

Solution News AUTUMN 2018 EDITION

UKASFP United Kingdom Association
for **Solution Focused Practice**

Editor: Naomi Whitehead

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**Naomi Whitehead.
Thoughts from the
Editor.**

Welcome to our Autumn 2018 Edition of Solution News. Firstly

we are very pleased to welcome our new Board members, Tim Newton, Alun Parry and Martin Bohn. Secondly we present our podcast and youtube channel (see links above) which we hope will provide even more inspiration, even more ideas for deepening practice and even more pleasure for your solution focused ears and eyes! Thirdly I would like to share two ideas which the articles below, and my SF Summer, have left me musing on: *Improvisation* and *the spaces in-between*.

The UKASFP 2018 creative, jazz infused, socially responsible conference, (given to us by Suzi Curtis & Steve Flatt, opened skilfully by Andrew Gibson & made possible under the guidance of our insightful Chair, Jim Bird-Waddington), provided powerful food for thought about *improvisation* and communication. Alex Steele and his fellow musicians enabled us to experience in real time the new thoughts, feelings, perspectives and joy that can be experienced when we are with people prepared to experiment, act intuitively and who truly, deeply, really listen (avoiding judgement). Similar concepts of which were purported by Steve De Shazer himself, documented in the book 'Encounters', where Alasdair Macdonald recalls conversations with Steve: "A musician may appear to sit for long periods without activity. Then he plays his notes perfectly in time with the orchestra, then he sits still again. Steve suggested that a therapist may

appear inactive, but is actually waiting for his cue and the perfect moment to act".

Skills and qualities I myself am endlessly mindful of, because when done well, brilliant things happen. More laughter erupts with clients and friends, creative, unusual and profoundly useful ideas emerge, and connections are established. For example that tingly feeling in sessions or meetings and training where everyone is delighted by existing success and possible signs of progress. Moments where we escape from worry, planning, lists, where our usual patterns are disrupted and we *improvise* and suddenly experience a new pathway. New pathways which often play out in the spaces afterwards where we are calmer and more open than previously.

In art and sculpture a huge amount has been discussed on how *the spaces in-between* a constructed form or within a depiction of an image are where the important metaphors, messages and hooks for our own internal reflections lie. What follows is changes in our minds, which have a repercussion on how we act in the world, and from this a ripple effect begins. Which when recognised can make every one of us notice the potential we intrinsically possess.

At the recent 2018 European Brief Therapy Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, I participated in a Ben Furman skills practice with someone who was so present with every word I said and who found the confidence and self discipline to be still (in spite of their incredibly energetic disposition) that it was actually a little bit life changing. And I share this in the hope that it instills as much celebration in you as it does in me for emphasising the subtle yet significant power of the solution focused approach.

2. Bryan Thornton: Becoming Solution Focused: Getting Better: The 4 Stages of an SF Conversation and Helpful Ways of Being

Talking about what is wanted. At a recent training event, we did a skills practice session with the group interviewing me.

I chose to talk about my allotment. At the end, one of the group said, 'I can't believe how much we focused on talking about an allotment in a counselling session'.

This sparked off my thinking. I replied 'yes, that's exactly it. That is what I do every day of my life with clients. We talk about life as they want it, life at its best.

They come with their problems, talk about their preferences and go away in a much better place. All in 4 sessions.'

In the process, there is often humour, laughter, lightness and fun. Bemusement is also a frequent visitor. People don't expect this line of questioning. They are unprepared and often answer 'I don't know', which is an invitation to wait and give them time to think. Once they get the hang of it, they become very eloquent as a torrent of new thinking bursts forth. I see people change physically, they relax, grow and speak confidently and clearly, reflecting their changed emotional state.

Being Problem Focused: Good Reasons So that surprised response from the person do-

ing the training reminded me that we are indoctrinated with the notion that to solve problems, we must talk about them so that we can understand and fix them. Essentially to be problem focused.

