

# USEFUL CONVERSATIONS

## An Introduction to the Solution Focused Approach

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- ▶ Please note that these slides are intended for a non-professional audience and are offered as an addendum to Ms. Emma Burn's webinar conversation with David Prescott on May 28, 2020

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## SF IN 25 WORDS OR LESS

- ▶ It is best described, not as a type of therapy, but as a language.
- ▶ It is simply a way of thinking and talking about things.

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► "SFBT is not for the faint-hearted. It requires curiosity, optimism and openness to the approach. Perhaps the hardest part is that it needs us to put aside our socially (and sometimes professionally) inculcated beliefs about problems and the nature of change. We have to quite literally change our way of thinking. This means being open to new ideas and being able to challenge our own beliefs."  
Barry Winbolt (2006).

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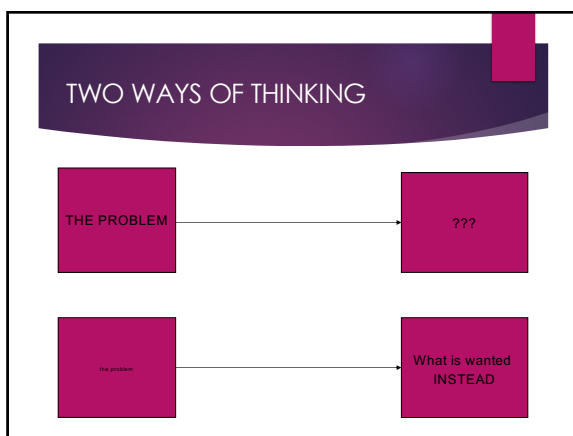
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**ORIGINS OF THE APPROACH**

- Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, BFTC.
- Feedback from clients about what worked.
- Client determines desired outcomes.
- Discovers and utilises client strengths.
- Collaborative and respectful.
- Often very brief in duration.

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## CORE PRINCIPLES

### Major Tenets of Solution-Focused Coaching

If it isn't broken, don't fix it.	If it works, do more of it.	If it's not working do something different.
Small steps can lead to big changes.	The solution is not necessarily directly related to the problem.	The language for solution development is different from that needed to describe a problem.
No problem happens all the time, there is always an exception that can be utilized.		The future is both created and negotiable.

"More Than Words" by Sherry Kline, p. 2-3 www.createlearning.com

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## KEY BELIEFS IN THE APPROACH

- ▶ The approach assumes that all people have some knowledge of what they want.
- ▶ People already possess at least the minimal skills necessary to create solutions.
- ▶ People have previously solved many problems and probably have some ideas of how to solve the current problem.
- ▶ Even when a person can't identify a previous solution, most have recent examples of exceptions to their problem.

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## CONVERSATIONS

- ▶ ***"We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."***  
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)  
German theoretical physicist
- ▶ "The answers you get depend upon the questions you ask." (Thomas Kuhn)

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## LANGUAGE

- ▶ The language we use makes a huge difference to the person we are speaking with.
- ▶ The types of questions and the wording of the questions are designed to work on the brain to make change more likely.

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## Language Creates Reality



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## NEUROSCIENCE OF SF

- ▶ Solution focused questions have been shown to directly impact key regions of the brain.
- ▶ The effects of SF questions have been demonstrated in electrophysiological responses as well as functional MRI studies.
- ▶ SF has also been shown to increase attention, cognitive flexibility and working memory.

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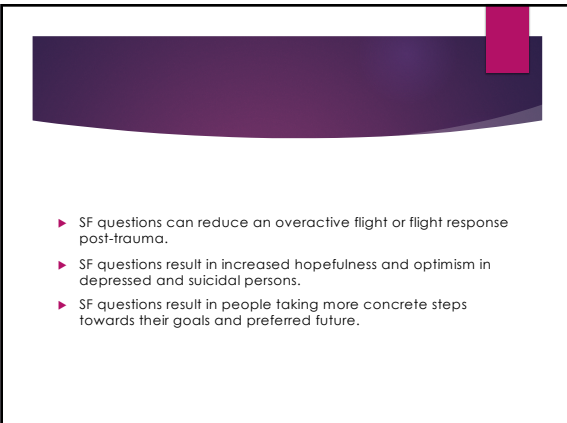
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- ▶ SF questions can reduce an overactive flight or flight response post-trauma.
- ▶ SF questions result in increased hopefulness and optimism in depressed and suicidal persons.
- ▶ SF questions result in people taking more concrete steps towards their goals and preferred future.

