

Solution-Focused Questions

Engagement

Talk about what has been working for you as you meet with families. What are your needs? If you are ready to improve your skills in using solution-focused questions, this guide can support you as you assess and plan.

Explore:

When you think about solution-focused questions, what are your strengths?
 What improvements would you like to make in your use of solution-focused questions?

Assessment

Scaling:

On a scale of 1 (need to learn) to 10 (can mentor), where would you place yourself?
 (Record on the Functional Assessment.)



Scaling Continuum:

| <u>Learning</u> Learning the Skills | <u>Working</u> Using the Skills with Families | <u>Mentoring</u> Using the Skills to Mentor |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Generate questions that identify strengths and what is working well. | 1. Use solution-focused questions to discover what is already working well for families. | 1. Use solution-focused questions effectively with families and demonstrate an interview for the caseworker. |
| 2. Identify personal past success and discuss ways they would share that information. | 2. Use exception-finding questions to generate solutions and look at strengths. | 2. Coach caseworker in the use of solution-focused questions to obtain relevant information and engage families in the process. |
| 3. Understand how solution-focused questions are used to focus on information that leads to solutions and meeting needs. | 3. Use the miracle questions to identify needs, strengths, wants, and desires and to generate solutions with the family. | 3. Coach caseworker in planning for a solution-focused interview and plan possible questions or line of questions that might be helpful. |

| <u>Learning</u> Learning the Skills | <u>Working</u> Using the Skills with Families | <u>Mentoring</u> Using the Skills to Mentor |
|--|--|--|
| 4. Apply the miracle question to your own learning experience. | 4. Use scaling questions to support family in tracking their progress. | |
| 5. Use scaling to track personal progress and establish personal and professional development goals. | 5. Use and develop additional solution-focused questions as needed in working with families to get to underlying needs and brainstorm solutions. | |

Planning

1. What will it look like when you use solution-focused questions as you would wish?
2. What steps can you take that will lead to the desired result?

Practice Opportunities

| Mentor with Caseworker | Caseworker with Family | Family with Family |
|--|--|---|
| Have the caseworker select a topic they are willing to discuss and use that topic to demonstrate a solution-focused interview. Then select a topic you are willing to discuss and have them practice with you. | Have a miracle day. Coach family through answering the miracle question and then selecting a day when they act as if the miracle has happened. | When a child is struggling, coach family through helping that child answer the miracle question and then the entire family supports the child in holding a miracle day. |
| Practice solution-focused interviews on friends and family members and then process the experience with mentor. | | |

Knowledge Base

Concept:

Using solution-focused questions to obtain information for the purpose of helping the family formulate solutions to meet their needs.

Basic Elements:

Solution-focused questions
Solution-defining questions
Past successes
Exception-finding questions
Miracle questions
Scaling questions
Additional solution-focused questions

Definitions:

Solution-focused questions

Solution-focused questions are questions specifically focused to solicit specific information to get at underlying needs and generate solutions with families to meet those needs.

Solution-defining questions

These questions help family members define the who, what, why, where, when, and how of the problem and the solution. It helps to identify the nature of the problem and the solutions, as well as who else is interested in this problem or has information that might be helpful in solving the problem. It helps to provide a video replay of how and under what circumstances the problem occurs. Examples include:

- Under what circumstances is this likely to occur?
- When this happens (your husband loses his temper and threatens the children), what do you do?
- What are the positives for you in continuing to stay in this relationship?
- Who else is concerned about this problem in your family?
- What would have to be different for you to not be afraid?
- How often did it happen last week?
- Who was there when it happened?
- Where were you when Johnny had his temper tantrum?

Past successes

Through the interview process, you can focus on the family's past successes; that is, when he or she was functioning well enough not to require Child Protective Services intervention. It is empowering to the family member to realize that there was a period in his or her life when he or she was more successful than he or she feels at this moment. Examples of questions include:

- It's not easy to raise three children on your own. How did you do it?
- After having been through what you've been through, how did you find enough strength to keep pushing on?
- What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your life again?
- What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you had when you were in high school?
- What has and is making it possible for you to cope?

Exception-finding questions

In solution-focused interviewing, exceptions are times when problems could have happened but did not. You and the family need to examine who did what, when, where, and how so that the problem did not happen. Essentially, you are trying to discover how the patterns around the problems are different, especially what is different when the problem does not occur. In addition, problematic behaviors usually happen only within certain physical, relational, or social contexts. It is important to find out in detail what happens when the person does not have the problem. That information can be used to identify the abilities the family uses successfully in one setting. Those strengths/abilities could be transferred to another setting. Examples of exception-finding questions include:

- I can see you have every reason to be depressed. When do you suppose you get a little bit less depressed?
- How would you say you are different when you are a little bit less depressed?
- When you force yourself to get out of bed and walk the kids to school, what do you suppose your children will notice different about you?
- What would it take to force you to get up in the morning more often?
- You are saying that you didn't drink for five days last week. How did you do it?
- Tell me what is different for you at those times when you don't lose control.
- How do you explain to yourself that the problem doesn't happen at those times?
- What would have to happen for you to do it more often?
- When the problem is solved, how do you think your relationship with your son would be different? What will you be doing then that you are not doing now?