It is little wonder that many professionals find difficulty in accepting and adapting to the notion that talking about difference, preference and possibility is both valid and very helpful.

How this conversation helped me. In talking about my allotment, I experienced some very uplifting images of my ideal allotment, along



with things I had achieved already. I also identified some further small signs of progress that I might notice in the coming days and weeks. These images helped me connect with the benefits of this vision coming into

being. In the process, addressing any problems that I might experience if I didn't take these steps.

I didn't mention any problems that I have, and the group still have no idea of any problems I might have. I am a human being, so of course I have problems, just like everyone else. Lots of them. Nobody asked me about my problems, why I had them, what was stopping me from having this ideal allotment, or what was wrong with me in any way. They were forced by the exercise to ask me about what I wanted and what was important to me.

I found this conversation to be extremely useful in helping me to continue to function.

So how does this work? I was asked what my best hopes were. Because of this, I was able to talk about what I wanted and what difference this would make, thus giving me something to work towards. These descriptions create pathways in the brain and signs of progress will be noticed because my attention has been drawn to them. In essence, what we talk about is what we notice and becomes the world that we experience. So, we should perhaps be careful what we talk and think about.



The structure of SFBT: 4 stages. This experience also reminded me that whilst SF is very simple, it is not easy. It is useful to know where you are in the conversation and what it is that you are discussing.

There are 4 stages to any SF conversation

1. What are your best hopes?
2. What progress have you made?
3. An ideal future
4. Signs of progress

What are your Best Hopes? By asking this opening question, there is an immediate focus on what is wanted.

This is the opening move in a language game. It determines the rest of the game.

People generally know what they don't want, and they will have been talking and thinking about it, usually with little difference being made. Often, they will have given little thought to what they **do want**, so when

asked, it is not unusual for them to say what they don't want e.g. 'I don't want to feel anxious'. It is helpful, at this point, to ask '**What do you want instead?**', as this helps them come up with words e.g. 'I want to feel calmer' that describe what they want. This

captures the image and gives **something to work towards**, rather than away from (the problem).

We are developing a language of difference, preference and possibility which is generally very different from the language being used in a problem solving discourse.

If we ask, ‘What has brought you here?’, they are likely to continue to recite the same script; one that hasn’t made a difference. If we do an assessment, it generally covers the

we shine a light on what they **are doing**, their abilities, coping skills and resilience. Many of the ‘taken for granted’ things in life. As people describe what they are doing, they come to recognise that they are doing better than they thought.

Uncovering these factors builds a platform on which to build the next phase of enquiry.

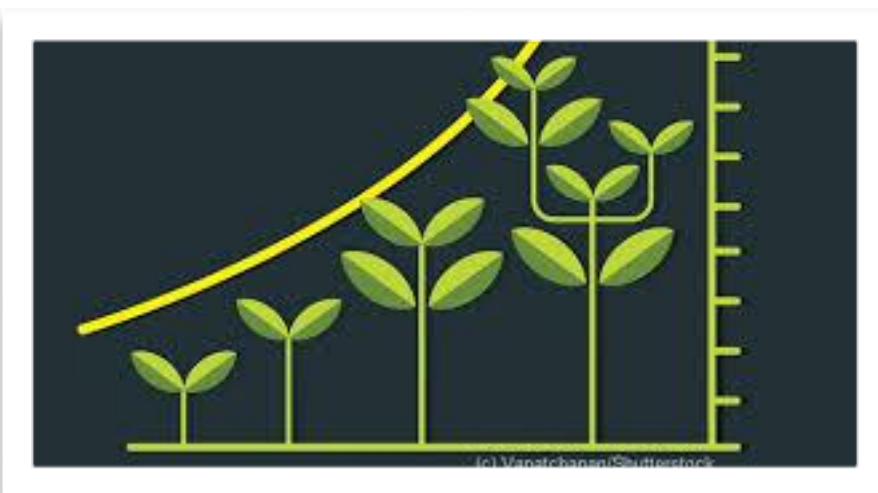
An Ideal Future. This is key to any SF conversation as it opens conversation about future preferences that are desired and will be

noticed. The miracle question is frequently used to facilitate this phase. The beauty of this question is that it suspends reality, creates a vision of this preferred future and engages the imagination.

