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It is more effective to look for ways to build on existing strengths than to look for weaknesses and deficits and attempt to correct these.

~ Lee, Sebold & Uken

Insoo Kim Berg (co-founder solution-focused brief therapy) explains:

What is the *Solution-Focused Approach*?

As the name suggests, it is about being brief and focusing on solutions, rather than on problems. We learned a long time ago that when there is a problem, many professionals spend a great deal of time thinking, talking, and analyzing the problems, while the suffering goes on. It occurred to a team of mental health professionals at Brief Family Therapy Center that so much time, resources, and energies are spent on talking about problems, rather than thinking about what might help us to get to solutions, thus bringing on realistic, reasonable relief as quickly as possible.

We discovered that problems do not happen all the time; even the most chronic problems have periods or times when the problem does not occur or is less intense. By studying these times when problems are less severe or even absent, we discovered that people do many positive things that they are not fully aware of. By bringing these small successes to their awareness, and helping them to repeat these successful things they do when the problem is not there or is less severe, their life becomes better and people become more confident about themselves.

And of course there is nothing like experiencing small successes to become more hopeful about themselves and their life, and when they are more hopeful, they become more interested in creating a better life for themselves and their families. Thus we become more hopeful about our future and want to achieve more.

Because these solutions are already within the person and only come out sporadically, repeating these successful behaviors is easier than learning a whole new set of solutions that worked for someone else, but may not suit the person who has to make the changes. Thus, the brief part was born. Since it takes less effort, we can become more eager to repeat the successful behaviors, thus it is easier to embrace the changes.

SFBT (Solution-Focused Brief Therapy) has taken almost 30 years to develop what it is today and it is simple to learn, but difficult to practice because our old learning gets in the way. The model continues to evolve and change, and is increasingly taken out of the therapy or counseling rooms and is applied wherever people want to get along with, or to work together, no matter what the setting and who is involved.



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BASIC ASSUMPTIONS FOR SOLUTION BUILDING*

1. We are useful to people when we see the potential that they don't notice
2. People are the best experts about their own lives
3. Everyone is doing the best they can
4. People want to save face, feel competent, and be in control
5. People are NOT categories or stable states
6. Change is constant and inevitable
7. People can and do create their own solutions
8. Small change leads to big change, *small is big*
9. We construct meaning with language
10. Asking good questions allows the individual to utilize their resources
11. "Not knowing" creates opportunity for the facilitator & client to construct their own solutions
12. There is no clear relationship between problems and solutions
13. Everything is connected

- Adapted from Adriana Uken's assumptions

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Some of Insoo Kim Berg's Useful Solution-Focused Skills & Questions*

- Use “*Not-knowing skills*” – practice keeping a fresh and open “*curious beginner’s mind*”
- Use the speaker’s key and exact words
- Ask: “*How?*” or “*How come?*” instead of “*Why?*” questions
- Goal formulation: “*What would have to be different as a result of our meeting today for you to say that our talking was worthwhile use of your time?*”
- “*When is your problem a little bit better, or gone even for a short time?*”
- Frequent uses of “*difference*” or “*different*” to signal emphasis on change: “*What difference would it make?*” “*How would that be different?*”
- Self-compliment is convincing, credible, and useful for clients: “*How did (do) you do it?*” (described as admiring commiseration) “*What does that say about you that you did that?*”
- Relationship question: “*What would your best friend say about how you have managed so far?*” “*How would your best friend know that you had a great day?*”
- “*You must have a “good reasons” for (drinking a lot, not looking for a job, etc.). I wonder what might be some of the ‘good reasons?’*”
- “*How is that helpful? How would that be helpful? How helpful would your child (best friend, mother, etc.) say that is?*”
- Become comfortable with silence and as a conversation strategy
- “*How do you know you can do this?*” “*What do you know about yourself (your child, etc.) that tells you that you (he/she) can do that?*”
- Effective use of educational information to clients: “*Has anybody suggested that you might be drinking too much?*” “*What do you think about what they tell you to do?*” “*Knowing what you know about your drinking history and how you get when you get drunk, what have you thought about doing about that difficulty?*”

*Some of this information has been adapted by Loren Walker

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Insoo's *Scaling Questions* to highlight changes & to notice what we are doing when we reach our desired goals

Scaling questions are a wonderful tool to measure change and can be used with anyone capable of understanding the difference between 0 – 10, including children. The facilitator does not need to understand what the client means by the number chosen, only the direction the numbers are going. Scaling questions are a neutral tool.

Example: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you are willing to do anything humanely possible to make things better, and 0 is you don't want to lift a finger, where would you rate yourself?

If the client says 3, you can ask, *“What makes you a 3 and not 2? What would you have to do to get yourself to a 3.5 or a 4?”* or *“Who would be the first to notice that you were at a 4?”* and *“What would they notice you doing differently that would tell them you were a 4?”* Or, *“What behavior were you doing at a 3 that you were not doing at a 2?”*

Scaling questions are very versatile, and can be used to assess confidence, motivation, relationships, commitment etc.

Example: “On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means no confidence at all, and 10 means total confidence, how confident would you say your boss is in your ability to deliver the assignment to her expectations?”

What do you think your boss would need to see you doing to rate you one step higher?”

On a scale 0 – 10, where 0 means no confidence at all, and 10 means total confidence, where would you rate your husband's motivation to stop drinking?

When clients move up on a scale, it is important to find out what they are doing different that moves them up.

Example: On a scale of 1 – 10 where 10 is this relationship is where you want it to be, and 0 is it's just awful, where would you rate it?

If they say 4 you can ask them, *“What will you be doing different when it is a little bit better, say a 5?”*

“What will your partner notice you doing different when the relationship is at a 5? How will this affect him?”

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SOLUTION-BUILDING PRACTICE

- If it's not broken, don't fix it
- If it works, do more of it
- If it doesn't work, do something different
- Change is constant and inevitable
- Carry a magnifying glass to seek "successes"
- The future is negotiated and created
- Small solutions can lead to large changes
- The solution is not always directly related to the problem
- For every problem, there is a solution





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Recommended books about solution-focused approaches:

Family Based Services: A Solution-Based Approach, Insoo Kim Berg, 1994

More Than Miracles: The State of the Art of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, Steve de Shazer, 2008

Interviewing for Solutions, Peter De Jong & Insoo Kim Berg, 2012

Solution-Focused Treatment of Domestic Violence Offenders: Accountability for Change, Mo Lee Yee, John Sebold & Adriana Uken, 2003

101 Solution-Focused Questions for Help with Trauma, Fredrike Bannink, 2015

1001 Solution-Focused Questions: Handbook for Solution-Focused Interviewing, Fredrike Bannink, 2010

Handbook of Solution-Focused Conflict Management, Fredrike Bannink, 2010