

A Solution-Focused Response to Students Exhibiting Symptoms of COVID-19 Related Trauma in the Classroom

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This Talk will Cover:

- My best hopes for this talk
- What is Solution-Focused Process (SFP)
- How it can be useful in the classroom setting in responding to student trauma
- SFP questions
- Three step process

- What are my best hopes from this presentation today?

My best hopes

- My colleagues will have an additional tool to respond to students who may present with an emotional issue that interferes with their academic performance. This includes COVID-19 related trauma symptoms.
- My PTL colleagues will investigate and consider including a brief SFP response to their existing options of responses.

What is SFP?

- Strength-based
- Spends little time talking about the problem
- Small incremental steps towards preferred future or goal
- Collaborative
- Finds exceptions to problems
- Exceptions already exist because no problem is present 24/7

A quick review of the Solution-Focused Process

- SFBT was developed in 1984 as a form of marital and family therapy by two social workers Insoo Kim and Steve de Shazer, at their Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Franklin, et al., 2012).
- It has evolved during the last three decades and it is now used in *“schools, alternative schools, prisons, courts, hospitals, pain clinics, social service programs, shelters, day care centers, residential treatment homes, and in businesses and many other settings.”* (Bergl.K., Steiner, T., 2003).

SFBT Trauma Research

- Eight worldwide systematic reviews and meta-analyses
- 100 randomized-control trials show SFBT is as effective (or more effective) compared to other evidence-based approaches.
- Effective dealing with loss, abuse, medical issues.

(Froerer, Cziffra-Bergsm Kim & Connie, 2018)

What makes it useful to student/faculty?

- Optimistic
- Hopeful
- Identifying strengths and resilient
- Survivors not just victims
- Return a sense of control
- Solution already exists

Basic Assumptions

- Knowing the cause or source of the problem is not necessary for finding a solution to the problem.
- All parties need not agree on what the problem is to find a solution.
- All parties are motivated by something they value.
- The solution is not necessarily directly related to the problem.
- Asking solution-oriented questions is the key to success.
- There is no predetermined solution to the problem.
- The person asking the questions is not burdened with finding a solution.

For our purposes, SFP is not:

- An approach that encourages students to talk about their trauma.
- A method in which instructors give students advice, answers, or a particular perspective other than asking the student(s) to notice things such as changes or exceptions to the issue at hand.
- A theory of health, wellness, right or wrong.

How can SFP help Instructor respond to student's trauma in the “classroom”?

- It acknowledges the trauma by including the ‘manifestation of the trauma’ in the questions asked.
- After engaging the student, it helps avoid getting pulled into the trauma story to the point of losing sight of the student’s strengths.
- Create hope.
- Find what has worked in the recent past and encourages more of it.
- Find solutions as opposed to solving problems.
- Avoid re-traumatizing student.

SFP Tools for the classroom

- Best hopes questions
- Preferred future questions
- Miracle question
- Exception questions
- Scaling questions
- Resource questions
- Coping questions

SFP Tools for the classroom

- Best hopes questions
 - What are your best hopes for....?
 - What would your closest hope be different for you as a result of us meeting?
- Preferred future questions
 - What will you be doing when you become the student you want to be?
 - What difference would that make?
 - If your lost loved one were looking down, what would they notice about your course work that would make them pleased?
- Exception questions
 - What role did you play in it diminishing or going away?
 - What difference did you notice?
- Resource questions
 - What did it take to become good at that?
 - What has it taken to stay away from that or not do that?
 - Who in your life was not surprised to see the improvement?
- Coping questions
 - What helped you cope?
 - How long has that worked so well for you?
 - How did you know to ask for that?

