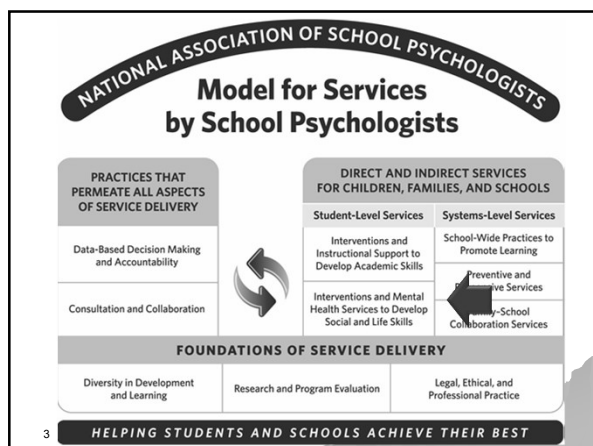


## Brief Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools

**Kathleen Minke, Ph.D., NCSP**  
**University of Delaware**  
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### Objectives

- ◆ **Participants in the session will be able to:**
  - Describe principles and techniques of solution-oriented and narrative approaches to counseling
  - Implement strategies to monitor effectiveness and outcomes of counseling
  - Identify opportunities to integrate solution-oriented approaches with current practices



Disclosure of  
Potential Conflicts of Interest

- ◆ **The presenter has no financial interest in any of the information presented today.**

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Brief, Solution-oriented, Strength-based Counseling is NOT:

- ◆ **A panacea for every problem**
- ◆ **A cookbook approach**
- ◆ **A simple, problem-solving model**

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Characteristics of Brief Counseling

- ◆ **Relationship-based**

*Reliance on the alliance...*

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Characteristics of Brief Counseling

- ◆ Relationship-based
- ◆ Strength-based

*The client knows best...*

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Characteristics of Brief Counseling

- ◆ Relationship-based
- ◆ Strength-based
- ◆ Action-based

*If it's working, do more of it;  
If it's not working, do something  
else!*

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Characteristics of Brief Counseling

- ◆ Relationship-based
- ◆ Strength-based
- ◆ Action-based
- ◆ Allows for frequent progress monitoring

*Frequent checks on the alliance and  
the outcomes*

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### Steps in the Brief Counseling Process

- ◆ **Orienting toward solutions and building the alliance**
- ◆ **Define and clarify the difficulty**
  - Set a small, positive, meaningful goal
- ◆ **Generate ways to reach the goal**
  - solution building by utilizing exceptions and existing resources
  - problem busting by interrupting ineffective solution attempts

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### Orienting Toward Solutions Building the Alliance

- ◆ **Establish a cooperative relationship with the client.**
  - The alliance is critical to success

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### Orienting Toward Solutions Goals of the First Session

- ◆ **Understand the nature of the complaint**
- ◆ **Elicit the client's understanding of the problem, current efforts to handle it, and minimal goals**
- ◆ **Think about interventions to match goals (e.g., solution building or problem busting)**

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Don't forget your basic skills

- ◆ **Listen**
- ◆ **Allow for silence**
- ◆ **Attend to nonverbals (theirs and yours)**
- ◆ **Summarize and paraphrase**

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Building the Alliance  
(Eliciting the Heroic Client)

- ◆ **How is the client's perspective being discounted? How is the client being blamed?**
- ◆ **How can I give credit to the client for trying?**
- ◆ **"No wonder you feel or behave this way [client's circumstances] given that [your understanding of the client's perspective]."**

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Listening

- ◆ **Listen from a position of not knowing**
- ◆ **Accept comments at face value**
- ◆ **Listen for hints of strength, hope, resilience, and other assets**

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## Orienting Toward Solutions

### ◆ Adopt the “Ambassador” Perspective

- maintain an open mind
- ask questions and listen carefully
- assume others know more than you
- expect and respect differences
- help others pursue their own goals
- always curious, often confused

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## Question Starters from the Ambassador’s Perspective

◆ I’m wondering if....

◆ Could it be....

◆ Is it possible that....

◆ Help me understand how....