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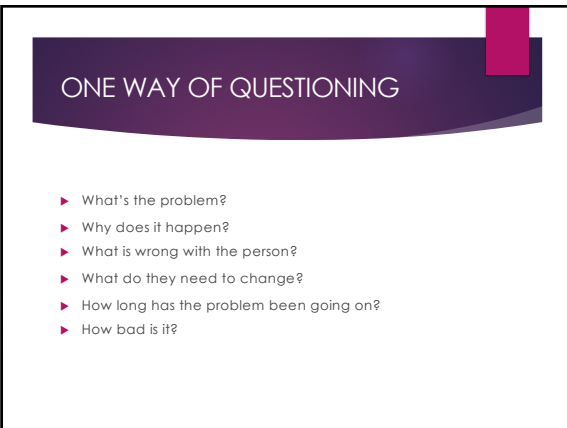
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### ONE WAY OF QUESTIONING

- ▶ What's the problem?
- ▶ Why does it happen?
- ▶ What is wrong with the person?
- ▶ What do they need to change?
- ▶ How long has the problem been going on?
- ▶ How bad is it?

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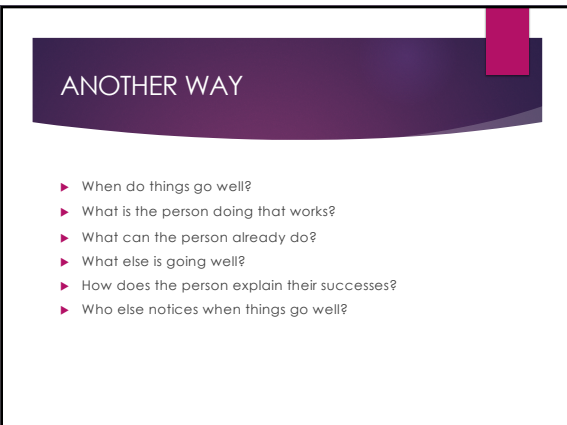
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### ANOTHER WAY

- ▶ When do things go well?
- ▶ What is the person doing that works?
- ▶ What can the person already do?
- ▶ What else is going well?
- ▶ How does the person explain their successes?
- ▶ Who else notices when things go well?

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- ▶ People get stuck when they view themselves as incompetent or some other negative label.
- ▶ Sometimes professionals consciously or unconsciously contribute to those labels.
- ▶ Change comes when a person sees that change is possible.
- ▶ This can happen when a person:
  - ▶ Recognises times when things are different;
  - ▶ Constructs a picture of what different looks like.

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### WHAT SF IS NOT ABOUT

- ▶ Ignoring problems.
- ▶ Minimising seriousness of behaviour.
- ▶ Condoning violence or harm.
- ▶ Rescuing people from consequences.
- ▶ Incompatible with accountability.

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### SF TOOLS

- ▶ The tools used in Solution Focused conversations are very simple.
- ▶ Focus on who benefits from the question.
- ▶ Information vs imagination.

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I hate it when, I plan a conversation in my head, but the other person doesn't follow the script.



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### FUTURE FOCUS

- ▶ When things are going well, what will be happening? What will others notice?
- ▶ What will be the first sign to you that things are getting better?
- ▶ Imagine the problem is solved – what will be happening when you have solved it?
- ▶ The miracle question.

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### EXCEPTIONS

- ▶ "Great things are done by a series of small things brought together." Vincent van Gogh
- ▶ Focus on what is working.
- ▶ When are things better?
- ▶ When is it working even a bit better?
- ▶ How are you doing that?
- ▶ How does that make a difference?
- ▶ What do other people notice at those times?

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## BUILDING THE FUTURE

- ▶ From the miracle question, the person starts to build a detailed picture of what the preferred future looks like.
- ▶ Be as specific about behaviour as possible.
- ▶ What WILL be happening, as opposed to what WON'T be happening.

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## SCALING

- ▶ Scales can be used to measure movement towards the preferred future.
- ▶ E.g., on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 is the worst it has ever been) to 10 (the day after the miracle has happened) where are things at now?
- ▶ Questioning around the scale.
  - ▶ What tells you that you are at a 3 and not a 2?
  - ▶ What will you notice that tells you you have moved to a 4?
  - ▶ What will others notice?
- ▶ Scales can be used for anything!

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## ASK ABOUT A POSITIVE FUTURE

- ▶ If a miracle happened, what would be different?
- ▶ Imagine yourself in a year's time....what would you want to say to yourself now?
- ▶ Suppose you begin to see another solution to your problem, what difference will that make?

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## FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES

- ▶ "This is a very real approach that I have never experienced before." M – nana.
- ▶ "This is the first time we have felt empowered and cared for as her mum and dad." G and A – adoptive parents.
- ▶ "Everyone else has seen me as just a piece of shit and written me and my family off." G – father.

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- ▶ "This makes us feel like we are actually capable people who have the ability to solve things ourselves." N and L mum and 14yo son.
- ▶ "Before you came I felt like the air around me – empty and heavy. But now I feel like the air is full of bubbles, and each bubble is a smiley face." M aged 9.
- ▶ "If I was a cat I would be purring." Q aged 7.

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## SUMMARY

- ▶ Focusing on the problems doesn't help.
- ▶ Change is constantly happening.
- ▶ Hope and optimism are two key elements in this approach.
- ▶ If you can talk, you can make a difference!

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