

Contents

Preface	ix
Overview of the Contents	ix
What's New in This Edition	xi
Who Can Benefit From This Book	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
About the Author	xvii
1. Counseling in Schools and Other Settings: Problems and Solutions	1
Origins of Solution-Focused Brief Counseling	6
Differences and Similarities	7
Effectiveness	12
Core "Rules"	13
Solution-Focused Assumptions	14
Additional Guiding Concepts	17
Summary	22
Practice Exercise	22
2. Setting Goals	25
Opening the First Meeting: Establishing Rapport and Explaining the Process	26
Developing a Positive Goal	27
The Miracle Question	37
"What Else" Questions	43
Establishing Well-Developed Goals: An Overview	44
Summary	48
Practice Exercises	48

3. Discovering and Constructing Solutions	51
Discovering Unrecognized Solutions:	
Instances of Success	52
Empowering Clients Through Recognition of Their Resources	56
Scaling a Baseline and Progress	61
Flagging the Minefield: Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles	64
Concluding the Initial Session With a Message	65
Summary	76
Practice Exercise	77
4. Connecting the Pieces	79
Components of the First Session	79
Case Study From a Mental Health Setting: Session 1	85
Case Study Transcript From a School Setting:	
Session 1 With Pedro	89
Summary	103
Practice Exercises	103
5. Abbreviated SFBC Session	105
Explaining the Process	106
Determining What the Client Wants to Achieve	106
Using Scaling to Determine Clients' Views of Their Present Situation	107
What's the Highest Number the Client Has Ever Been?	108
Writing the Message	112
A Case of an Abbreviated SFBC Session	113
Summary	117
6. Conducting Subsequent Sessions	119
Subsequent Sessions: Getting Started	120
Components of Second and Subsequent Sessions	120
Assessing Whether Further Counseling Is Needed	127
Writing the Message	128
Tools for Second and Subsequent Sessions:	
Flow Chart and Note Sheet	128
Subsequent Session From a Mental Health Setting	129
Subsequent Sessions With Pedro From a School Setting	133
Summary	135

7. Working With Reluctant Clients and Challenging Situations	137
Helping Involuntary Clients Become Customers for Counseling	137
SFBC With Students Mandated for Counseling in Lieu of Disciplinary Action	142
Turning Difficult Situations Into Workable Goals	148
Summary	150
8. Expanded Applications of Solution-Focused Concepts	151
10-Second “Counseling”	151
Solution-Focused Counseling Referral Form	152
Using Puppets in SFBC	152
Using Sand Trays in SFBC	157
Solution-Focused Group Counseling	158
Classroom Counseling Using SFBC Methods	160
Solution-Focused Parent–Teacher Conferences	164
Solution-Focused Guided Imagery	172
Summary	172
Final Thoughts	173
Appendix A: Practice Detailing a Nonspecific Goal	175
Appendix B: Counseling Session With Kasey: A Practice Exercise	177
Appendix C: Solution-Focused Guided Imagery	193
References	209
Index	213

Preface

This book provides step-by-step instruction in how to use solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) with youth. School counselors certainly will be able to relate to the typical client concerns presented. Teachers will also benefit, because each component of this approach can be used independently in a variety of situations and school settings. Other professionals—psychologists, social workers, marriage and family counselors, pastoral counselors, licensed professional counselors, and drug counselors who work with youth—also will find the methods and case studies relevant.

SFBC is ideally suited for schools and mental health facilities. With large caseloads, school counselors and other mental health practitioners often have too little time to provide clients with longer-term, traditional counseling. Today more than ever, mental health professionals need a brief but effective approach suitable for a wide range of problems.

