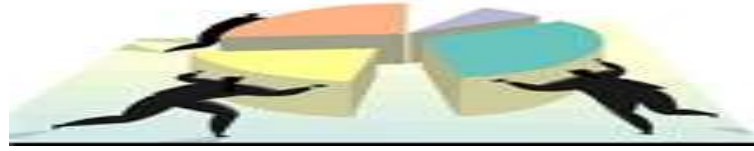


Brief Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools: Advanced Skills and Strategies



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Translating Research into Practice

University of Central Arkansas (USA)

Participants will learn practical skills and strategies to help them:

1. Develop creative, one-of-a-kind interventions based on student's indigenous resources.
2. Interrupt problem patterns by changing the viewing and doing.
3. Empower and maintain small improvements whenever they occur in the counseling and intervention process.

Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP)

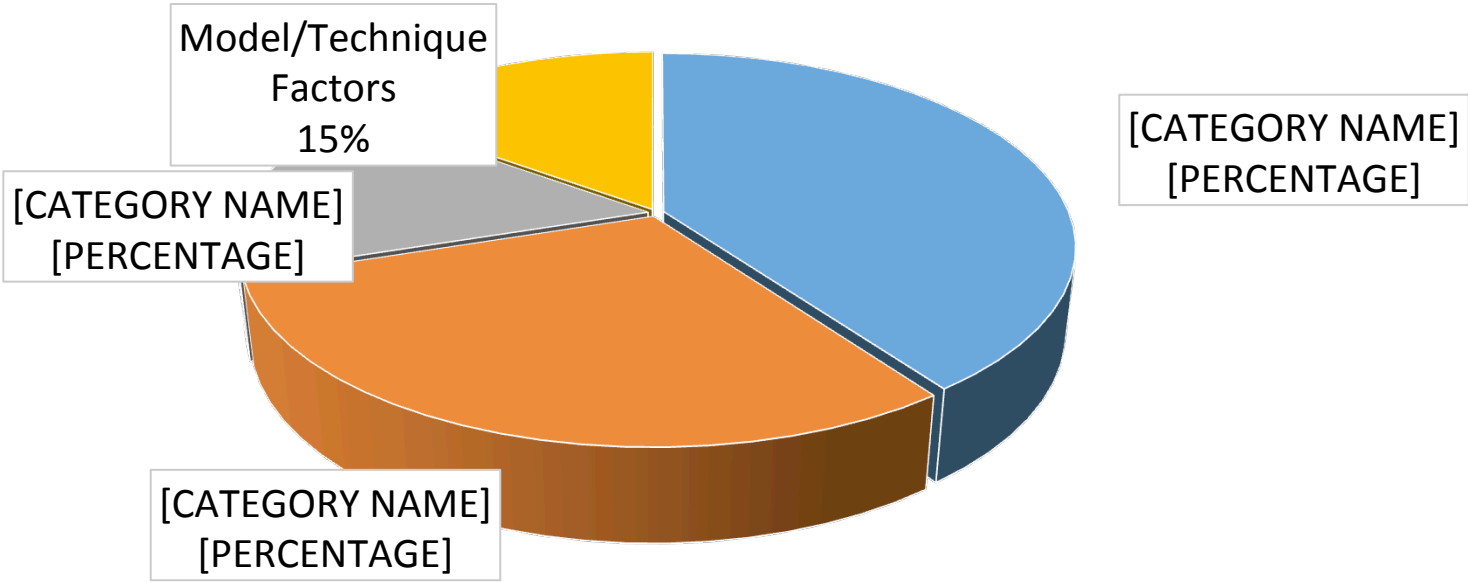
February 17th, 2017: 1-4pm PST

The Change Pie: Core Ingredients of Effective Counseling

(and their Percentage Contribution to Successful Outcomes)

(based on 1000+ research studies; Lambert & Ogles, 2004)

Successful outcomes depend largely on the extent to which the practitioner respects and builds on people's resources and input (client factors), forms a strong alliance (relationship factors), instills hope (hope factors), and uses techniques that mobilize all these ingredients (technique factors).



