

# 20 Solution Focussed Techniques

## Summarising and reflecting

Summarising and reflecting back what a client has said helps to build trust and demonstrates empathy. Reflections should be as accurate as possible and should usually use the words that the client has used. Examples of how summarising and reflecting might be used include:

- It sounds as though you're very angry
- I can hear how upset that makes you
- It's clear that you love your children very much

## The desired situation question

The desired situation question invites the client to consider and describe in clear and positive ways what they would like the future to look like. Examples of how the question might be phrased include:

- What would your ideal outcome be?
- How would you like things to be different?
- How will you notice that things have become better?

## The what's better question

The 'what's better' question is often used in follow up sessions and can help clients to focus on progress and what has worked well. Examples of how the question might be phrased include:

- How are things better?
- What's improved?

## The past success question

The past success question helps clients to identify situations where they have been able to deal with problems in the past. It encourages confidence and focusses the client on their existing skills and resources. Examples of how the past success question might be used include:

- Have you faced similar issues in the past?
- Have you felt like this in the past?
- How did you deal with it?
- Tell me about a time when you feel you dealt with a problem well.

## The scaling question

The scaling question is used to help a client identify how they feel about a particular issue by asking them to describe where they are on a scale of 0 to 10. This is often used as a sequence of questions. An example of how scaling questions might be used would be:

- Thinking about your current communications with Amy's dad, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'every time you try to communicate it ends in an argument' and 10 is 'your communications are easy and uncomplicated', where would you say things currently stand?
- What would it take to move that score up by one point?
- What would a 10 feel like?

## The miracle question

The miracle question invites the client to consider what the world would look and feel like if the problem had miraculously gone away. It can help to move clients who are 'stuck' and unable to future-think. It can often foster a sense of hope. An example of how the miracle question might be asked would be:

- Imagine you woke up one morning and by some miracle all of the issues you are having to deal with had just gone away. Think about it now...
- What will you notice around you that let you know that the miracle had happened?
- What will you see?
- What will you hear?
- What will be happening around you?
- What will you feel inside yourself?

### **The exception finding question**

The exception finding question encourages the client to think about past instances where the current issue or problem was not present or was less intense and think about what may have been different in order for that to be the case. An example of how exception finding questions might be used include:

- Are there times when this problem doesn't happen or when it isn't so bad?
- How was it different?
- What was happening that meant it wasn't so bad?
- How did you make it happen?

### **The usefulness question**

The usefulness question is aimed at helping a client focus on specific issues and set goals within any session. Examples of how the usefulness question might be used include:

- What would you like to achieve by the end of this discussion?
- How can we make this discussion as useful as possible to you?
- How will you know that this discussion has been useful?

### **Solution focussed directing**

With solution focussed directing, the practitioner, through their questioning, sets an implicit goal for the client to achieve. This can help the client focus on a particular goal and how they can meet it without feeling under pressure. Examples of solution focussed direction might include:

- What would you need to do to make [the goal] possible?
- How can you do things differently so that [the problem] doesn't happen again?

### **The coping question**

This works well when a client feels that they have no resources left to draw on by focussing on their existing ability to cope or by referring back to a time when they were able to cope in the past. Examples of coping questions might include:

- How do you cope with that?
- What helps you to keep coping when things are really tough?
- When you think back to that time, how did you manage to keep going?

### **Reframing**

With reframing, the practitioner reinterprets and reflects the clients words or actions in a positive way to help the client think about the situation differently. An example of reframing might be:

- Client: He's determined to make things as difficult as possible. He won't stop going on about wanting to take Josh to the football.
- Practitioner: Do you think that might be his way of expressing how much he wants to contribute to Josh's life and how much he cares for him?

### **The perspective change question**

The perspective change question asks the client to visualise how things will be different and better when a goal has been achieved. It focusses on how other people will know things have changed. Examples of perspective change questions might include:

- How will your daughter know that the conflict between you and her dad has reduced?
- How will Aaron's mum know that you are serious about making those changes?

### **Normalising**

Normalising is a quick and simple technique to reassure clients by using reflection to convey that their experiences aren't unusual. Examples of how normalising might be used include:

- Most people would be angry in a situation like this.
- It's normal to feel upset in this type of situation.

### **The observation task**

The observation task can be used when a client is stuck in the belief that things are never better. When using this technique, the practitioner asks the client to spend time (usually between sessions) noticing when things are a bit better, how they are better and what happened differently that has made them better. An example of how the observation task may be phrased might be:

- Between now and the next session, I'd like you to notice when things are just a little bit better than they usually are. Try to think about how it feels different and also about what has happened differently to make it feel that bit better.

### **The continuation question**

The continuation question can help clients to see that not everything in their lives needs changing and that some things are working well. This can make situations feel less hopeless. It can also provide the practitioner with the opportunity to offer positive feedback. Examples of continuation questions include:

- What's already working well?
- Which things do you feel don't need changing?

### **The optimism question**

Using optimism questions is a way of reinforcing the possibility for change and helping clients to future-think. It can also help clients focus on incremental change and recent successes. Examples of the optimism question might include:

- What small signs can you see that make you feel optimistic?
- What changes can you see that make you feel as though you are making progress?

### **The imagination suggestion**

The imagination suggestion is based on the idea that thinking about a more positive future is more likely to bring it about. The practitioner invites the client to imagine what tomorrow would be like if it was a little bit better than today. An example of how the imagination suggestion might be used could be:

- When you go to bed tonight, try to think about what tomorrow would feel like if it was a little bit better than it is today.

### **The platform question**

The platform question focusses on what has already been achieved. This can help a client feel more optimistic that sustainable change is possible by highlighting the progress that they have been able to make up until this point. Examples of the platform question might include:

- What have you already achieved?
- What is working better now than it was at the beginning?
- What have you changed that has helped you get to where you are now?

### **The resisting the urge task**

Whatever behaviours clients are trying to change, it is normal for them to be tempted to slip back into old patterns. By focussing on the potential to resist that urge, clients can build a sense of control over their choices. This observation task also reinforces the expectation that the client already has the resources to resist failure. An example of how the resisting the urge task might be used could be:

- Next time you have the urge to slip back into old behaviours, I want you to notice what it is that you do that helps you to resist it.

### **Mutualising**

Mutualising works by focussing, not on the differences between two positions, but on any mutual aspirations inherent in those two positions. In this way, it can be possible for the practitioner to reframe the problem so that a client is able to work around the future outcome. An example of mutualising in practice might be:

- Client: I think what's best for Kate is to live with me full time but spend Saturday afternoons with her dad, but he thinks she'd be better off spending half of the time with me and half of the time with him. It's just not possible to resolve it, is it?
- Practitioner: It's clear that you both have different ideas about how Kate should spend time with both of you, but it's also clear that you both want to find a solution that is in Kate's best interests. Is that something you'd agree with?

\* Based on: 20 Solution Focussed Techniques – Coert Visser 2009