It helps us to talk from the future, as if it is already happening. Another key feature of the approach. This helps the brain to

build connections, as it cannot differentiate between real and imagined. Thus, talking about the future is as effective as doing it. So, patterns of interaction are laid down through conversation. Establishing as much detailed description as possible is crucial, as the story of difference is thickened and developed.

The question ‘what else?’ is useful in this phase, as it adds to the detail.



same areas; the problems. It is rare to engage in conversation about what is wanted and what is going well, so it takes some practice.

What progress has already been made?

People will always be doing things that are helpful. They might be happening now, or have happened in the past, they may be coping with difficulties.

Often, these things will not be noticed and not be talked about. By asking this question,

Signs of Progress. At the end of the session, it is simply suggested that people notice any signs of progress; the smaller the better. This again directs attention towards the presence of what is wanted, rather than the absence of what is not wanted, thus focusing on things getting better.

Scaling. The scaling technique. ('on a scale of 0-10, where 10 is the best things can be and 0 is the opposite, where are you now?'; 'how come you are at this number and no lower?'; 'how will you know that you are 0.1 higher?' 'what will the smallest signs of progress be?')

Incorporates all the above stages after Best Hopes and before Noticing Signs of Progress (the between session task). It also adds in visualisation of what small signs might be noticed.

Helpful Ways of Being. It is important to listen well, to consult with the client about what they want and what they consider to be important. To build questions based on the answer to the last question. To allow time to think.

To be 'always on the way' to understanding, maintaining curiosity throughout.

To 'be with' clients wherever they are, listening, acknowledging and validating their concerns (LAV), accepting where they are and listening for openings about difference and change. Not rushing to solutions, staying one step behind and taking your time to

build stories of difference that will make a difference.

Maintain a fluid and flexible approach, responding with care to each utterance in the language game.

Listening always for signs of progress already happening, signs of coping and drawing attention to these things, whilst letting problem talk go by unattended.

By following these guidelines, you will be



able to develop your own style of using the SF approach and become fluent in both the structure and the language of SF. The only way to do it is by practising. SF is clean, lean and simple, applying the Occam's Razor principle of doing what is necessary and no more.

The approach starts with the end, asking about how the client will know that they don't need to come any more. The search



then starts for things that are already happening in line with that outcome, visualising a preferred future and followed by noticing signs of progress. It is assumed that people will know the answers and our job is to ask questions about what they know. Every client is unique, they are the experts in their own lives. We are experts in asking good questions to help them discover what they already know, but maybe hadn't realised. My strapline 'improving lives through solution focused conversations' says it all. This is what we do.

It assumes that people want to get better, so we cooperate with this desire by establishing what better consists of and talk about this coming to fruition. The techniques are skeleton keys that open the door to the future, so the approach works regardless of the 'presenting problem'. No attempt is made to assess or understand. This is not considered to be necessary. Thanks to Shital Shah for providing the inspiration for this article.

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2. Steve Flatt: SF & a young man

I have been seeing a young man (12) who had been bitten by a dog on the face. When I first saw him it was 18 months since the event and there were an awful lot of ingrained behaviours such as sleeping in his parents bed, not going out on his own at all and texting his mother constantly on his way to and from school.