Change Pie Exercise

(Individually or in pairs/small groups; 5 minutes)



Instructions: Respond to the following questions individually or in small groups:

- 1) What you are already doing to apply the change pie “common factors” (client factors, relationship factors, hope factors) in your work?
- 2) What do you want to do differently, or more of, to make these factors an even bigger part of your work? (List two specific ways you can do this)

Main Tasks of Brief Solution-Focused Counseling*

- **Involve people in every aspect of their care** to the extent that they are willing and able to participate (build collaborative, culturally responsive relationships)
- **Clarify people's desired future and develop goals** (clarify what people want from services and develop practical goals that matter)
- **Build on what is "right" with people; invite them to try something different** (build on what people already do (exceptions) and already have (natural resources) to help them reach their goals; invite them to try something different by changing the viewing or doing)
- **Empower progress** (invite people to notice, own, explain, and sustain desired changes)

*These tasks and methods apply to working with children, adolescents, parents, teachers, families, and others, and to *any* change-focused activity including problem-solving teams, group work, consultation, systems change, supervision, teaching, etc.

Build on What is “Right” with Students: Natural Resources



Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it. —Helen Keller

I am more and more convinced that our great problem is taking advantage of what we've got. —Thomas Merton

Examples of Natural Resources

I am more and more convinced that our great problem is taking advantage of what we've got. —Thomas Merton

All clients offer valuable “natural resources” that can help them achieve their desired future, such as:

- Values, beliefs, cultural wisdom and customs
- Heroes and influential people
- Previous experiences/solution attempts
- Resilience and coping skills
- Values, beliefs, cultural wisdoms/customs
- Special interests, talents, and hobbies
- Theories and ideas about the problem, solution, and change
- Community support systems

Questions for Identifying and Applying Students' Natural Resources

- *Heroes and influential people* (What would your grandmother advise you to do if she were here?; What would your older brother do?)
- *Previous experiences* (What has worked with similar challenges you have faced?)
- *Resilience and coping skills* (How have you kept things from getting worse? What helps you hang on instead of giving up? Where do you find the courage to come to school each day?)
- *Solution ideas* (What do you think might help turn things around?)
- *Advice for others* (What advice would you offer others who are facing similar challenges? What would you say to another child/parent who wants to make the kind of changes you have made? How can I be helpful to other people in this situation?)

Identifying and Applying Students' Natural Resources

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- *Previous experiences* (What has worked with similar challenges you have faced?)
- ***Resilience and coping skills*** (How have you kept things from getting worse? What helps you hang on instead of giving up? Where do you find the courage to come to school each day?)
([Videos: 5th Year High School Seniors](#))
- *Solution ideas* (What do you think might help turn things around?)
- *Advice for others* (What advice would you offer others who are facing similar challenges? What would you say to another child/parent who wants to make the kind of changes you have made? How can I be helpful to other people in this situation?)

Build on Resources: Resilience & Coping Skills

(“5th Year” Seniors Group, ages 18-20)

Build on Resources: Resilience & Coping Skills

“What have you learned from your struggles & victories?”

Identifying and Applying Students' Natural Resources

- *Heroes and influential people* (What would your grandmother advise you to do if she were here?; What would your older brother do?)
- *Previous experiences* (What has worked with similar challenges you have faced?)
- *Resilience and coping skills* (How have you kept things from getting worse? What helps you hang on instead of giving up? Where do you find the courage to come to school each day?)
- *Solution ideas* (What do you think might help turn things around?) ([Video: Molly, age 10](#))*
- *Advice for others* (What advice would you offer others who are facing similar challenges? What would you say to another child/parent who wants to make the kind of changes you have made? How can I be helpful to other people in this situation?)

Ask for People's Solution Ideas
(Molly, age 10: "You also have the solutions for yourself")

Identifying and Applying Students' Natural Resources

- *Heroes and influential people* (What would your grandmother advise you to do if she were here?; What would your older brother do?)
- *Previous experiences* (What has worked with similar challenges you have faced?)
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(Video: Ronald, age 11)*

**Requesting the Client's Advice for Others
(Ronald, age 11) (4:35-6:50)**

Practice Exercise

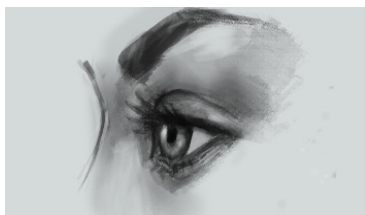
Build on What is Right and Working: Natural Resources (Individually or in pairs/small groups)

Instructions (Individual): Think of a personal concern or goal and run through the steps below as they apply to you and your concern or goal).

