

Teaching Tools – the Series

In recent years professional educators and associated colleagues have been using a range of interventions to support young people in difficulty. Embedded in these interventions are a menu of strategies and skills which can be used by teaching staff and taught to students.

About the Books

Teaching Tools 1 – A Solution Focused Approach for Secondary Staff and Students by Tina Rae and Elizabeth Smith

When presented with a student in difficulty many helping professionals will take time to listen and explore the problem, allowing the young person to describe the detail of the worrying or distressing experience. Time spent in this way can sometimes make things worse. An alternative is, after a brief description, to move on from the problem to a non-problem scenario in which the solution is envisaged using a range of specific techniques and strategies. In this way, and after a relatively short time, the student finds a way to improve the situation and takes a more positive view

Teaching Tools 2 – A Motivational Interview Approach for Secondary Staff and Students by Tina Rae and Elizabeth Smith

Motivational Interviewing is a counselling technique originally developed within medical settings to help people with addiction problems. It is a powerful tool for use with young people who may not always wish to change their behaviours or have strong reasons why they wish to maintain certain behaviours. Concerns about pupils behaviour may come from others such as parents or staff and MI provides a useful means of helping young people identify their future needs and plan appropriate interventions. Change is motivated by a perceived discrepancy between present beliefs and important personal goals or values. Overall, it is the student who is responsible for choosing and carrying out the change.

Teaching Tools 3 – A Cognitive Behavioural Approach for Secondary Staff and Students by Tina Rae and Sandy Egan

Secondary staff and students can bring about positive change by identifying and replacing dysfunctional, inaccurate or unhelpful thoughts, emotions and behaviours with more realistic, useful and positive ones. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) highlights the role thoughts play in relation to both emotions and behaviours. CBT offers individuals a way of talking about themselves, their world and other people so they understand that what they do effects their thoughts and feelings, and vice versa.

Learning Outcomes for Focus on Solutions

- For students to understand the core principles of solution focused approaches.
- For students to understand how this approach to psychotherapy is based upon solution-building rather than problem solving.
- For students to understand that being clear and specific about goals will make achieving them more likely.
- For students to understand how all young people and adults (not just those with diagnosed 'mental health' issues such as high anxiety) can benefit from using this set of strategies and techniques.
- For students to become conversant with issues around wellbeing and the importance of identifying difficulties at an early stage in order to focus on solutions and prevent escalation.
- For students to understand and practice a range of solution focused techniques including: problem-free talk, the miracle question, target setting, defining a preferred future, exception finding, scaling to reach goals and confidence scales and visualising future success.
- For students to experience an increase in confidence, optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem.
- For students to feel confident that they can make use of these 'therapeutic' tools/ strategies in order to maintain motivation and support the process of positive change – in both themselves and within members of their peer group.
- For students to more fully appreciate and understand the value and power of peer support as a means of motivating the individual and preventing the escalation of problems – specifically those related to emotional wellbeing.

Introduction

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is an approach to psychotherapy which is based upon solution-building as opposed to problem-solving. The process requires the individual to actively explore current resources and future hopes and aspirations rather than focusing upon present problems and past causes. Unlike traditional psychotherapy approaches, which can continue for many years, this type of approach tends to involve only three to five sessions and is frequently used as a preliminary intervention and as an adjunct to other treatments. This approach was originally developed at the Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee (de Shazer et al 1986), originating in a focus on the inconsistencies to be found in problem behaviour. This led to the development of the central notion of 'exceptions', that is, regardless of how serious, fixed or chronic a problem might initially appear to be, there will always be exceptions. It is within such exceptions that the individuals own solutions can be found and articulated. De Shazer (1988, 1994) and Berg (Berg 1991; Berg & Miller 1992) were also keen to identify the specific goals of this therapeutic intervention which would then ensure that all involved would know when it was an appropriate time to end.

The effectiveness of SFBT is evident across a wide range of difficulties and problem presentations. Lethem (1994) describes effective interventions for women and children, Macdonald (1994, 1997) highlights positive impacts upon adult mental health, Jacob (2001) describes successes with eating disordered clients whilst Rhodes and Ajmal (1995) describe a range of successes with children, young people and teachers in the school context. As Iveson states, 'In brief it is a simple, all-purpose approach with a growing evidence base to its claim to efficacy,' (Iveson, 2002).

How Does it Work?

The therapist aims to elicit the client's resources through carefully framed questioning. The focus is upon developing a sense of personal agency and responsibility. For example:

- 'You managed to do that, so what did you learn about yourself in the problem?'
- 'What do you think that your behaviour/actions may have taught others about you?'

The questioning process requires the client to translate their actions into meanings and to then construct new meanings about themselves, providing themselves with self-affirmative feedback. This then allows for the development of new and more positive possibilities for the future based upon the client's own answers, feedback and resources. The latter includes both internal and external factors such as strengths, skills, qualities, helpful beliefs, capacities and supportive relationships, both personal and professional. Within this programme, the solution focused approaches are based upon SFBT. However, it is important to note at the outset that we are presenting approaches and strategies as opposed to the therapeutic approach.