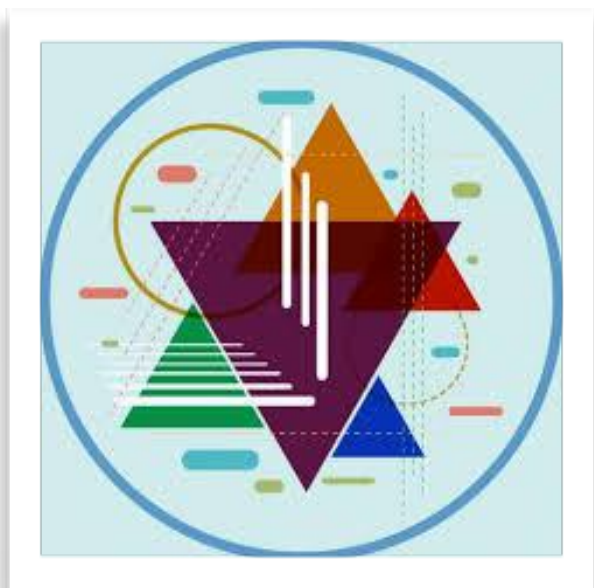
We have met four times. Each time he came with his mother, each session was about 30 minutes long. We didn't talk about the dog bite at all, we talked about his passion – football! We talked about how much he wanted to go back to play with his mates in the park, we talked about what it would be like to be able to walk to the park and meet up to play football. We talked about what it would be like him to be able to go out into his backyard and kick a ball around. We also talked about what it would be like to walk to school with his mates without feeling the need to text his mother.

At the end of the fourth session I asked him to scale (the second time) where he was on the scale we have constructed in the first session (3) and he gave me a great big grin and said, "10 out of 10!" I also asked his mother for her opinion and she said, "8 ½ out of 10." When I enquired of the young man what made it 10 out of 10 and he told me it was because he was now going to the park and playing football with his mates. When I asked mum, she told me that the only thing she felt was missing was confirmation that

he would go to school without using his phone. She said he was no longer sleeping in their bed, he was going out on his own, she had got her little boy back.

We hadn't talked about the event at all. He was now completely refocused on his future and also reported that he wasn't scared of dogs any more. He said he would always remain cautious around dogs and we all decided that that was probably very sensible.

Sometimes people like that young man remind me of the power of questions over answers!



3. Mamoun Mobayed: First Arabic Language book on Solution Focused Practice

The first sight: The first time I discovered the Solution Focused (SF) approach was when I was using group therapy for sexual offenders 1995, in Northern Ireland as part of the Home Office program for offenders. I

noticed that some questions in the training manual were somewhat different from the usual questions we usually ask in psychotherapies, e.g. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), for example asking someone recovering from a drinking problem, who relapsed into drinking “You must have had a good reason to drink”! So, I started to search, and soon came across the writings of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, and I was hooked from the first sight of SF. I started to learn more and more about the approach and used it in daily psychiatric practice. Then I joined the United Kingdom Association for Solution Focused Practice (UKASFP).

SF and cultures: The question of the transcultural suitability of Solution Focused came up early 2009 when I was a member of the training team from UKASFP who went to China to train psychologists on using SF with the survivors of the severe 2008 Sichuan earthquake, 2008, which was so severe that over 69,000 people lost their lives in the quake, including 68,636 in Sichuan province. 374,176 were reported injured, with 18,222 listed as missing as of July 2008. The team was led by the late Greg Vinnicombe, Eva Golding, Basharat Hussain and myself.

The Arabic culture: In 2010, I moved to Qatar where I am still working as a consultant psychiatrist and the director of the treatment and rehabilitation department at the Behavioral Healthcare Center. Since then I have introduced SF to many practitioners

in Qatar including my therapeutic team at the Center. As in China, SF approached was compatible with the Chinese culture as it is with the Arabic.



Recently in May 2018, I have trained some Syrian mental health workers on SF, as they were attending the 6th conference of the Syrian Association for Mental Health (SAMH) in Istanbul. These colleagues are working with the traumatised Syrians affected by the current war in Syrian. Two years ago, I took the challenge of writing what I think is the first Arabic language book on SF, and it was published early 2018, with the title “Solutions not Problems”. I hope with this work I have contributed something useful to the Arabic literature and to the SF movement.