Instructions (Pairs/Group): Select roles (Client or Helper); Client briefly describes a real-life or role-played problem (student, teacher, or parent), after which Helpers complete the following steps:

- 1) Ask the client to briefly describe a current concern or goal.
- 2) Identify one or more “natural resources” that might help the client address the concern and reach their goal.
- 3) Explore how each resource has helped the client and how it might help them with their current concern or goal.
- 4) Discuss details (“next steps”) of how the client can apply the resource(s) to their current concern or goal (Who will do what? When? What small step are you willing to take today or tomorrow to begin the plan? How will you know the plan is working?).

After the Interview (if you have time): Discuss how you can build on students’ natural resources in your everyday work.

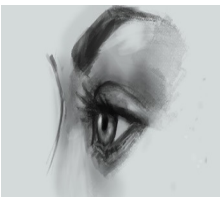


Change the Viewing and Doing

- **If building on exceptions and resources is **successful**, encourage people to **continue** doing what is working and **empower progress**.**
- **If unsuccessful**, “try something different” and invite people to **change the viewing** by altering their *perceptions* or **change the doing** by altering their *actions*. Strategies for changing the viewing and doing are unlimited and come from many therapeutic traditions—behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, ACT, etc. The examples in this workshop borrow largely from brief therapy and family therapy approaches.



Change the Viewing (also called “Reframing”)



As a thing is viewed, so it appears.—Tibetan Proverb

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one you have. —Émile Chartier

Practical Assumptions and Steps of Changing the Viewing

1. There are many possible views (interpretations) of any given problem or situation (facts), and some views are more useful than others in promoting change.
2. When one view is not helping, we can invite students or caregivers to consider a different view that fits the facts of the situation, makes sense to them, and is different enough to make a difference.
3. Changing the viewing involves two steps:
 - choose a new view (from client material and/or helping theories)
 - present the new view (with light, tentative touch)

Examples of Changing the Viewing

These examples offer different views of people/actions viewed as purely bad, disturbed, or dysfunctional.:

- Controlling = likes structure, clarity, and direction
- Defiant = frustrated, independent, assertive
- Impulsive = lively, spontaneous, energetic, playful
- Withdrawn = observant, introspective, reflective, quiet

Source:

Murphy, J. J. (2015). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Example: Dwayne

Client: Dwayne, age 17, National Merit Scholar

Problem Description: Failure to complete a writing assignment (extended essay) required to pass the class and graduate from high school; Dwayne's mother, teachers, and school administrators were very frustrated and requested therapy; they viewed Dwayne as "troubled" and "stubborn" and urged him to "just write something and turn it in, even if it isn't very good, so that you can graduate."

Videos

Changing the Viewing & Building on Client Resources

(Video, Part 1: Dwayne, age 17)

*Quick Brainstorming Exercise: Dwayne Video
(Individually or in pairs/small groups; 5 minutes):*

**Where would you go from here
if you were working with Dwayne?**

Instructions: Based on the background information and brief video with Dwayne, brainstorm your ideas on the following questions:

- What could you ask or say to promote a different view of Dwayne and his actions?
- What other techniques from this workshop might help change the situation, and how could you present those techniques to Dwayne or others?

The rest of the story: Dwayne: Videos 2 & 3

Changing the Viewing & Building on Client Resources

(Video, Part 2: Dwayne, age 17)

Changing the Viewing & Building on Client Resources

(Video, Part 3: Dwayne, age 17)

Change the Viewing: Externalize the Problem

- “Externalize” the problem from the student by discussing it as a separate, external entity—for example, giving it a name and discussing its influence in the student’s life
 - When did Pushy enter your life?
 - How does Pushy steal your power and have his way with you?
- Explore times when the student stood up to the problem instead of yielding to it.
 - Tell me about a time you held your ground and did what *you* wanted to do instead of what Pushy wanted?

