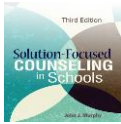


Solution-Focused Strategies for Working with Parents



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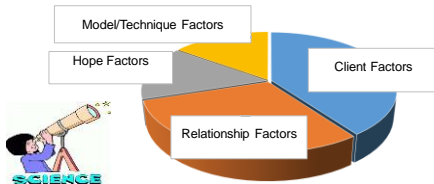
Translating Research into Practice
University of Central Arkansas (USA)

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Strategies in this workshop are based on...

Common Factors of Effective Helping
(1000+ research studies)
(Lambert & Ogles, 2004; Wampold, 2015)

Successful outcomes depend largely on the extent to which the practitioner/school psychologist incorporates people's strengths and resources (client factors), builds a cooperative alliance (relationship factors), instills hope (hope factors), and uses techniques that mobilize these ingredients (model/technique factors).



Main Tasks of Solution-Focused Practice*

- > **Involve people in every aspect of their care** to the extent that they are willing and able to participate (build collaborative, culturally responsive relationships)
- > **Clarify people's preferred future and create practical goals** (clarify what people want for the future and from services; develop practical goals/next steps toward the preferred future)
- > **Build on what is right with people; invite something different** (build on what people already do (exceptions) and already have (natural resources) to help them reach goals; invite 'something different' by changing the viewing or doing)
- > **Empower progress** (invite people to notice, own, explain, and sustain desired changes)

*These tasks apply not just to parents, but to *anyone* you work (students, teachers, administrators, etc.) and *any change-focused activity* (counseling, intervention, group work, RtI/IEP meetings, etc.)

Involve Parents by Building Collaborative, Culturally Responsive Relationships

Adopt the “ambassador mindset” by approaching every interaction as a *cross-cultural experience* and every parent as a *culture of one*.

- Listen to parents and *validate* their struggles
- Ask questions from a position of *not knowing* and *respectful curiosity* (cultural humility)
- Compliment parents for what is *right* in themselves and their children
- Collect parent *feedback* about your services (consultation services, ARD meetings, etc.)



Strategy 1: Orienting Parents to the Purpose of Services and Meetings

Research says: Orienting people to the purpose and structure of school services in general—and meetings in particular—improves service outcomes.



Parents appreciate having a general idea of what to expect from a service (assessment, consultation, intervention, etc.) and related meetings, and they are more likely to participate when they are oriented to the purpose and structure of services and meeting.

**Well worth the time it takes to do so.*

Strategy 2: Giving Compliments

Compliments can be:

- *Direct* (commenting on specific actions)
- *Indirect* (folding into questions)
- *Attribution-based* (commenting on personal attributes like caring, courage, persistence, etc.)



Research says: People notice, appreciate, and benefit from compliments given by helping professionals.



Strategy 3: Collecting Parent Feedback

Purpose

- Gives parents a voice in their child's services
- Shows respect for parents and their input
- Strengthens parent-school relationships



Methods

Informal feedback

- "On a scale of 1 to 10, how helpful..."

Formal (systematic) feedback

- Session Rating Scale (SRS) from Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS) (4 items, 1 min to administer, 1 min to discuss) For more info: www.heartandsoulsofchange.com

Discuss parent responses and obtain ongoing feedback about services, meetings, and other aspects of their child's program

Session Rating Scale (SRS)

(SRS obtains systematic client/parent feedback on the usefulness of meetings & the quality of parent-practitioner relationships)

- Administer at end of every meeting
- Each line is 10 centimeters long
- Discuss when total score is 36 or below
- Reliable, valid, practical

Session Rating Scale (SRS V.3.0)	
Name _____ Age (Yrs): _____ ID# _____ Sex: M / F _____ Session # _____ Date: _____	
Please rate today's session by placing a hash mark on the line nearest to the description that best fits your experience.	
Relationship: I did not feel heard, understood, and respected _____ I felt heard, understood, and respected _____	Goals and Topics: We did not work on or talk about what I wanted to work on or talk about _____ We worked on and talked about what I wanted to work on and talk about _____
Approach or Method: The therapist's approach is not a good fit for me _____ The therapist's approach is a good fit for me _____	Overall: There was something missing in the session today _____ Overall, today's session was right for me _____

Strategy 4: Creating Practical Goals

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

—Socrates

- Scaling Questions
- Best Hopes, Fast-Forward, Tomorrow, and Miracle Questions
- 5-S Guideline of Useful Goals

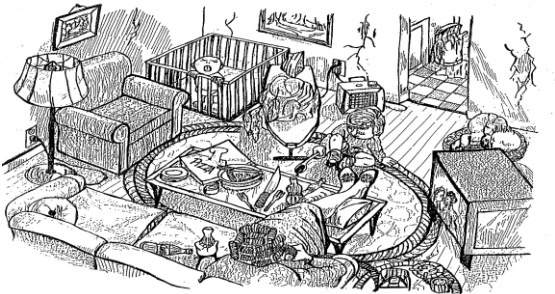


5-S Guideline of Practical Goals

- Significant (to the person for whom it is designed)
- Specific (concrete, measurable, observable)
- Small (small changes prompt bigger changes & sustain motivation)
- Start-based (stated as the start/presence/increase of something desirable vs. end/absence/decrease of something undesirable)
- Self-manageable (under person's control vs. other people's control)

What is Wrong AND What is Right? (3 to 5 per group, 5 minutes)

Brainstorm two story sets: (1) Stories of failure/weakness (what's *wrong*); (2) Stories of success/strength (what's *right*)



Strategy 5: Building on What's "Right" (Exceptions)

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"Now think, Harris, what did you do different on that day?"

