

# Solution Focused *Counseling Strategies*

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# Today's Focus

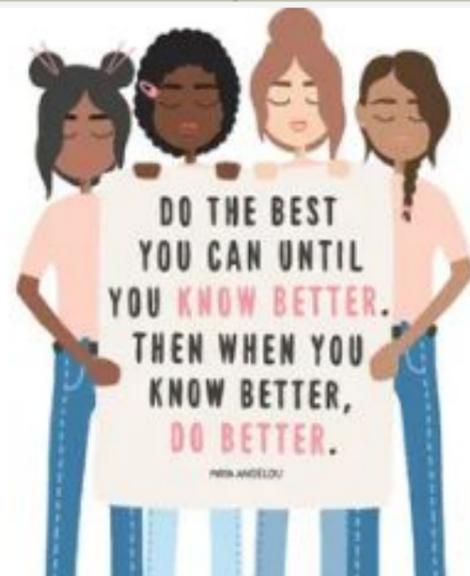
## *Solution Focused Counseling Strategies*

Change through accessing a client's strengths and resources

### *The Approach*

Brief, goal-directed intervention focusing on what client wants to achieve instead of focusing on the problems

### *The Principals*



### *Assumptions*

Foundation of beliefs behind this theory

### *Techniques*

5 types of questions

# Solution Focused Approach

## *History*

- Despite the name, Solution Focused meetings don't always lead to solutions being identified within the meeting
- Sometimes the process leads the student being "unstuck" in terms of their thinking and actions and more aware of what is already working and what else could possibly work

## *Solutions Over Problems*

- Assist in identifying solutions
- Focus on what is wanted over what is not wanted
  - Not essential to focus on the problem

## *Focused, Not Forced*

- Focus on a future where the problem doesn't exist or is less of a problem and times in the past/present where the problem isn't occurring

## *Brief*

- Should not be more than one session
- Should be clear about what will be happening
- Finishing is incorporated from the beginning

# 3 Principles

*If it ain't  
broke, don't  
fix it*

*Once you  
know what  
works,  
do more  
of it*

*If it doesn't  
work, don't  
do it again.  
Do something  
different.*

# Assumptions for Practice

## *About the Student / Client*

- Every client is unique
- Clients come with their own strengths, supports, and resources
- All clients have the ability to find their own solutions
- You cannot change them, they can only change themselves
- Client is their own expert, not you
- Client's solution is more likely to fit their particular difficulty/situation and more likely to be implemented and maintained (long lasting change)

## *About Problems*

## *About Change*

## *About the Practice*

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- No problem happens all the time, there are always exceptions to be found and built on
- Focus on the possible and changeable rather than the overwhelming and intractable
- The client is not the problem. The problem is the problem. The problem and solution occurs in the interaction between people rather than residing within people
- Problems that appear complex may not necessarily require a complex solution

## *About Change*

## *About the Practice*

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## *About Change*

- Change is happening all the time
- Small changes can make big differences
- Rapid change or resolution can happen when people hit on ideas that work
- There may have been some pre-session change

## *About the Practice*

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## *About the Practice*

- Lasting change is more likely to happen when you find out what's working and help people figure out how to do more of it
- Change is happening all the time
- Our job is to identify and amplify useful change
- People are more likely to behave and/or think differently when you work with their goals for change

# Problem-Free Talk

## *Problem-Free Talk*

It's important to learn their strengths and interests. This provides a positive start to the process because by inviting them to talk about their skills and likes, they understand there is more to them than just the problem. It reminds them of their resources and abilities.

You can find more examples in the resources section I include at the end.

## *Questions*

- Ask them about their interests and strengths
- If they're having difficulty with this, use a position question
- If they're shy, do an activity without a lot of eye contact

## *Games*

- Hangman to guess their strength
  - Dice, Candyland, Uno:  
Every point or color, they name something they're good at, etc

## *Activities*

Have them draw or make a collage or shield  
Strength cards  
Strength shield

# Compliments

## *Directly*

I can see that you're really persistent, you've already tried a few different ways to solve this on your own.

## *Indirectly*

What would your best friend say you're good at?

## *Self Compliment*

How did you know it was time to address this?

Let clients give their own observations and interpretations

*Look for opportunities to compliment them along the way on what they've done whenever possible.*

*Empower them.*

*How were you able to do that!*

# 5 Main Types of Solution Focused Questions

## *Exception*

## *Coping*

## *Preferred Future*

## *Scaling*

## *Position*

Find past successes: When is the problem not happening?  
How?

Can provide hope by proving that the problem is not always occurring and there have been times they have faced the challenge and handled it in a way that resolved it.