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## Orienting Toward Solutions

### ◆ Understand and respect the client’s position

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## Orienting Toward Solutions

### ◆ Understand and respect the client's position

#### – Visitors

- ◆ no action-oriented tasks
- ◆ acknowledge client's view
- ◆ compliment
- ◆ find a congruent goal (if possible)
- ◆ discuss non-problem topics; elicit the "heroic client" story
- ◆ consider working also with others

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## Orienting Toward Solutions

### ◆ Understand and respect the client's position

#### – Complainants

- ◆ listen, compliment, validate
- ◆ remark on the hidden strengths
- ◆ offer tentative interpretations
- ◆ offer reflection or observation tasks

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## Orienting Toward Solutions

### ◆ Understand and respect the client's position

#### – Customers

- ◆ action-oriented tasks and experiments
- ◆ ask for their advice
- ◆ engage them in monitoring progress and generating solutions

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### Validation

- ◆ **Accepting client perceptions and avoiding judgment**
- ◆ **Normalizing their concerns**
- ◆ **Conveying confidence in their strengths and resources**
- ◆ **Acknowledging their desire to make things better**

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### Validation

- ◆ **No wonder you did \_\_\_\_\_, given that you felt \_\_\_\_\_.**
- ◆ **It makes perfect sense that...**
- ◆ **You have good reasons to...**

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### Asking permission

- ◆ **I'm wondering about \_\_\_\_\_. Is it ok to ask you a few questions about that?**
- ◆ **I have a few ideas about how thoughts and feelings are connected. Is it ok if I tell you a bit about that?**

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### Complimenting

- ◆ **Direct compliments**
- ◆ **Indirect compliments**
- ◆ **Attribution-based compliments**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Match the client's language**

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### 17 Year Old Client:

- ◆ **My mother is a total witch. You have no idea how she is. She comes in here and seems all reasonable but then she is totally unreasonable at home. I hate her. She treats me like dirt but acts all nice with you.**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Match the client's language**
- ◆ **Use presuppositional language**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Match the client's language**
- ◆ **Use presuppositional language**
- ◆ **Use the language of curiosity**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Match the client's language**
- ◆ **Use presuppositional language**
- ◆ **Use the language of curiosity**
- ◆ **Use the language of empowerment**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Match the client's language**
- ◆ **Use presuppositional language**
- ◆ **Use the language of curiosity**
- ◆ **Use the language of empowerment**
- ◆ **Use the language of qualification**

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### Reminders about Questions

- ◆ **Don't ask questions you already know the answer to.**
- ◆ **Avoid "why" questions.**
- ◆ **Avoid following a question with a question.**

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### Orienting Toward Solutions

- ◆ **Adopt the Ambassador Perspective**
- ◆ **Understand and respect the client's position**
- ◆ **Intentional use of language (matching, presupposition, curiosity, empowerment, qualification)**



Cooperative, Change-Focused Relationships

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### Structuring the First Session

- ◆ **Explain who you are**
- ◆ **Make sure the client knows what to call you**
- ◆ **Make sure the client knows what your job is and why he/she is meeting with you.**

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### Structuring the First Session

- ◆ **Provide information about what to expect:**
  - How long the session will be
  - Overview of activities (if any)
  - Explain what will happen next
  - Give the child a chance to tell you if he/she is missing something important.

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### Review Confidentiality

- ◆ **Be brief and developmentally appropriate.**

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### Define the Difficulty

- ◆ **Briefly describe your understanding of the problem**
- ◆ **Normalize it**
- ◆ **Elicit the client's understanding of the problem**

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### Don't Rush!

- ◆ **Help the client tell the story**
- ◆ **For younger kids might involve play, puppets, art**
- ◆ **For older kids, might involve letting them admire the problem for a bit**
- ◆ **Remember to elicit the Heroic Client!**

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### The First Session

- ◆ **Listen for the heroic client...**
- ◆ **Find out what the client wants...**
- ◆ **Find out what is going well...**
- ◆ **Validate and reflect back the ways the client is being successful...**

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Define the Difficulty  
(negotiate a solvable complaint)

- ◆ **Define unclear terms**
- ◆ **Use “videotalk” to get specifics**
- ◆ **Clarify surrounding circumstances**
  - When, where, with whom?
  - What happens right before/after?