Solution-Focused Process

1. Empathize and acknowledge the student's challenge with some specificity (Use the student's words).
2. Ask for the best hopes of the client.
3. Describe the client's preferred future in detail, based on their best hopes.
4. Discover exceptions – times when the client has already achieved a small part of the preferred future.
5. *[Do more of it.]*

Solution-Focused Process

- Listen to the problem or traumatic experience.
- Listen for strengths including, coping skills, resources, successes, and previous attempts to deal with the issue.
- With authenticity, acknowledge how difficult the situation is or was.
- Ask: “Given that you went through X, how did you manage to think of, remember to, respond appropriately to, etc.?”

Solution-Focused Process

1. Empathize and acknowledge the student's challenge with some specificity

- **Student:** Professor, sorry to bother you right now, but I'm dealing with a situation right now that I hoped would not interfere with my ability to take courses this semester. I've been in a domestic violence situation for quite some time but managed it by focusing on graduate school and staying away by going to the library and getting involved in a variety of things on campus as much as possible. Then last March, when we did not return from spring break and started having class remotely, the abuse got worse. With the help of friends and family, I left and have not returned. However, since class started, I find myself feeling anxious and not concentrating on my work. It's as though I was reliving last year. Zoom calls are great, but it's not the same as being able to be in the presence of friends and classmates physically. I can't get my work done; I'm afraid I will fail your course.
- **Faculty:** Wow, you went through a lot last year and even more so after the University shut down in March. I'm so sorry that you went through that. I'm also glad you were able to get away from that situation. By leaving, you accomplished something that many people are still struggling to do. May I ask you a question? What did you draw on to first, come up with those tactics you successfully used last year to get all A's in your courses, and second, to get out of the horrible domestic situation you were in?

Solution-Focused Process

1. Empathize and acknowledge the student's challenge with some specificity

Student: Well, getting my MSW means everything to me right now. I don't have children yet, and I want to be an independent person, so when I have children, I would be able to take care of them even if my relationship goes south. I want to have a profession, and I want to help people. I cared about my partner, and I felt shame about my home situation. However, when I imagined myself at graduation with my family and friends being genuinely happy for me, I smiled and concentrated better for a while. I became friends with many single classmates. We spent time together at Starbucks and other places on campus, talking about policy, programs, and services. We would often say together and laugh, "Without policies and programs, there are no affordable services even to people like us."

Solution-Focused Process

2. Ask students what are their **best hopes** from the conversation
 - **Faculty:** That's great that thinking about graduating, making, and spending time with friends talking about what you were learning were among the things you did that helped you succeed last year. You are resourceful and resilient, and now you are faced with this challenge. I appreciate you contacting me with your concerns about your performance this semester. What are your best hopes about what will occur as a result of our meeting today?
 - **Student:** My best hopes are that I find a way to focus on my work the way I did last year. It's so strange that I still get anxious about being beaten up even though I know that I am safe. I still get anxious and frightened. My best hopes are that you will understand that I am serious about my training. I may need extra time to get my work in even though I don't have a documented disability that makes me entitled to extra time for assignments.

Solution-Focused Process

3. Describe the client's preferred future in detail, based on their best hopes.

Faculty: If you were successful in getting me to understand that you are serious about your training but was experiencing similar to what you had last year and last spring, even though your living and relationship situations are different and that as a result, you may need extra time to complete assignments despite not having a documented disability, what difference would that make for your?

Student: I think I would feel the support I felt from my classmates last year and that you would help me feel less anxious and alone. I would be able to concentrate better and motivated not to ask for extra time because I don't want to feel dependent on your kindness even though I would appreciate it.

Faculty: And what difference would that make for you?

Student: I know that I would earn an A in this class because when I work like that and feel supported by people who know what I am doing or studying, I get A's. But the last two weeks since the semester started, I've been distracted, checking to see if my partner is outside waiting for me to go out or come in; I'm feeling lonely and obsessing about stupid things.

Solution-Focused Process

4. Discover exceptions – times when the client has achieved a small part of the preferred future. (Linda Metcalf, 2020)

Faculty: What would you like to be doing instead?