Miracle questions

The miracle question literally asks clients to disregard their current troubles and for a moment imagine what their lives would be like in a successful future. It creates a vivid image or vision of what life will be like when the problem is solved and the family member(s) can see some hope that life can be different.

The question is:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you were sleeping and the problem that brought you to Child Protective Services is solved. Since you are sleeping you don't know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved. What do you suppose you will notice that is different the next morning and will tell you that the problem is solved? Follow-up questions include:
 - If the miracle happened, what would be the first thing you would notice?
 - If the miracle happened, what would be the first change you will notice about yourself?
 - What would your spouse notice different about you?
 - If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?

Minor miracle questions also help family members to look at a more hopeful future. It helps you and them to envision positive outcomes that can become part of the change process. These questions include:

- If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- If you had a magic wand and could grant you one thing that would solve the problem/meet the need that your family is now facing, what would you wish for?
- If you could paint a picture for me of what your family would be like if all this were solved, what would that picture look like?

Scaling questions

Scaling questions are an interesting way to make complex features of a person's life more concrete and accessible for both the family member and the child protection worker. Scaling questions can be used to assess self-esteem, self-confidence, investment in change, prioritization of problems, perception of hopefulness, etc. They usually take the form of asking the person to give a number from one to ten that best represent where the family member is at some specific point. Ten is the positive end of the scale, so higher numbers are equated with more positive outcomes or experiences. Examples of scaling questions include:

- On a scale of one to ten, with ten meaning you have every confidence that this problem can be solved and one meaning no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today?
- On the same scale, how hopeful are you that this problem can be solved?
- What would be different in your life when you move up just one step?

You can use scaling questions to assess client motivation to change:

- On a scale of one to ten, how much would you say you are willing to work to solve the problem?
- If the client gives a low answer you could ask, "What do you suppose your husband would say you need to do to move up one point on the scale?"

Additional solution-focused questions:

Often, family members have more solutions available than they realize. Solution-focused questions are questions the helper can frame to help the family member direct attention to useful answers that will move them forward. These questions can empower family members to find their own solutions. Here are some additional examples of solution-focused questions:

- How do you keep making it work for you and your family?
- What are some of your family's strengths that can be used to accomplish the plan/steps/changes?
- What needs to change to make you feel safe?
- Under what conditions have you been able to make your family safe?
- On a scale of one to ten, how important do you think this decision is to your family?

- What solutions have worked for you in the past regarding _____?
- When was the last time _____ didn't happen?
- Who else is interested in helping your family change?
- How have you been able to change/accomplish things that are important to you before?
- What is the role of other family members in helping your family change?
- What do you get from continuing this behavior?
- How will this step/service help you?
- What is happening in your family that keeps you from doing this?
- What would need to be done to help you do this?
- What do you want right now?
- What would make this possible?
- What have you tried that has not worked?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- When are you and your son able to have a good time together?
- When things are going well, what is your family doing?
- Describe the last good day you had together.
- On a scale of one to ten, how important is it that _____?
- What are the common issues that unite your family?
- What do you see as the things that stop you?
- What could help you be more in control and less vulnerable?
- How can you increase the involvement of each family member in the plan?
- On a scale of one to ten, how difficult is it for you to maintain the behavioral plan for Tim?
- Where do you feel stuck?
- How do you describe what it feels like to be stuck?
- What is one step that you could take to move forward?
- What is the most important to address for you?
- When and under what circumstances is this behavior likely to occur?
- How and under what circumstances is this behavior likely to occur?
- With whom is this behavior likely to occur?
- What are some ways you can disrupt/change the patterns of behavior that aren't working for you?
- What are some ways that the positive/effective behaviors could increase?
- What motivates you?
- What causes you to be uncomfortable?
- What new understandings/experiences would help you to change?
- What are you concerned about that could go wrong if you follow this course of action?
- What are you afraid might happen?
- If you were to wake up tomorrow and find that this problem was gone, how would you and your family be different?
- If you were to wake up tomorrow and find that this problem was gone, what do you think would have happened to make it go away?
- When was the last time you expected this _____ to happen and it didn't?