The book is intentionally short. Theory and research are discussed briefly; however, implementation is the main thrust. My approach is to lead you through the material one step at a time, including practice exercises at the end of the first four chapters and in Appendices A and B. I seek to provide the knowledge necessary to apply SFBC with children and youth.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

The book is based on the work of Steve de Shazer (1985), who developed the SFBC approach. He discovered that by focusing on solutions rather than problems, clients were getting better faster

than with traditional counseling modalities. Implicit in the model is the belief that clients are not always overcome by their problems. In fact, solutions are present even though they may be unrecognized. By rediscovering their resources, clients are encouraged to repeat past successes. As simple as this sounds, it represents a powerful, empowering dynamic that enables clients to quickly resolve the difficulties that brought them to counseling.

Chapter 1 presents background, research, rationale, and principles for SFBC. The chapter also highlights the reasons SFBC techniques work well with clients from various cultural backgrounds. The exercise at the end of the chapter guides you to experience firsthand the effects of problem-oriented questions versus solution-oriented questions.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how to introduce clients to solution-focused counseling and how to facilitate the initial goal-setting phase of the model. Step-by-step procedures prepare you to help clients identify, behaviorally, what they will be doing to achieve their goal. In the section on the “miracle question,” you learn how to help clients explore their goal by painting a mental picture of what their lives would look like if they were problem free. The exercises at the end of the chapter provide practice with goal setting and an opportunity for you to experience how the miracle question can help you with a problem you’d like to overcome.

Chapter 3 describes how you can equip clients to identify instances of unrecognized success and exceptions to their difficulties. You learn how to encourage clients through “cheerleading” that reinforces even slightly successful steps clients have used to improve their situation. This chapter also covers scaling techniques clients can use to assess their current status as well as progress toward their goal. The chapter concludes with detailed instructions for constructing a message—composed of compliments, a bridging statement, and task—that clients receive at the end of each interview. A practice exercise gives you a chance to apply these steps in addressing a personal situation of your own.

Chapter 4 reviews the components of the initial SFBC session and provides a transcript of one of my actual client cases so that you can see the entire process unfold as described in Chapters 2 and 3. The chapter also provides a flow chart and note sheet to help keep you on track as you implement the SFBC process. The chapter concludes with an opportunity to practice writing a message to the client whose case is presented in the

chapter and an opportunity to practice SFBC interventions for an entire session found in Appendix B.

Chapter 5 describes how to conduct an abbreviated SFBC counseling session and provides a flow chart and note sheet to help you implement the process. This short format is ideal when counselors and mental health practitioners may only have time for a 20- to 25-minute session with a client.

Chapter 6 covers the interventions you use in second and subsequent sessions to address the successes and challenges clients have experienced since the previous meeting. The chapter also discusses the scaling interventions used during second and subsequent sessions to determine clients' progress, and the use of a message to reinforce behaviors that keep clients on track for reaching their goal.

Chapter 7 addresses ways you can help reluctant and mandated clients become cooperative "customers" for counseling. The chapter also provides suggestions for dealing with particularly challenging situations and details techniques for turning difficult situations into workable goals.

Chapter 8 describes eight other applications of the solution-focused approach. It discusses 10-second "counseling," the use of a solution-focused referral form, and how to implement the solution-focused approach using puppets and using sand trays. The chapter also details how solution-focused concepts and techniques have been applied with small groups, entire classes, parent-teacher conferences, and guided imagery for groups.

Appendix A provides answers for a practice exercise on detailing a nonspecific goal. Appendix B contains a complete counseling session with prompts that give you an opportunity to practice SFBC interventions and then compare your interventions to the ones I used in the session. Appendix C contains detailed instructions as well as pages that can be enlarged and duplicated to create the booklet participants use in the solution-focused guided imagery group activity.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION

Since the second edition of this book in 2005, many exciting developments have made even clearer the value of staying focused on solutions. In particular, this new edition cites recent research

on the effectiveness of solution-focused counseling and therapy, highlights more applications and new adaptations of SFBC, and provides new tools to help the practitioner.