Finding when the problem is not present or is less influential helps them identify solutions that have been used in the past or present.

Don't skip progress that the client has already made and go straight for the next step. Make sure you really discuss what they've done already. Have the client identify what needs for them to happen for things to get better. You want them to be in charge of the planning.

*Notes*

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## *Coping*

What are you doing to cope with all of this?

Some problems last for a long period of time or become part of their life. i.e.: Chronic illness, grief, court outcome, finances

Ask in a way that shows empathy and compassion. It acknowledges your understanding of what they're experiencing and can show their existing strengths and actions.

## *Preferred Future*

## *Scaling*

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This helps them define what their goal looks like and think about specific steps they can take to reach that goal.

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## *Scaling*

Encourage useful conversations about almost any situation and get helpful details about the present, past, and future.

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## *Position*

Gather other people's perceptions.

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# How to Establish Goals

## *Preferred Future Questions*

### *Miracle Question*

- If you had a magic wand, what would you change?
- If you woke up and everything was perfect, what would be different?
  - What is the first thing you would notice? What else? What will others notice?
- Locate the future description based on the context of their problem.
  - In your first practice, what will tell you things are different?
  - When you first enter your class...
- Ask them what part of their miracle day is already happening.

### *Best Hopes*

- What are your best hopes for today's meeting?
- What needs to happen for you to leave here thinking it was worthwhile to come?
- How will you know when things are "good enough" for our meetings to end?
- What needs to happen in these sessions so that your parents/teachers/friends say "I'm really glad you went to meet with them"?

# How to Establish Goals

## *Position Question*

- What is the first thing your teacher would notice that would tell them that things are different?
- Who would be the first person in your class to notice? What would they notice?

## *Scaling*

- As a follow up for the miracle question:
  - Imagine on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is everything you described in your miracle day is happening now and 0 is that none of that is happening. Where are you at right now?
  - Is that good enough?
    - If YES: What can you do to continue to keep things at this number?
    - If NO: If things improved slightly, what number would you be at? What would be happening at that higher number? What would it take for this to happen?

# Preferred Future Examples

*Worksheets for use included in resource section*

## Miracle Day Clock:

If you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had occurred so that all your hopes became reality, what would tomorrow look like?

What would you notice?

What would you do when you woke up?

How would your day be different from another day?

What would happen at each stage of the day?



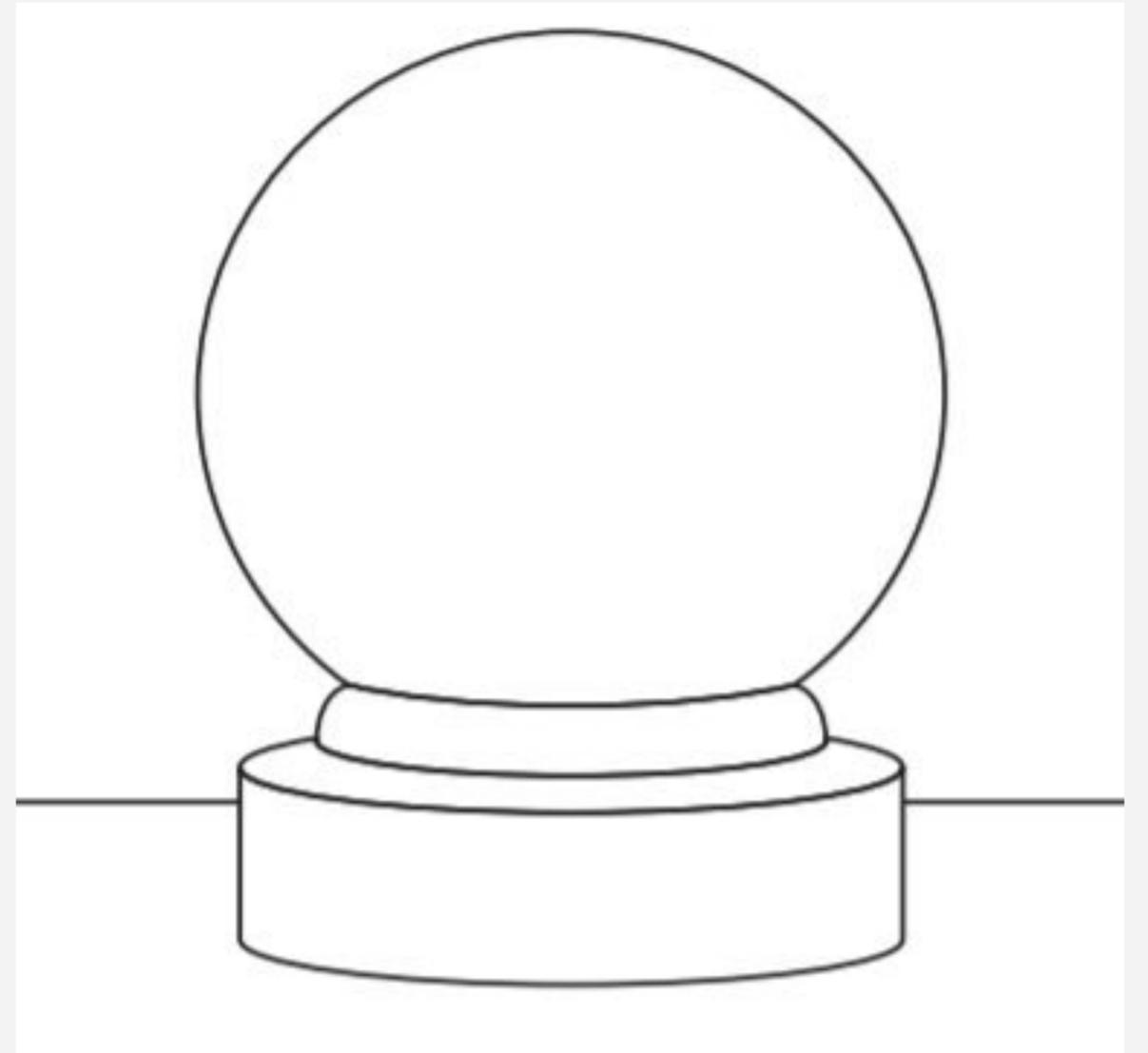
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## Crystal Ball:

How would you know that our time together has helped you?

What would you like to see in the crystal ball?



# Preferred Future Examples

*Worksheets for use included in resource section*

## Magic Wand:

If a wizard/fairy waved a magic wand to cast a spell and suddenly your best hopes all happened exactly how you wanted it- what would be the first thing you noticed that told you it worked?

What would you be doing?

What would other people notice?



# Preferred Future Examples

*Worksheets for use included in resource section*

## Time Machine:

Imagine getting out of a time machine that took you to a point in the future when things are how you would like them to be.

What is it like when you get out of the time machine?

What would your day be like?



# Preferred Future Examples

*Worksheets for use included in resource section*

## A Letter from the Future:

Ask them to write to themselves from a future time, when their life is going well for them (closer to their best hopes or their best hopes are happening).

What does this future self want to tell the person you are now?

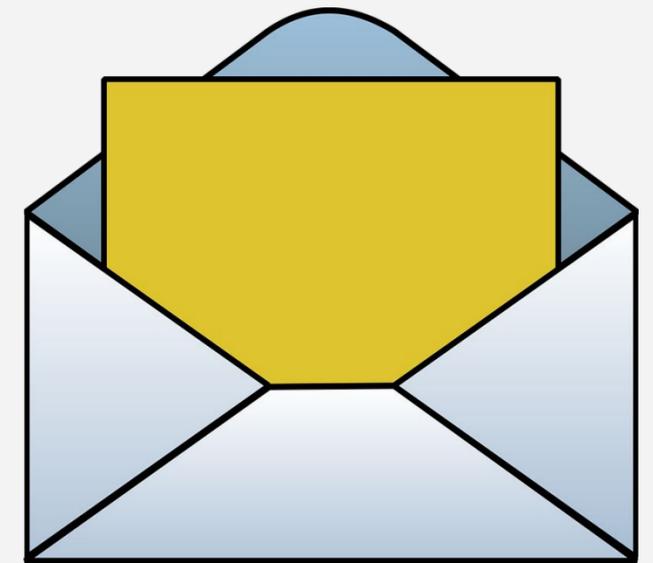
In what ways is the future a good place to be?

What has changed?

What advice might future you give to the younger you now?