(The book is available from neelwafurat.com)
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The workshop to the Syrian mental health workers, during the icebreaker on having

two papers, problems and resources, and if you have to throw away one, which one you will?

4. 'Solution Focus Plus (+)' By Paul Avard 'Open Mind Therapy' Ltd

I am, generally speaking, a lucky fellow. And I consider myself lucky in that I am both a solution focus (sf) practitioner and a qualified and registered hypnotherapist, who happens to use Ericksonian techniques (Et), and I do so in both my regular counselling work, and in my hypnotherapy work, providing the client asks me to.

In regular, face to face 'talking' counselling I use these techniques as an adjunct to the solution focus model. In hypnotherapy, I am a solution focus hypnotherapist, so the utility of my skills set are reversed.



So, some talking therapy clients ask me to add some Ericksonian hypnotherapy to the work we are doing together; which I do, since I am qualified to do so.

This seems to help them, in that once an altered state has been elicited, it becomes easier for them to focus on the change(s) they want and the changes, seem more real to them. I know that many solution focus practitioners add Mindfulness work to the mix of approaches they use with clients and the great joy is that both Ericksonian techniques and Mindfulness are well suited as additions to solution focus work. I do know that some have disparaged the way I work as some kind of hybrid. That, however, isn't my problem. It works, my clients like it and, if it proves to be successful, helpful or useful to the client(s), I DO MORE OF IT.

I use my understanding of Erickson's techniques because they allow me to follow the edicts of the solution focus practice approach. This way I never (knowingly) under-sell either sf or Et.



Ok, so we may believe that Erickson used hypnosis in his work, and we wouldn't be wrong; except for those times when he didn't use hypnosis, per se and if not using hypnosis how was he able to help?

OK, so, what he did was he utilised what it was that the client knew about the solution to their problems and which they had brought to the table, without knowing they knew the answer to this insurmountable problem that led them to seek help. Isn't that what we do when we meet a client for the first time? We begin our work by asking what their best hopes for working with us are likely to be? Oh, and, how would they know that working with us may have proven, to be successful, helpful or useful in some way? Questions, questions, questions ...?

A Starting Point:

What is Hypnosis? Strangely, it is a lot easier to start this bit by explaining what hypnosis isn't. It isn't about power, we have no control over the mind of another, that's for sure. Erickson appears to have been amongst the first therapists to realise this, in addition, we know now, as Erickson did then, that hypnosis will not, nor can it, 'cure' anything. '...Hypnosis is hypnosis' (Lankton, in Rossi, E. Klein-Erickson, R & Rossi, K (Eds) 2010 p346)1.

So, what is unique about what Erickson did? Quite possibly, as Lankton goes on to say, it has to do with Erickson's knowledge about how change, in individuals, occurs. Thus, Erickson understood very well how to engage with clients and how to help them to facilitate (co-create, my addition) change for themselves and

how to do so ‘...at the proper pace..’ (ibid, p347)2.

Erickson NEVER explicitly said what his theory of change was, however, it is clear from all he wrote and said, and in what the generations of hypnotherapists have used, experimented with, and rejected too, over the past 40 plus years since his passing (March, 1980).

Lankton (2008) devised a six stage process, not his own, but coming from Erickson, and which was garnered, learned and understood, over the many years of Erickson’s teaching, lecturing, mentoring, practising, writing articles and books and so on. Lankton calls this series of six steps that Erickson used, the ‘Basic Footprint...’ (Lankton, 2008 , in Rossi

et al (Eds), 2010 p347.)3

It will become clear, as I explain the six stages, why I assert that Ericksonian techniques and solution

focus are inordinately suited to each other. And that suiting may well lead us backwards to understand how some of these stages are foundational to solution focus as we know it today. And that, far from Ericksonian work hybridising solution focus, it may be more true, if referred to the other way around.