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Define the Difficulty  
(negotiate a solvable complaint)

- ◆ **Explore previous solution attempts**
- ◆ **Clarify the influence of the problem**

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Define and Clarify the Difficulty

- ◆ **Try to figure out how a “difficulty” became a “problem.”**
- ◆ **The MRI Problem Process**

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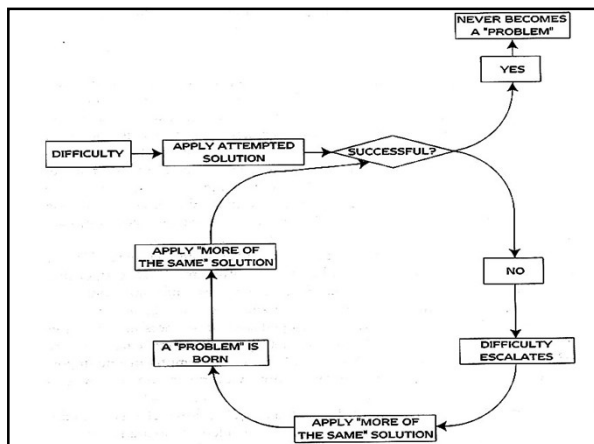
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### Set a Goal

◆ **Effective goals are:**

- Significant (meaningful)
- Specific
- Small
- Start based (positive)
- Self manageable

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### Set a Goal

(see question handout)

◆ **The miracle question**

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## Problematic Miracles

- ◆ **Vague miracles**
  - use persistent questioning
- ◆ **Impossible miracles**
  - explore the underlying desires
- ◆ **Others will be different miracles**
  - help students understand that their behavior can affect other's behavior

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## What Does the Client Want?

(see question handout)

- ◆ **The miracle question**
- ◆ **Scaling**

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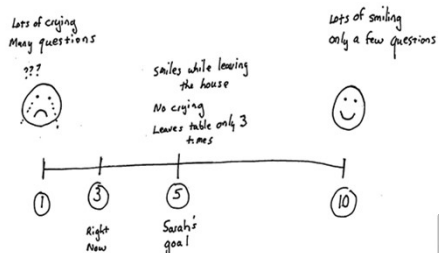
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## The Church Problem

Church Nights




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## What Does the Client Want?

(see question handout)

- ◆ **The miracle question**
- ◆ **Scaling**
- ◆ **Instead questions**

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## What Does the Client Want?

- ◆ **The miracle question**
- ◆ **Scaling**
- ◆ **Instead questions**
- ◆ **Aligning actions with values**

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## What Does the Client Want?

- ◆ **The miracle question**
- ◆ **Scaling**
- ◆ **Instead questions**
- ◆ **Aligning actions with values**
- ◆ **Social relationship questions**

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### Problematic Goals

#### ◆ Negative goals

- use instead questions
- ask student about the positive effects for the student about the other's change
- ask how you can be helpful in achieving change in the other

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### Problematic Goals

#### ◆ Harmful goals

- explore the student's reasons for the goal
- seek healthy goals that meet the same need

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### Problematic Goals

#### ◆ I don't know goals

- Use hypothetical "if" questions

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Orienting Toward Solutions  
(Listening for Heroic Stories)

- ◆ **Find out what the client wants**
- ◆ **Find out if the client wants to change a current situation**

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Solution-oriented first sessions

- ◆ **Solution building**
  - Encouraging more of what works through exceptions and existing resources
- ◆ **Problem busting**
  - Doing less of what doesn't work through interrupting ineffective patterns

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**Generating Ways to Reach  
the Goal –  
Solution Building**

- ◆ **Focus conversation on what is going right and exceptions to the difficult situation**

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### Solution Building Step 1: Elicit Exceptions

#### ◆ Look for them

- Attendance records, ODR patterns, psych reports

#### ◆ Listen for them

- Pay attention to exceptions mentioned in the problem story

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### Solution Building Step 1: Elicit Exceptions

#### ◆ Ask for them

- Times when things are less bad
- Parts of the miracle already happening
- Scaling (times when the problem was worse)
- Pre-session and between session change
- Observation tasks

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### Solution Building Utilizing Exceptions

#### ◆ Elicit

- Don't miss exceptions that are mentioned but glossed over by the client
- Ask specifically about exceptions

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### Solution Building Step 2: Elaborate

- ◆ **Be confused and interested**
- ◆ **Dig for details**
  - How did this happen?
  - Who was there?
  - What else was going on?
  - When did this happen?
  - Where did this happen?
  - What sense do you make of this?
- ◆ **Observation tasks**

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### Solution Building Utilizing Exceptions

- ◆ **Elicit**
- ◆ **Elaborate**
- ◆ **Expand**
  - to other contexts
  - to greater frequency

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### Solution Building Step 4: Evaluate

- ◆ **Elicit**
- ◆ **Elaborate**
- ◆ **Expand**
- ◆ **Evaluate**
  - Informal scales
  - Outcome Rating Scale
  - Permanent products

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**Solution Building  
Step 5: Empower**

- ◆ Elicit
- ◆ Elaborate
- ◆ Expand
- ◆ Evaluate
- ◆ Empower




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What if the client does not identify  
any exceptions???