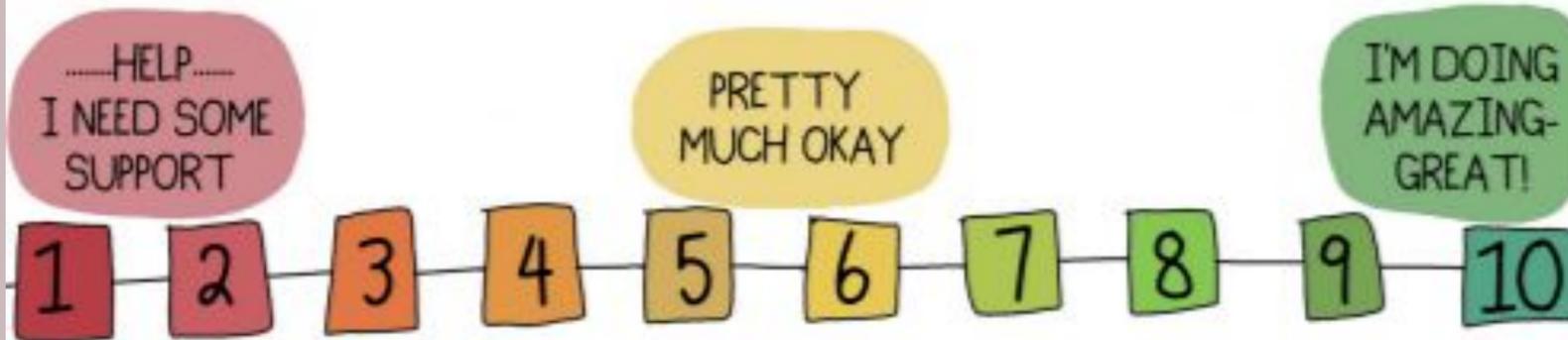
This could also be addressed to a friend or somebody else.

The important thing is for them to describe in detail what's good about their life in this preferred future.



# Scaling

On a scale between 1 and 10,  
how are you doing?



IF YOU ARE BETWEEN  
1 AND 5:

What would move you  
up a number or two?

What is helping you to cope and  
get through these tougher times?

When things are going better,  
what will you notice is different?

IF YOU ARE BETWEEN  
6 AND 10:

What is helping you  
to be here?

What can you do more of  
to stay here or move up?

What does being at this  
number tell you that you need?

*Don't be afraid to dig deeper*

- On a scale of 1-10 (1 being as soon as I leave the room you're going to find something and hurt yourself and 10 being you are confident you won't even have a thought about it again) what number are you right now?
- How did you get to that number?
- What does that number mean?
- Why are you at that number and not one lower/higher?
- What would it take to move you up by one number?
- What's preventing you from getting to that number?



# Scaling Ideas

**Climbing  
a  
mountain**

**Rocket Ship  
Taking Off**

**Climbing a  
ladder**

**Using your  
fingers**

**Emojis**

**Numbers**

**Traffic Light**

**Water bottle  
with Sand  
or Water**

**Hopscotch**

# Coping Question Examples

In the past, how have you dealt with this?

What skills do you use to cope with when you're around other people who do that?

How did you manage to get through class today with all this going on?

In the past, how have you coped with the stress of this?

What's one strategy that you've learned that helps you cope with this stress?

How did you learn to cope with this when you were still so young? Did you do it all by yourself?

During times when you didn't/couldn't - how did you cope with it?

Over the past few days, how have you been able to cope with this? Even a little?

# Identifying Their Solution Team

*Who in their life supports them and can help them work towards their best hopes?*

## Questions:

Who do you like being with? Who helps you already?

Who can help you towards your miracle day?

Who might notice positive changes you're making?

Is there anybody you'd like me to talk to, to explain our work together?