The Basis Footprint (after Lankton, after Erickson): Please note, it is not necessary to work through the stages in the order they are set; nor is it always necessary to attempt ALL of them, sequentially or any other which way. Much good work can be done by using two or three (or if necessary, all six, steps). All of the below are also heavily bound to the notion of the therapeutic- alliance and creating rapport.

Matching: This is to do with ‘matching’ the verbalisations of the client – the vocabulary, language style, manner of expression and non-verbal traits (if noticeable and important).

What the therapist is doing here is to understand the client’s world and to give some of



what s/he hears, and indeed sees, back to the client (providing this does not, appear to patronise the client).

Blending: Is not the same as matching. The point of blending is to counter resistance to change. Lankton explains that the goal is to move at the client’s pace as they introduce

new ideas and so on. And thus to allow the client freedom from tension and to move toward new material as the session goes on, whilst the therapist accompanies him/her. Blending is said to ‘minimise interference by the therapist...’ (Lankton, *ibid*, p 350)4.

Utilization: (sic). This is often held to be the most important of the six steps, and the one most would-be Ericksonian therapists ignore or bypass. Basically, it means allowing the client to be the client, behaviourally, spiritually and every other way they (the client) wants. Shouting, using bad language, defensiveness, aggression (as long as it’s safe to do so) and then using this ‘energy’ to help shape and frame the therapy. This negative energy can be reframed and channelled into helping the client access the change they seek. Controlled Ambiguity (Disrupting):

Here the client is likely to really begin their search for meaning in terms of the change they seek. The therapist will use metaphor, story-telling and other language games here which will disrupt the client’s thought processes and cause them to seek understanding from the therapist (the therapist holds the key here, and this step can help to reframe the client’s equilibrium).

Reframe: And 4 will flow into 5. So, as they come more into equilibrium, they will develop a new understanding of what change means / might mean and to help the client to see the change in a more beneficial light. This helps them to refocus and to find the resources they need to help them move themselves on.

Co-Creating Outcomes: And 5 will flow into 6. Although arguably this has been present from number 1 onwards. Here, the client and the therapist will facilitate greater understanding of the clients resources, skills and talents. It will help the client realise that they are at the stage of going it alone and they will frame backwards; in order to understand and accept the meaning of the therapy they have undertaken.

Limitations of space mean I have not said much about the how, in this article. That is for another article in a different edition of the magazine. For information about training in Ericksonian Techniques please see www.paulavard.co.uk Training Programme, 2018/19.



The use of Step 3 is likely to be the precursor, and to logically flow, into Step 4.

Notes: Lankton, S 'A Basis Footprint of Milton H Erickson's Process of Change' in Rossi, E, Erickson-Klein, R & Rossi, K L (Eds) 2010. The Collected Works of Milton H Erickson. Vol 6: Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 2, Memory & Hallucination p345 - 357 Milton H Erickson Press, Phoenix, USA, Lankton, S (ibid)

Lankton, S (2008). An Ericksonian Approach to Clinical Hypnosis. In Nash, M & Barnier, A (Eds) The Oxford Handbook of Hypnosis: Theory, research and practice p467 – 485. Oxford University Press. In Rossi, E; Erickson-Klein, R & Rossi, K (Eds) 2010 The Collected Works of Milton H Erickson. Vol 6: Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 2, Memory & Hallucination p347. Milton H Erickson Press, Phoenix, USA, Lankton, S. (2008, ibid p350)

5. John Wheeler: Building rafts with couples and families

Scott Miller's promotion of the Common Factors reminds us that, out of everything we have influence over in the work we do, therapeutic alliance makes the biggest difference to outcomes. In one to one work this is one alliance between two people. When I work with a couple, it can be argued that the alliances increase to three: each partner's alliance with me, and, I would suggest, their alliance with each other. If I am working with a family of four the number of alliances calculated in this manner increases to 10! Constructing strong alliances in work with couples and families can be like building a raft. And the work itself can be thought of as needing a good raft in a number of ways. In the following account I will share my thoughts on the importance of rafts in couple and family work,

the components of a good raft, how a Solution Focused approach might be helping me to build good rafts and then invite you to reflect on the rafts you build in the work you do.