The problem is the problem, the person is the person. For a problem to survive, you must cooperate with its requirements. —Michael White

Change the Viewing: Interview the Internalized Other

In conflict situations where two people (student-teacher; student-parent; student-student) are locking horns and feeling misunderstood, interview one person through the other to build empathy and promote different future responses toward one another. This technique is most powerful when both people are present to see and hear themselves interviewed through the other. However, the interviews can be conducted separately when it is not possible to have both people present at the same place and time. For example, In working with a student who displays persistent behavior problems, interview the teacher through the student and vice versa.

- Interviewing teacher through student (Jessica): What are your best hopes for Jessica? What do you appreciate most about her? What gives you the most joys/concerns as a teacher? If you could do one thing to help Jessica right now, what would it be?

Practice Exercise: Change the Viewing

(Individually or in pairs/small groups; 5-10 minutes)

Instructions (Individual): Select a concern you have (or had) with another person and complete the steps below by alternating between Client and Helper roles as best you can).

Instructions (Pairs/Group): Select roles (Client or Helper); Client briefly describes a real-life or role-played problem (student, teacher, or parent), after which the Helper(s) complete the following steps:

- 1) Obtain a brief description of the concern along with the client's interpretation (view) of it.
- 2) Helpers consider other possible views, then select one that might be acceptable to the client.
- 3) Helpers present the new view to the client. Check out their response by watching their expression as you present it and by asking them what they think of it.
- 4) *If the client accepts* the new view as “possible,” discuss how it might change their response to the situation.
- 5) *If the client does not accept* it, try another one.

Change the Doing

Invite people to change any aspect/action that is part of the problem pattern (time of day, words, tone of voice, etc.).

- *The “Do Something Different” Experiment* (for any students/ caregivers, especially those who have tried various reasonable strategies to address the problem): What if you were to do something really different the next time the problem starts happening? How willing are you to try that?
- *Observe the Problem* (for problems made worse by over-attention and over-intervention): Maybe it would help to stop and observe things for a few days to learn more about what’s happening.
- *Invite What You Dread* (for people trying to solve the problem by avoiding it): Do you it might help to take a few minutes every night to “give the depression its due” and try to learn what you could from it.
- *Agree & Exaggerate* (when one person is overly critical of another): Teacher says to critical student, “I agree, I make a lot of mistakes. I’m not sure teaching is even the right business for me ”

Change the Doing: “Do Something Different” Experiment

[To the teacher] “I’m impressed with everything you’ve tried with Evan. Things haven’t worked the way we’ve wanted so far, but Evan’s lucky to have you in his corner as his teacher and I appreciate your continuing to hang in there to help him. I don’t have any other ideas right now, but I’m going to suggest that you think about doing something very, very different than anything else you’ve tried so far...within legal and ethical guidelines, of course! I’ll think about it, too, and let you know what I come up with over the next few days. You can view it like an experiment and make careful observation of Evan’s reactions.

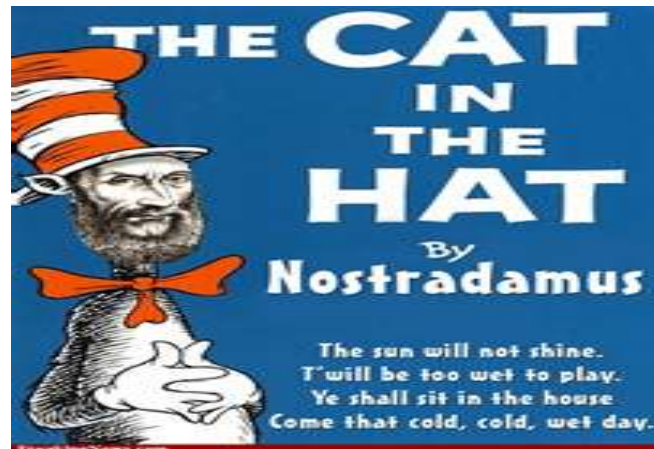
Change the Doing

Observe & Predict Tasks

Observe: The next time you're out on the playground, pay attention to what you're doing when things are going well between you and other kids.



Predict: Every morning before school, mark the chart to indicate your prediction about what kind of day it's going to be at school (good or bad), and keep track of how many days you were right.