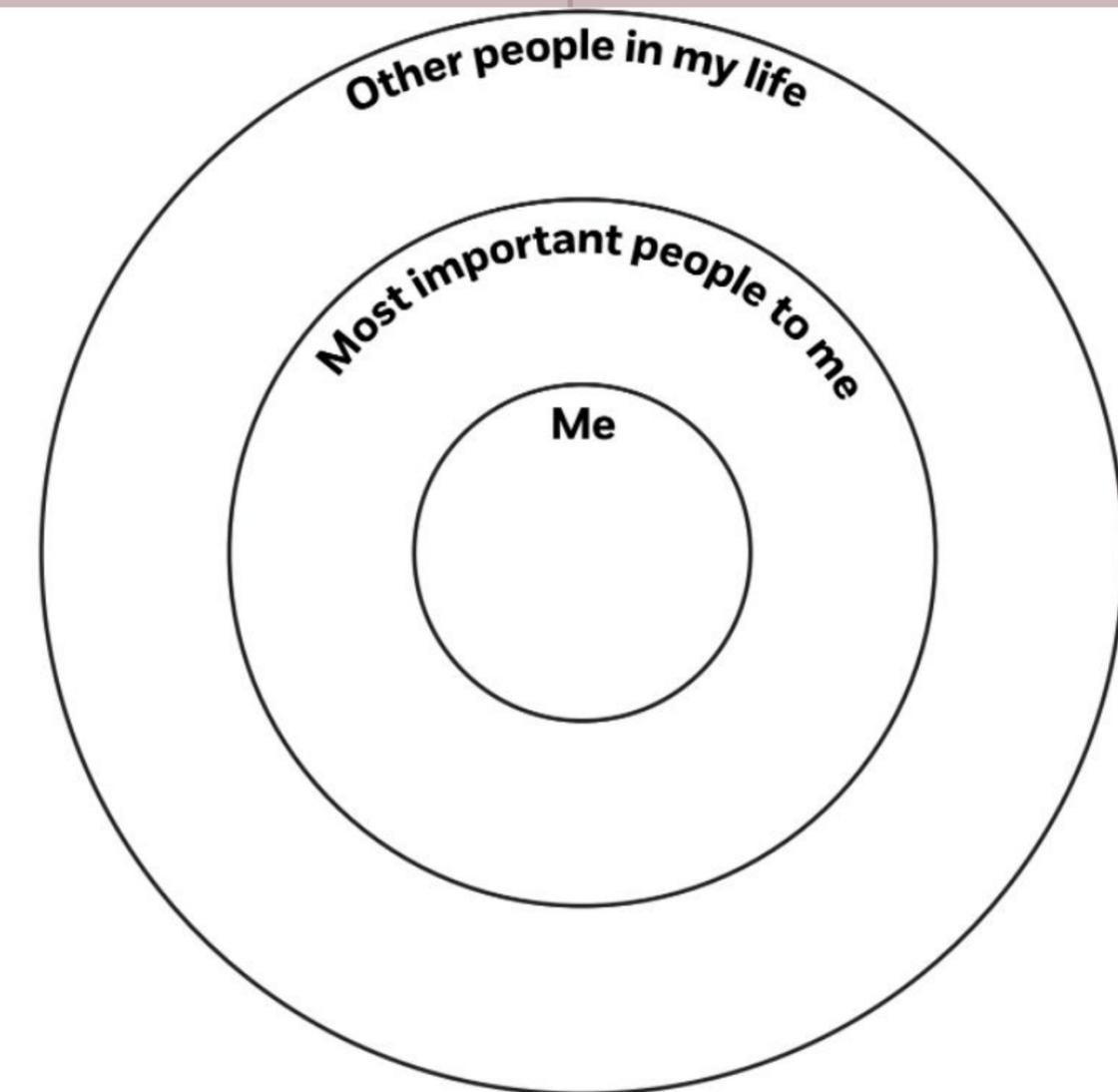
## Tools & Activities to help them:

The Helping Hand

Drawing their Solution Team

Support Circles / Who is important to me

Manipulatives: Buttons, toys, stones, stickers



# FAQs: What if....

## *What if they try to speak about the problem in detail?*

Listen and try to identify strengths and exceptions. Validate their thoughts and feelings and praise them for their attempts to cope with and resolve the problem.

## *What if they struggle in talking about themselves?*

Use position questions by asking about the perspective of other people in their life. Use other ways like drawing or using a scaling question.

## *What if their miracle day seems impossible? Or is unethical / illegal?*

It's typically still helpful to get the details of their miracle day even when it seems impossible. When you continue to elicit the details, their responses can guide how their goal can be achievable. If the best case situation isn't possible, what would good enough look like?

# FAQs: What if...

*They can't identify a preferred future?*

Encourage them to find a time in the past when things were even slightly better.

When were things better for you than they are now? What was happening then? What was different then?

Teens: Have them write a letter to themselves from the adult they hope to be in 1-5 years with details about what they are doing and how they got there.

*In a later meeting they say things are worse?*

How are you coping with that? How were you able to stop things from getting even worse?

*They don't want to be here? (Involuntary)*

Join with them: What needs to happen for your mom to get off your back? We don't want to meet more than necessary so what needs to happen in our meetings so we can reduce the amount of times we meet but make our time together useful for you?

*They want someone else to change their behavior?*

What if they don't change, how will you cope?  
Scale the chances of that happening- what can you do to increase the chances?

# You Practice

## *Preferred Future*

Examples....

## *Coping*

Examples...

# You Practice

*Scaling*

Examples...

*Exception*

Examples...

*Position*

Examples

# Sources & Resources

*Click to access the document!*

[Solution-Focused Practice Toolkit](#)

[Perfect Day and Shield Worksheet](#)

[Letter From The Future Worksheet](#)

[Miracle Day Worksheet](#)

[Time Machine Worksheet](#)

[Greg Vinnicomb's Solution Focused Handout](#)

[M&M Strengths Finding Game](#)

[Elliott Connie's 101 SFBT Questions](#)