Sometimes only one family member wants to be involved in the work and the other/s are in various positions ranging from prepared to try it out to not wanting to be there at all. I recall a father in a family meeting, when asked how he'd decided to attend, saying that he didn't usually have much to do on Friday afternoons. I also remember another father who arrived home when I was meeting with his family, settling into his arm chair and then sleeping through the rest of



the meeting. Given these possibilities the raft needs to be inviting, a raft that everyone wants to be on. Paying attention to everyone in the meeting takes some effort and there is

a risk of quieter people being forgotten. So the raft also needs to be big enough to include everyone. Couple and family work can encounter times of difficulty and struggle along the way. So the raft also needs to be strong enough to cope with storms and unexpected hazards. Experience tells me that for a raft to be inviting, big enough and strong enough for couple and family work four components are particularly important.

RESPECT

APPRECIATION

FAMILIARITY

TRUST

Respect If we think of respect as meaning a valuing of the self-worth of the other then in couple work I would argue that this can go three ways, and in work with a family of four, 10. When couples and families seek a professional involvement their attention is often focused on actions or inactions that happen when people are not at their best. This potentially impacts on everyone's sense of worth, their own and each other's'. Using the frame of a raft also reminds me of the likely importance of everyone in the meeting being able to respect me too, bearing in

mind that respect is seldom automatically conferred and often has to be earned.

Appreciation If we think of appreciation as meaning recognition of people's best efforts then it occurs to me that this can also go in all directions. At times of difficulty it can make less sense to make an effort, and even when people do, they usually have good reasons for not making a big deal out of what they are doing. So efforts can easily go unnoticed. Like respect, appreciation of me is also not necessarily automatic in couple and family work. The person who wanted a meeting to happen might assume my best efforts, but others who are less decided

about the involvement might not.

Familiarity If we think of familiarity as knowing each other's ways this can also apply to everyone in the meeting.

When couples

and families run into difficulty it's not surprising to find that people cut off from each other to keep themselves safe from interactions that have changed for the worse. And, even when familiarity is still in place, the focus can shift from the best of peoples' ways to the mishaps and misunderstandings that can easily bedevil human interaction. Fa-



miliarity of me doesn't necessarily require people to know me well as a person, but there is a possibility of people becoming familiar with my way of working. Again, whilst one person may know something about the way I work, the others may not and may need time to learn.

Trust It's difficult to imagine how people could work together productively without trust. Like the other three features of interaction, this usually needs to apply to everyone. Over the years I've often heard couples and families identify increased trust as one sign that the involvement had been useful. Trust in me, like the other three components is also not automatic, but something that may have to be earned.

SF raft-construction

So how might a Solution Focused approach help to construct respect, appreciation, familiarity and trust in my work with the couples and families I meet?

I believe the Solution Focused approach helps to increase mutual respect and respect of me in couple and family work in a num-

ber of ways. Firstly my interest in the qualities, abilities and successes of each person potentially reconstructs them in the eyes of the other/s as people of worth. The likelihood of mutual respect may increase further when I ask people to give accounts of each other's qualities and abilities. In work with a

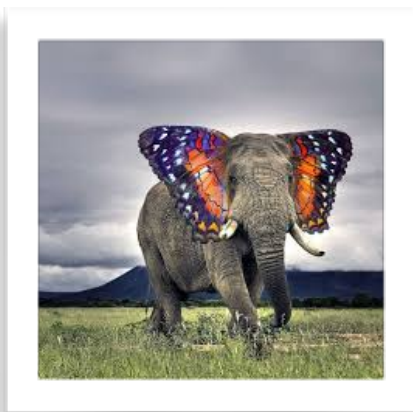
couple who argued incessantly I and a colleague saw each partner separately, and both of us resolved to find one positive comment one could say about the other. When we brought