The SFBC model presented in this book is not a static process. In the years since the previous edition, through my own practice and the experiences that other practitioners have so generously shared, new strategies and tips have come to light. This edition incorporates these new tips and techniques in ways that I believe have made the model even more effective. Also, the range of case examples has expanded to include a case study from a mental health agency setting. As I have trained more mental health professionals outside school settings, several have contacted me about their experiences using the SFBC model. The book has been enriched by the successes they have shared.

Creating well-defined goals is key to success in SFBC. Goals clarify the specifics of what clients want to accomplish—what success will look like. In the simplest terms, you have to know where you are going if you are to have a likelihood of getting there. In light of the critical importance of goals, this edition has expanded Chapter 2 on goal setting to incorporate more tips for handling the types of responses clients may give when you ask, “What are your best hopes from our meeting?” or “How can I help you?” Knowing in advance the range of responses that clients may give and being prepared to address them reduces the chance you will get “stuck” in determining what intervention to use.

Because of time constraints, school counselors have asked for ways to implement SFBC in shorter sessions. A new Chapter 5 describes in greater detail an abbreviated SFBC session. This short format is particularly useful for school counselors with large case-loads who may have only 20 to 25 minutes to counsel a student. For clients in settings in which they are paying for counseling “out of pocket,” the short format may provide a more affordable alternative to the traditional 50- to 60-minute session. This chapter also features new tools—a flow chart and note sheet—specially designed for the abbreviated SFBC session. Reproducible copies of the new flow chart and note sheet are presented in Chapter 5. Used in tandem, these tools help keep you organized and on track with the process for the abbreviated SFBC session.

In recognition of the many times clients who are sent to you arrive there unwillingly, this edition expands suggestions for how

to use SFBC principles to work with reluctant clients. For school counselors, this edition also includes special recommendations for working with students who were mandated to see you in lieu of suspension or other major disciplinary actions because of their disruptive behavior or violations of school rules.

Over the years, I have corresponded with many of the practitioners who participated in workshops I've conducted as well as other colleagues in the field of solution-focused counseling. It has been especially exciting to see ways they have adapted solution-focused techniques with different settings and modalities. Chapter 8 features several of these new applications, including the use of sand trays and the use of solution-focused parent-teacher conferences. Incorporating sand trays within a solution-focused session provides another tool for working with children in mental health facilities and schools. Applying SFBC methods in parent-teacher conferences creates a positive, goal-oriented format that helps both parents and teachers be more effective in helping students. The chapter also features an example of a different approach to using SFBC with small groups.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

This book is designed for school counselors, mental health professionals, and university faculty who teach in mental health programs. The intent of this book is to present step-by-step instructions coupled with case examples to enable you to gain the skills needed to use the SFBC approach. The book also can serve as a quick reference guide if you feel you are “stuck” and need to refresh your knowledge of the SFBC process.

The fact that clients can see positive results in a short time provides a particularly important advantage to those of you with large caseloads, especially in schools. Because this model focuses on solutions—rather than problems and their history—counseling becomes brief and success tends to come quickly.

Mental health counselors, psychologists, and social workers, especially those of you working in agency settings, can benefit from this book. It provides a framework for counseling clients—children, adolescents, and adults—in a way that is efficient, effective, and positive. By staying focused on clients' successes, rather

than their problems, practitioners have reported that they leave at the end of the day feeling energized and hopeful.

Counselor educators in universities report that they have found the previous two editions of this book to be effective in teaching SFBC as well as popular with their students. As of November 2013, 148 higher education institutions have used the second edition of this book. Several professors have commented that their students really appreciate the book. In particular, one professor told me that his school counseling students found this book to be a practical aid in preparing for the challenges that lie ahead for them as school counselors. His students also indicated that they especially appreciated the book because, compared to most of the required texts in mental health theory, it highlighted applications and case examples.

My hope is that this third edition will be even more useful in helping school counselors and other mental health professionals effectively serve their clients in a variety of settings.