Building on Exceptions

If I focus on a problem, the problem increases; if I focus on the answer, the answer increases.

—Alcoholics Anonymous (2001, p. 419)

- **Identify** an exception (recent time when the problem was absent or less intense)
- **Explore** details of the exception (When? Where? How did you approach things differently?)
- **Expand** the exception (What will it take to do this more often or in other places?)



Ask Parents and Others to Search for Exceptions in All Settings



Example: “I know you have your hands full and I would understand if you’re not able to do this, but would you be willing to pay attention to times when Noah does a little better at home? We can also do this at school. Between all of us, maybe we can learn what’s different about the better times, and then use that information to help Noah succeed. What do you think?”

Identify Exceptions and Incorporate them into School Interventions, Meetings, & IEP Goals (Listen, Look, Ask)

Listen for exceptions in the language of parents (Examples: “We argue *almost* all the time” “He’s *usually* late for class”)

Look for exceptions in school documents and records (Review school documents/records for exceptions to academic, behavioral, and social-emotional problems)

Ask for exceptions (Ask parents and others about “better times” at school—not perfect, just a little better than usual—and **explore** related details (“What was different?”), and **encourage** more of it (“What would it take to try that more often at home/school?”)

***Incorporate exceptions into academic/behavioral interventions, school meetings, IEP goals, etc.**

Strategy 6: Building on What's "Right" (Resources)



Values, resilience, cultural traditions, solution ideas,
special interests/talents, hobbies, social supports, advice
for others, previous experiences, ...

Building on 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 naturally occurring parent and student resources :
 - *Previous experiences* (What has worked with similar challenges you have faced as a parent?)
 - *Resilience and coping skills* (How have you kept things from getting worse? What helps you hang on instead of giving up?)
 - *Solution ideas* (You know your child better than anyone. What do you think might help turn things around?)
 - *Advice for others* (What advice would you give others in this situation?)

Identify Resources and Incorporate them into School Interventions, Meetings, & IEP Goals (Listen, Look, Ask)

Listen for resources in the language of parents and students
(Parent: He loves his grandfather; Student: The only thing I like about school is music class)

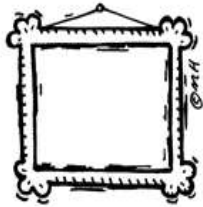
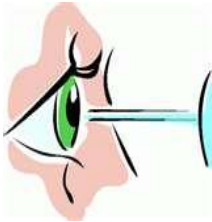
Look for resources in school documents and records (Review school documents/records for resources such as special interests, talents, influential; people, etc.)

Ask for resources (Ask Parent: "Who does Maria admire and respect most? What does she enjoy doing outside of school?"
Ask Student: "Maria, what would your friends say if I asked them what they like most about you?" Incorporate: "Maria, how do/can you use that trait to help yourself at school?"

*Incorporate resources into academic/behavioral interventions, school meetings, IEP goals, etc.

Strategy 7: Changing Your View (Reframing)

If the existing view isn't helping change things, then consider changing your view of the parent, student, or problem—and encouraging others to do the same



FACTS & INTERPRETATIONS are two different animals





Some views are more useful than others in engaging parents' cooperation and participation

Strategy 8: Empowering Any Sign of Progress

Be alert for any small sign of improvements and invite parents and others to do the same. Help parents/students “keep the ball rolling” in the right direction by empowering progress with one or more of the following strategies:



- *Give Credit to Parents/Students (“Positive Blame”)*: “How did you think of that?”; “How did you resist the urge to respond how you used to?”; Old You/New You Distinctions
- *Explore Personal/Social Consequences of Improvements* (“What was that like for you?”; “What did it teach you about yourself?”)
- *Request Parent’s Advice for Others* (“What advice would you give other parents in this situation?”)
- *Write Notes/Letters to Parents* (Writing short notes/letters that acknowledge/celebrate progress)

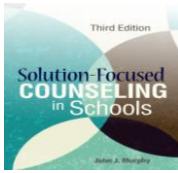
Examples of Letters (Student Letter & Parent Letter)

Erika (age 8): Dear Erika, Mr. Kelly told me that you were more kind to others this week in class. How did you do that? What made you decide to do that? Maybe you can teach me more about the “new you” so that I can help other students who need help behaving better. I’ll check with you tomorrow to see if you can help me with that.

Ms. Thomas (Derek’s mother): Dear Ms. Thomas, I wanted to let you know that Derek has had a much better week at school. Thank you for hanging in there and continuing to work with us to help Derek behave more successfully at school. Derek is lucky to have you in his corner, and so am I. Thank you for all your support and help, and congratulations to you and Derek on a better week.

Strategy 9: Broaching Difficult Topics & Managing Conflicts with Parents in Meetings

- Soft startup: Using soft startups to broach difficult or historically conflictual topics.
- Making the implicit explicit: Calmly, clearly acknowledging differences of opinion/perspective between parents and school personnel.
- “Normalizing” disagreements: Pointing out that differences and disagreements are inevitable, especially when discussing something as important as a child’s life and education.
- Reaffirming primary goal of schooling, services, meetings, IEPs, and schooling.
- Finding mutuality: Finding and stating areas of mutual agreement/commitment (e.g., student’s wellbeing, the importance of the child’s education, etc.).



Take a minute to think
about two techniques from the workshop that you want
to try out during your next week of work...
and **JUST DO IT!**

THANK YOU. JM

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