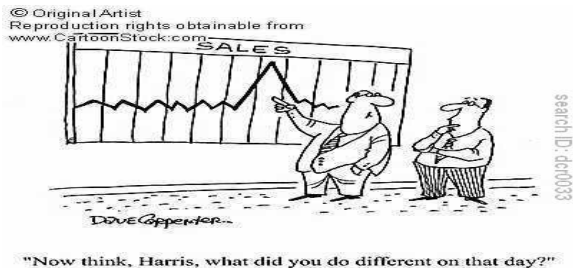
**Presupposition (future-focused)*

- when vs. *if*



Strategy 9: Noticing and Building on What is “Right” with People (Exceptions & Resources)

Cartoon Illustration (Building on Exceptions):



Building on Student Resources

I am more and more convinced that our great problem is taking advantage of what we've got. —Thomas Merton

- Identify and build on *exceptions* (times when the problem is absent or less noticeable) and *resources* (existing strengths and assets in the lives of students). Resources include:
 - Values, beliefs, cultural wisdom and customs
 - Heroes and influential people
 - Previous experiences/solution attempts
 - Resilience and coping skills
 - Special interests, talents, and hobbies
 - Theories and ideas about the problem, solution, and change
 - Social/family/community support systems

Strategy 10: Collecting Systematic Client Feedback & Adjusting Services



(SFCIS book, pages 101-104)

Research: Findings from six randomized clinical trials (RCTs) involving various helping settings and services indicate that collecting systematic client feedback on progress and alliance (and adjusting services based on the feedback) *can dramatically improve practitioners' outcomes and effectiveness.*



What is systematic client feedback (SCF)?

SCF refers to a practitioner’s ongoing and systematic use of valid, reliable instruments to obtain client views or concerns about progress and alliance, and to immediately address any concerns before they lead to negative outcomes.

Why collect systematic client feedback?

The good, the bad, and the ugly...

The Good: Most clients benefit (overall effectiveness of psychological services). The average person who receives services is better off than 80% of people (with similar struggles) who doesn’t.

The Bad: High dropout rate (in some studies, close to 50% of people who enter services drop out prematurely)

The Ugly: Some practitioners are much more effective than others, yet even best are not very good at identifying clients at risk for not benefitting from services or deteriorating

Systematic client feedback offers a practical solution to these problems.

How can you collect systematic client feedback?

The Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS) is a well-researched quality improvement strategy that uses ultra-brief measures of client/consumer feedback on the two most powerful predictors of service outcomes regardless of the presenting problem and practitioner’s treatment model:

- ✓ Client perceptions of early progress/change (using the Outcome Rating Scale/ORS)
- ✓ Client perceptions of client-practitioner alliance (using the Session Rating Scale/SRS)

Strategy 11: Empower Progress

Be alert for any sign of progress, no matter how small, and invite people to do the same. Help people “keep the ball rolling in the right direction” by highlighting and empowering progress using the following strategies:

- Give Credit (“Positive Blame”)
- Clarify Old You/New You Distinctions
- Explore Personal and Social Consequences of Change
- Request People’s Advice
- Help People Prepare for Setbacks
- Write Therapeutic Notes/Letters



Wrap-Up

Apply

Think about 1 or 2 relationship-building strategies from the workshop that you want to do more of in your work...then JUST DO IT! And remember...



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THANK YOU. JM