SOLUTION-FOCUSED THERAPY TIPS AND TOOLS TO USE WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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WHAT IS SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY?

- SFBT focuses on solutions rather than problems which in turn helps the client feel better faster. Problem talk create labels and the student feels stuck like in a fish bowl….Round and a round.

- The counselor guides the client to see solutions by finding exceptions to problems that were previously unknown. This leads to the client feeling empowered to resolve the current problems but future difficulties as well.

- Change is constant

- Problems do not happen all the time. When they are less, analyze, study, notice!

- Small successes brings improvement of life. (This HUGE for a teenager! Many believe in all or nothing. If it is not straight A’s, what is the point?)
THE ESSENCE OF SOLUTION
FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY

• To see a person as being more than their problem
• To look for resources rather than deficits
• To explore possible and preferred futures
• To explore what is already contributing to those futures
• To treat clients as the experts in all aspects of their lives
  (Iveson, 2009)
SFBT IS AN EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR KIDS

• Insight is not necessary. For kids, they may not cognitively understand how they got to the problem.

• As a counselor, you use the clients words, and their language.

• SFBT shows kids what they can do instead of what they need to stop doing. (For example, a teacher sends a child to you to “fix” and stop unruly behavior. Difficult for children to picture themselves not doing something.)

• Kids are the experts not the administrator, teacher, or counselor. Focuses on the child’s desires which builds confidence and respect.
LET’S GET MORE SPECIFIC….

- Grades: If your grades were on the rise or they were doing better, what would you be doing that would have caused that to happen?

- Social: What would other kids in your class say you were doing that would show them that you are getting along better with them?

- Replacement: If you weren’t doing _______, what would you be doing instead? (Gives a postive goal, counselor restates, and then ask…What would you be doing to show that. School client can now have a detailed visual because of he or she is detailing goal.)

- Others to Change: If _______ started doing ____, what would you start doing differently?/If you were doing those things you just described could _____ change as well? (Ripple Effect—One’s behavior changes another.) (Sklare 2003)

- My favorite: “What would you be doing?” or “What does it look like when….?” or How would things be different?
SFBT IS AN EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR KIDS

• Insight is not necessary. For kids, they may not cognitively understand how they got to the problem.

• As a counselor, you use the clients words, and their language. (Also validates them that you are listening)

• SFBT shows kids what they can do instead of what they need to stop doing. (For example, a teacher sends a child to you to “fix” and stop unruly behavior. Difficult for children to picture themselves not doing something. When are times he/she is really behaved? What do I want instead of what I don’t want? No child is misbehaving 100 percent of the time.)

• Kids are the experts not the administrator, teacher, or counselor. Focuses on the child’s desires which builds confidence and respect. (I always tell the kids they are the experts in their life.)
BASIC RULES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

- Rule 1: “If it works, don’t fix it. If it doesn’t, do something different.” What has worked for them?
- Rule 2: “Once you know what works for you, do more of it.” Look for those exceptions. A problem is not there 100 percent of the time. There are no absolutes. What is a solution?
- Rule 3: “If it doesn’t work, don’t do it again.” Example: Keys or Making brownies when I am on a diet. (Important to learn from your mistakes which is life! Those failures and mistakes make you better, but move forward.)
LET'S GET STARTED: YOU GOT A CUSTOMER! WOO HOO!

• The child coming to see you is a step of that he or she is a step in the right direction.

• The focus of your first meeting should be to set a goal of what the child WANTS to accomplish:

1) “What are your best hopes from our work together?
2) “What is your goal for coming here?”
3) “What can we talk about today that will be helpful to you?”

• These questions help students see what is possible for them. They will also elicit statements that can be developed into concrete behavioral goals. (Sklare, 2005)
HELP! I AM FAILING MY CLASSES!

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WHY GRADE CHECKS?

- Students look at their grades, determine what they need to do, and set goals/list of things they need to do in order to pull up to their desired grades.
- Gives them control.
- Creates a visual and organizes what needs to be done. (Grocery List)
- Lowers stress and being overwhelmed
- Teaches realistic expectations. (All A’s=Give Up; Baby Steps)
- Gives you data for your program!
“On a scale of 1-10 with 0 being the worst, and 10 being completely successful, where would you mark where you are today.”

This gives a baseline of where a student is currently at. It is also great for goal setting!

