

# SOLUTION FOCUSED

## Family Therapy

CPY 550  
Dynamics of Marriage, Relationship  
and Family Systems

Burt Bertram, Ed.D., LMHC, LMFT

People already have the skills to solve their problems but have lost sight of these abilities because their problems loom so large that their strengths are crowded out of the picture.

Solution focused therapy is fundamentally about helping the client shift their language from talking about problems to talking about solutions

## Solution Focused Development of the Theory

- Based on Ericksonian ideas and the strategic MRI model, but moves from problem-focus to a focus on solutions to the problem.
- Primary work was developed at the Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee and has been expanded by many of the trainees from the center.
- Brief Solution-Focused therapy was a response to political/financial pressures of the 80's and 90's.
  - the need for rapid, crisis-oriented therapies to respond to community mental health issues
  - the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral treatments, which were originally defined as brief treatments
  - the focus on brief therapy in research studies because of the practical difficulties of studying long term treatments
  - the increasing awareness among clinicians that most clients desire a treatment of shorter duration
  - the pressures from health insurance companies to lower treatment costs

Compiled by A. Homrich

## Solution Focused Assumptions and Practice of the Theory

- Emphasizes cognition, shifting attention from a problem orientation to times when the complaint is absent. (*Change the "doing" and the "viewing" of the problem.*)
- Contends that the cause of the problem or details of the problem do not need to be defined; only the complaints the clients presented.
- Assumes people are resourceful, really do want to change and only need slight shifts of perspective to release their potential.
- Suggests that "resistance" is the client's way of cooperating by teaching the therapist what is (or isn't) the best way of helping them.
- Future focused – look to where problems can be solved

Compiled by A. Homrich

## Solution Focused Assumptions and Practice of the Theory

- Assumes that language shapes reality, that what is needed is to change the way people talk about the situation and the language they use. (*Moving from "problem talk" to "solution talk."*)
  - Shift thinking from negative to positive
- The art of solution focused therapy involves helping clients not only see that their problems have exceptions, but also realize that these exceptions are solutions that they have in their repertoires.

Compiled by A. Homrich

## Solution Focused Assumptions and Practice of the Theory

- Three dictums underlie the philosophy of the brief therapy approach and help the therapist focus on successful goal-attainment
  1. *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it"* suggests that therapists not delve into problems or issues of the family that aren't presented by the family, no matter how obvious the problem may be to the therapist;
  2. *"Once you know what works, do more of it,"* which applies especially to "prescribing" behaviors that have been identified as exceptions to the problem or engaging in more newly-discovered successful behaviors or perspectives; and
  3. *"If it doesn't work, don't do it again. Do something different,"* which means that the therapist, along with the family, should use unsuccessful outcomes as examples of what doesn't work in order to avoid repeating frustrating pitfalls and continue the search for solutions elsewhere.

Compiled by A. Homrich

## Solution Focused Techniques

### The Exception Question

*"When in the past might the problem have happened – but didn't?"*

*"What is different about those times when the problem doesn't happen?"*

*"How have you let your child (spouse, parent, etc.) know when she/he does something that makes a positive difference to you?"*

### Coping Questions

*What keeps you going under such difficult circumstances?*

--- or ---

*What have you done to keep things from getting worse?*

Invites client to recognize that they may be more resilient, simply for enduring, than they realized.

### Scaling Questions

*"On a scale of 1 – 10..."*

## Solution Focused Techniques

### Miracle Question

*"Suppose one night, while you were asleep, there was a miracle and this problem was solved. How would you know? What would be different?"*

### End-of-Session-Feedback

*Pausing at the end of the session to offer feedback, consisting of a summary of the session (could involve observations, encouragements, and compliments) and suggestions for building on the positives.*

## Solution Focused Goals of Therapy

Resolution of the presenting problem by shifting to a focus on the client's desired outcomes or replication of problem-free occasions and generalizes these occurrences to future problem-free functioning. This is done by:

- Identifying times when the family has handled the problem successfully in the past,
- Structuring opportunities to view the problem in different ways that bring about change, and/or
- Creating experiences in which the problematic situation is experienced differently. In other words, the therapist helps to modify the repetitive sequences that surround the problem and to incur a hopeful perspective about change.

Compiled by A. Homrich