Solution-Focused Therapy

"I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it."

— adrienne maree brown

Founded by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, Solution Focused Therapy, also known as Solution Focused Brief Therapy, is a family therapy theory that centers possibility, imagination, and resilience through solution-focused, future-oriented questions and theory.

Therapists harness the client's imagination as a therapeutic instrument. Clients are invited to re-orient themselves towards solutions, exceptions, and possibility instead of problems, patterns, and ruts.

Neuroplasticity: "while the brain usually [rewires] itself in response to injury or disease, when humans focus their attention enough, they can slowly rewire these pathways themselves." (Mannino, 2022)

Types of intervention questions:
- Scaling questions
- Coping questions
- Miracle question
- Future-oriented questions
- Solution-focused questions
- Complimenting/noticing

Critiques
- Toxic positivity
- Therapist doesn't get to know client's past, which may make it harder to understand and empathize with client
- The brief, goal-oriented focus does not work with every kind of person or problem — who might struggle with this format?
- It is easier to focus on the positive and solutions than to do the deep, difficult work of talking about trauma and the past

"Imagination is one of the spoils of colonization, which in many ways is claiming who gets to imagine the future for a given geography. Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma. Reclaiming the right to dream the future, strengthening the muscle to imagine together as Black people, is a revolutionary decolonizing activity."

— adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy, 2017

Definitions

Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)	Internet Addiction (IA)	Problematic Internet Use (PIU)
"Inability of individuals to control their internet use, resulting in marked distress and functional impairment in daily life such as psychological, social, academic, and professional problems" (Wang et al., 2022)	*"Characterized by excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges, or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that leads to impairment or distress."* (Shaw & Black, 2008)	*"Internet use that is risky, excessive, or impulsive in nature leading to adverse life consequences, specifically physical, emotional, social or functional impairment."* (Moreno et al., 2013)

Interventions for Internet Addiction
- Primarily with children, adolescents, and emerging adults
- Focused on changing internet addiction symptoms and related outcomes (e.g., comorbid psychopathology, impulsivity, quality of life)
- Common intervention elements: Pharmacology, CBT, Psychoeducation, Group-based Therapy, Multi-level Counseling, Combined Treatment
- Family Therapy Interventions

	Shek et al., 2009	Zhong et al., 2011	Han et al., 2012	Liu et al, 2015
Aspects of Intervention	Motivational interviewing with adolescent & family-based therapy	Family-based and group therapy	Engaged families with moderate to severe dysfunction in three weeks of family therapy	Multi-family group therapy
Study Outcomes	Reduction in internet addiction behaviors and improved family functioning	Improved family functioning and social support for the adolescent with an internet addiction	Improvements in perceived family cohesion led to brain changes in response to affectionate stimuli and how adolescents respond to online game stimuli	Decrease proportion of adolescents with internet addiction – partially attributed to satisfaction of psychological needs and improved parent-child communication and closeness

Solution-Focused Therapy Interventions for Internet Addiction
- Focused on internet addiction among adolescents and college students
- Incorporate solution-focused therapy into group therapy or support groups
- Findings (Pu et al., 2023; Akgul-Gundogdu & Selcuk-Tosun, 2023; Sagar & Ozabaci, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020; Busari, 2016)
  - Across all articles: lessen internet addiction behaviors; changed behaviors were sustained -- up to 6 months post-intervention
  - Study-specific: Saw changes/consequences in other areas of life (e.g., relationships, school, work) (Zhang et al., 2020; Busari, 2016); Supports (e.g., school nurse) can use solution-focused strategies to support adolescents and families in controlling internet use (Akgul-Gundogdu & Selcuk-Tosun, 2023)

Clinical Implications

Dos and Don'ts of Solution-Focused Therapy	
DO treat clients as the experts on their own lives **DO** allow clients to identify treatment goals - what do they want to be different in their lives? **DO** believe that clients have the ability to construct their own solutions **DO** use the client's language **DO** help clients create clear, positively framed, & achievable goals	**DON'T** ignore the therapeutic relationship **DON'T** engage in problem talk or problem-focused thinking **DON'T** categorize or label clients **DON'T** act as an expert in determining what's wrong and makes plans for how to fix it **DON'T** push for change **DON'T** schedule out sessions

● **DO** build on exceptions to problems ● **DO** find, amplify, and measure progress	

Key Guidelines

- No problem = no therapy
- Do more of what works
- If it isn't working, try something else
- Small steps → Big change
- Solutions aren't directly related to the problem

- Language matters
- There's always an exception to utilize
- The future is created and negotiable

Resources

- Reading Materials
  - Shazer, S. d., Dolan, Y., Korman, H., Trepper, T., McCollum, E., & Berg, I. K. (2021). *More than miracles: The state of the art of solution-focused brief therapy*. Routledge.
  - Berg, I. K., & Dolan, Y. M. (2001). *Tales of solutions: A collection of hope-inspiring stories*. W W Norton & Company.
  - Shazer, S. D. (1988). *Clues: Investigating solutions in brief therapy*. W W Norton & Company.
  - Shazer, S. D. (1991). *Putting difference to work*. W. W. Norton.
  - Lipchik, E. (2011). *Beyond technique in solution-focused therapy: Working with emotions and the therapeutic relationship*. Guilford Press.
  - Solution Focused Therapy Treatment Manual for Working with Individuals
  - Brown, A. M. (2015, July 9). What is/isn't transformative justice?
  - Brown, A. M. (2017). Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds. AK Press.
- Video Resources & Demonstrations
  - Overview & Individual Session: Solution-Focused Therapy: With Insoo Kim Berg
  - Overview & Individual Session Focused on Addiction: Solution Focused Therapy, Part 1 & Solution Focused Therapy, Part 2
  - Individual Session: The Miracle Question demo
  - Commentary & Clips from Individual and Couple Sessions: I'm Not Leaving You, Just Going Out for Awhile
  - Commentary & Clips from Individual and Family Session: Building on Adolescent Expertise: A Solution Oriented Brief Therapy Approach
  - Family Session: I'd Hear Laughter
  - Training & Research Videos: The Solution Focused Universe
- Training Institutes & Communities
  - Institute for Solution-Focused Therapy
  - Solution Focused Brief Therapy Association
  - The Solution Focused Universe