them back together and the discoveries were shared they both smiled, and then talked differently suggesting that they had been reminded of something of their own and/or each other's worth. Given that the Solution Focused approach is based on an interest in the improvements people want to make and what might already contribute to these changes I suspect that the approach is likely to make a significant contribution to mutual respect in couples and families. In my view there's also nothing secretive about the Solution Focused approach. What you see is what you get. One mother did once react to me asking about times that went well with her family by asking if I was "f...ing" with her

brain. When I explained the assumption this question was based on she was happy to continue, reflecting that her reaction had been based on a fear that I was trying to catch her out.

In my experience the Solution Focused approach can help greatly with people's appreciation for each other's best efforts. Many times my questions have brought into the open the actions people have been taking to



improve matters, stop matters getting worse or at least keep out of each other's way so bad things don't happen. A teenager brought by disgruntled relatives responded well to my questions about how he had decided to attend, what changes he hoped to see and steps he was already taking to bring these about. As he had a lot to say the interview turned into a one to one conversation with the adults just listening. It turned out that no-one had known that he wanted the same improvements as them, and his actions to improve matters had been taken unobtrusively. By the end the adults were much more appreciative of the unique contribution the teenager could make to the changes they wanted. The relentless hope for good out-

comes that a Solution Focused approach can bring to the work, and determination to help people figure out how to make this happen is likely, in my view, to mean that I am experienced as a person who is doing his best to be helpful. "I will guarantee that I will do my best" as Steve de Shazer used to say. When I used a comments box at one time to seek client's views on the work one client wrote, "Nothing has worked so far but I can tell that John is trying."

The interest in the details of what's working well in people's lives that is typical of the Solution Focused approach can, I find, greatly help to increase familiarity of each other's ways in couple and family work. When I ask one person how they know they are at 6 on a scale, or seek a response to the miracle question, the other/s are often fascinated by the replies and come to know the person in new or forgotten ways. A young child who behaved aggressively at home and school, when asked what she could do differently next time she felt like nipping someone so she could have more golden time at school, came up with two practical actions and in the event ended up using a third that she had not thought of at the time of our discussion. Relatives present at the time were amazed by her inventiveness having perhaps not realised that even 6 year olds can make wise choices. In my experience the simplicity of the Solution Focused approach means that it doesn't take long for people to become familiar with how it works. Indeed, it's not unusual for people to attend subsequent meetings with replies for questions before the questions have been

asked. “I was at 4 the last time we met, I’m at 6 now.” “What’s been better since we last met is ...”

Finally I believe a Solution Focused approach can help with trust in work with couples and families in a number of ways. If we think of trust as a confident expectation of another person, we can see that descriptions of the preferred future and the details of differences based on a number higher on a scale, exceptions/instances or a reply to the miracle question, all provide people with an opportunity to become more trustworthy in the eyes of the other/s. A teenager who realised that she could, to her advantage, deliberately keep her thoughts to herself when being sent out of a lesson, went on to do so on a regular basis. From then on her mother could trust that when her daughter was at school she would know how to self-regulate and avoid escalations with teachers.

Years later I had an opportunity to learn that this new found ability had been transferred to life at college and then in the workplace, with the mother seeing the service involvement as a turning point in her ability to trust her daughter. The simplicity of the Solution Focused approach is very likely, in my view, to make it easier for people to have confident expectations of me too. A mother and teenager looking back on work we had done together shared that sometimes when they had a problem at home one or the other would say, “If John was here what would he have asked?”

Over to you...

So, how about you and your raft building with the people you work with?

How do you help people become more respectful of each other?

How might you earn respect from those you work with?

How do you help people to be more appreciative of each other’s best efforts?

How might the people you work with be able to tell that you are making your best efforts?

How do you help the people you work with become more familiar with each other?

How might you help to make your work a familiar experience for those you work with?

How do you help people to trust each other more?

How might you earn the trust of those you work with?

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