**Notice** where a student is currently at. Even if a student is at a 2, that is still better than a 0. (Baby steps!) “You said you were at a 2. What are you doing that makes this problem be a 2 instead of a 1 or a 0?” or “What have you done to be at a 4?”

“What would you need to do in order for you to move up to a 3 by next week.” Student just set a goal!!

May need to identify obstacles the student may face, “How are you going to handle…..” This prepares the student on how they will handle a possible situation.

Many students believe it is all or nothing. They learn that baby steps are just as important because life is not all or nothing. (Example: Making all A’s or Losing weight!!)
SELF ESTEEM ACTIVITY

• Create a list of 25 things that are great about you.
• Counseling sessions or groups
• If we don’t finish it, I have sent it home with kids for homework. I call parents to prepare this is coming. The parents are not allowed to help their child. They can put it on the fridge and add things as life happens. They can turn it in when complete.
• Example: SSI students (Beginning of the year versus the end of the year.)
25 Things that are great about Mrs. Romine

1. kind
2. smart
3. friendly
4. helpful
5. nice
6. funny
7. tall
8. un-selfish
9. concerned
10. great
11. polite
12. good job
13. likes kids
14. generous
15. smiles a lot
16. giving
17. truthful
18. listens
19. forgiving
20. thankful
21. caring
22. honest
23. positive
24. big heart
25. She helped me!
The miracle question is helpful for goal setting in that it temporarily takes the school client away from his or her troubles and invites him to step into the solution that he desires. (Metcalf, 2008)

Miracle Question: “Suppose tonight you were asleep, a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problem that you have is solved. However, because you were sleeping you don’t know that the miracle has happened. So when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will tell you that this miracle happened?”

It is important that there is clarification in detail of what the student will be doing when the miracle happens.
Exceptions are times in a school client’s life when the problem was less or absent all together.

Ask curious questions to find what works for students. This diminishes resistance.

A student may say; “I don’t know.” The counselor can ask, “If you did know…”

“The Columbo Strategy: Act puzzled, give all the curiosity to the student, who then feels powerful because they have confused a competent adult.” (Metcalf, 2008)

They are teaching me, they are the experts, so let them guide you!
• How would you like for things to be?
• How did you do that so well?
• Take me back to a time when you were happy. (This give the student a chance to remember a past enjoyable experience.)
• What did you do to get a 3? (Scaling question)
• That is amazing that you do .......; how did you do that? (5th grade student)
• Tell me about a time when the miracle has happened---even just a little bit.
A LETTER OR A POST-IT

• School counselors can boost a student further by writing a small letter of encouragement. This is a very powerful tool to a student because they know “someone has their back.” This letter would include the goals accomplished and how they accomplished it, future goals, and several compliments. Example: A photo that promotes a good memory.

• Another option is The Post It

• Write 2-3 goals that the student wants accomplish, and then they put it somewhere to see constantly. Again, a visual.

• Bathroom mirror….Used for other students!
THE SECOND SESSION

• Insoo Berg created an acronym for a successful second session. EARS.
  • E: Elicit what is better
  • A: Amplify the effects of what’s better (The ripple effect, how did their behavior make a change in others’ behavior.)
  • R: Reinforce how these changes were brought about. (You are their biggest fan/cheerleader!!) *I love asking if I can borrow ideas for another student! They light up!
  • S: Start over again, discovering additional successes. (Scaling Question can be used again!) **The third is an optional check-in.
YOU DID THAT…NOT ME….

Kids are the experts in their story.
Let them guide you.
Listen to them.
How can you support them?
Don’t stress about questioning perfectly, just be curious as if they are teaching you. Look for exceptions and ask more curious questions!
Notice the positives in all students!
Students have a firm understanding of the problem. Focus needs to be on identifying solutions. (Build the Home Depot Apron)

ACTIVITY FOR OUR TEACHERS: HOW TO SEE A CHILD DIFFERENTLY

• Think of a person who drives you crazy! Write down all the things this person does that you cannot stand. (10-15 Reasons)

• You are now going to sell this person on EBAY. You have to be honest. Just like a car, you have disclose all information. Give five great things about this same person that you do like even if you don’t want to admit it!

• Give evidence to support each one.

• Great activity to do with teachers when they need a morale boost. It changes their perspective on a student. See them differently. They notice the positive instead of the negative. Have them put the five positive things in their desk as a reminder of what is good about a student. They noticed before, may need a reminder again!!

REFERENCES