Practice Exercise: Change the Doing *(Individually or in pairs/small groups; 5-7 minutes)*

Instructions (Individual): Select a personal concern or a conflict you are having (or had) with another person and complete steps 2 and 3 below.

Instructions (Pairs/Group):

1) One person from the group describes either a personal concern they are having in their life OR a student-related behavior problem they are working with in their job.

2) Other group members: Ask about specifics: Who is saying/doing what to whom?; What happens next? What has already been tried to address the problem? Consider ideas for “changing the doing” from this workshop and present one or more such ideas to the person with the concern.

Groups: If time permits, switch roles and start another session.

Individuals: If time permits, select another situation and complete steps 2 and 3.

Empower Progress

Be alert for any sign of progress, no matter how small, invite people to do the same. Help people “keep the ball rolling in the right direction” by highlighting and empowering progress using the following strategies:



➤ Give Credit (Positive Blame) and Control (Personal Agency)

➤ Clarify Old You/New You Distinctions

➤ Explore Personal and Social Consequences of Change

[Video \(Ronald, age 10: Explore Personal/Social Consequences of Change and Attribute Credit and Agency\)*](#)

➤ Request People’s Advice

➤ Help People Prepare for Setbacks

➤ Write Therapeutic Notes/Letters

**Empower Progress: Explore Personal/Social Consequences of
Change & Give Credit (“Positive Blame”)
(Ronald, age 11)**

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Video (Damika, age 8: Give Credit, Explore Personal/Social Consequences, & Request Advice)*

➤ Help People Prepare for Setbacks

➤ Write Therapeutic Notes/Letters



**Empower Progress: Give Credit, Explore Personal/Social
Consequences, & Request Advice
(Damika, age 8)**

Empower Progress

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- Request People’s Advice
- Help People Prepare for Setbacks
- Write Therapeutic Notes/Letters*

Examples*



Examples of Letters

(Student Letter & Parent Letter)

Erika (age 8): Dear Erika, Mr. Kelly told me that you were more kind to others this week in class. How did you do that? What made you decide to do that? Maybe you can teach me more about the “new you” so that I can help other students who need help behaving better. I’ll check with you tomorrow to see if you can help me with that.

Ms. Thomas (Derek’s mother): Dear Ms. Thomas, I wanted to let you know that Derek has had a much better week at school. Thank you for hanging in there and continuing to work with us to help Derek behave more successfully at school. Derek is lucky to have you in his corner, and so am I. Thank you for all your support and help, and congratulations to you and Derek on a better week.

Example of Letter to Family

*Practice Exercise: Empower Progress
(Individually or in pairs/small groups;
5 minutes)*



Instructions (Individual): Think of a student you've worked with (or someone else you know) who has made a recent change or improvement, and draft a short letter aimed at acknowledging and empowering their improvement. Also consider what else you could ask (or say to) this person to empower progress.

Instructions (Pairs/Group): Client describes a recent change or improvement (not too dramatic), and the Helpers use strategies for empowering progress (give credit, explore personal/social consequences, request advice, draft/narrate a short letter, etc.). Switch roles and repeat.

Practice Exercise

Taking It To the Streets: Other Applications (5 minutes)

Instructions: Brainstorm how you and others in your school or agency could apply solution-focused practices beyond individual counseling and intervention (for example: group work, teams, consultation, referral forms, etc.). Think big!



Apply



This workshop is only as good as its future application. Take a minute to think about one or two techniques from our session that you want to try out during your next week of work...

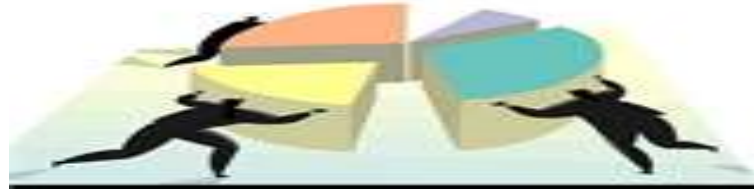
and **JUST DO IT!**

THANK YOU. JM

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2. Invite students and others to change the “viewing” of the problem or the people involved in it.
3. Invite students and others to change the “doing” of the problem.
4. Empower desired changes and improvements.

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Conference
February 23rd, 2017 (1:30–4:30pm)