Student: I would like to do the assigned reading for your course and read all, not just one of my classmates' discussion board posts. I did that last spring before things got out of hand with my partner. I enjoyed reading what they wrote. It gives me lots to think about, even when I don't agree with some of them. **Faculty:** Which of those were you able to do recently? **Student:** I read one or two of my classmates' posts, then I get distracted.

5. Do more of what works.

Elliot Connie's 101 SFBT

Questions

- DESIRED OUTCOMES
- What are your best hopes for....?
- What difference would you like this session to make for you?
- What would the person who suggested you come here hope be different for you as a result of us meeting?
- What would your closest hope be different for you as a result of us meeting?
- What difference would you hope happen in your life as a result of us talking?
- What do you wish would be different as a result of being here today?
- What do you think?
- If you did know?
- If I ask the person in your life who knows you best what do you think they'd say?
- What do you imagine?
- If I had asked you this question when you did know, what would you have said?
- What would you have said if I asked you this question on the day you first called me to schedule this appointment?
- If I had asked you that questions when you were at your most hopeful and motivated, what would you have said?
- What would you like instead?

Elliot Connie's 101 SFBT

Questions

- PREFERRED FUTURE DESCRIPTION QUESTION [Miracle Questions]
- Suppose you went to sleep one night and a miracle happened that solved all of the problems that led you into my office what is the first thing you would notice?
- If you woke up tomorrow and your best hopes had become a reality, what would you first notice?
- If the changes that you noticed, even before the session, continued, what would you first notice?
- If the problem kept diminishing and even went away, and your best hopes replaced it, what would you notice?
- If those differences you, and those close to you noticed once the problem went away were to continue, what would you notice?
- What time would it be?
- What else?
- What would you do next?
- What would you notice next?
- Would you consider this a good think?
- What difference would that make?
- Would that please you?
- How would you show that you were pleased to those close to you?
- How would those close to you notice you were pleased?
- How would those close to you let you know their life had improved as well?
- If your lost loved one were looking down, what would they notice that would make them pleased?
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Elliot Connie's 101 SFBT Questions

- RESOURCES TALK QUESTIONS

- What do you do for fun?
- What do you do for a living?
- How did you become good at that?
- What did it take to be good at that?
- What has it taken to stay good at that?
- What would the closest person to you say is their favorite thing about you?
- How do you show the people in your life that you care about them?
- What are you most proud of about yourself?
- What would the people who raised you say they are most proud of about the adult you have become?
- What has improved since you scheduled this appointment?
- How did you do that?
- What did you draw upon to help that thing improve?
- When did you first notice that things were improving?
- Were you surprised to see this improving?
- Who in your life was not surprised to see this improving?
- What do you know about yourself that lets you know you can achieve what
- What do you know about the problems that lets you know it can be solved? And that you can solve it?

Elliot Connie's 101 SFBT

Questions

- COPING WITH THE PROBLEM/WHEN THE CLIENT TALKS ABOUT THE PROBLEM
- What would you like to experience instead of the problem?
- How have you dealt with the problem while it has been present?
- When has the problem diminished or become less intense?
- What role did you play in it diminishing or going away?
- What was different about you while the problem was gone or less intense?
- Who else noticed that the problem was going away or becoming less intense?
- When did you first notice the problem was going away or diminishing?
- How did they notice the problem had gone away or become less intense?
- What difference did that person going away or becoming less intense make in that person's life?
- What difference did that person noticing the problem going away make What do you know about the problems that lets you know it can be solved? And that you can solve it?

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Questions

- QUESTIONS IN FOLLOW UP SESSIONS
- What's been better since our last session?
- How'd you do that?
- How did you hold on to enough hope for change and come back to therapy, even though things got worse?
- What skills did you draw upon to make those changes since our last session?
- What areas of your life got better other than the one we discussed in our last session?
- What's been better since we last met?
- What role did you play in things getting better since we last met?
- What role did others play?
- What are your best hopes for this session?
- What does that progress do to your thoughts about the future?
- Was this change a big surprise or a little surprise?