- ◆ **Observation task**
- ◆ **Utilize other client resources**




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Working with What Works  
Building on Client Resources

- ◆ **Values and beliefs**
- ◆ **Chance events**
- ◆ **Prior solution attempts**
- ◆ **Resilience (coping skills)**
- ◆ **Hobbies, interests, talents**
- ◆ **Heroes**
- ◆ **Social supports**
- ◆ **Ideas and opinions  
(Brainstorming)**




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Problem Busting  
(see questions handout)

- ◆ **Detail the difficulty**
- ◆ **Explore solution attempts**
  - Avoid repeating failed solution attempts
  - Explore coping efforts
  - May lead to a previously unidentified exception (back to solution building!)

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Solution Building:  
The Bottom Line

- ◆ **If it works, do it some more.**
  - Find an exception or client resource
  - Explore it and make the client the hero of the story
  - Apply the same analytic rigor to understanding the exception/resources as typically is applied to problem analysis!
  - Evaluate successes and invite the client and others to celebrate them

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Problem Busting

- ◆ **Client is stuck in a problem pattern**
  - Change the viewing
  - Change the doing

**If it's not working, do something else!**

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## Changing the Viewing

### ◆ Reframing

- Asks the client to try on a different perspective

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## Reframing

### ■ Based on two assumptions:

- 1) it is possible to reframe whatever a person does or doesn't do as a success;
- 2) persons will be cooperative if positive aspects of their behavior are stressed.

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For a reframe to be effective

- ◆ It must fit the facts as well as the existing frame
- ◆ It must make sense to the client
- ◆ It must be different enough to make a difference

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### Reframing

- ◆ **Must be tentative**
- ◆ **Must be accepted by the client**

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### Reframing

- ◆ **Context reframe: define whatever the client is or isn't doing as sensible in other contexts but not the current context**

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### Reframing

- ◆ **Meaning reframe: define whatever the person is doing (or not doing) as a success**

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### Problem Busting: Changing the Doing

- ◆ **Review past efforts and gain agreement that these are not working**
- ◆ **Consider ways to “do something different” when the problem situation occurs**

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### Problem Busting

- ◆ **Brainstorming**
  - Be sure you have reviewed prior solution attempts

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### Problem Busting

- ◆ **Encourage the client to do something different**
  - Unleash client creativity
  - Observe the problem and solution
  - Invite what you dread
  - Go with the flow

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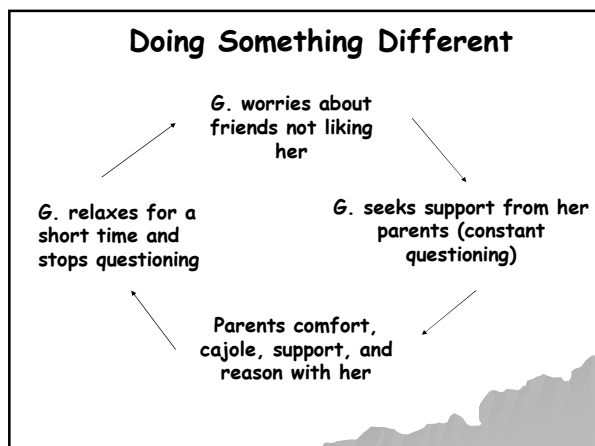
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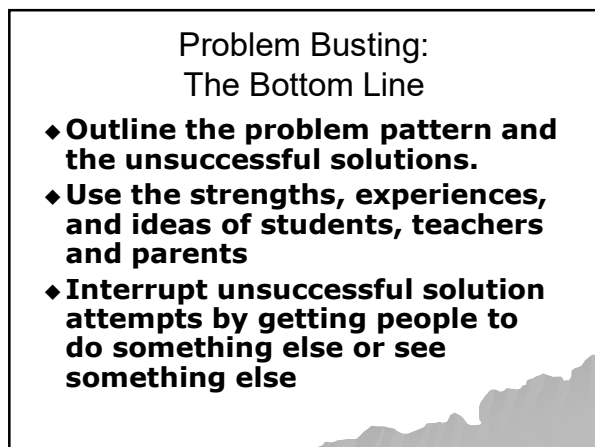
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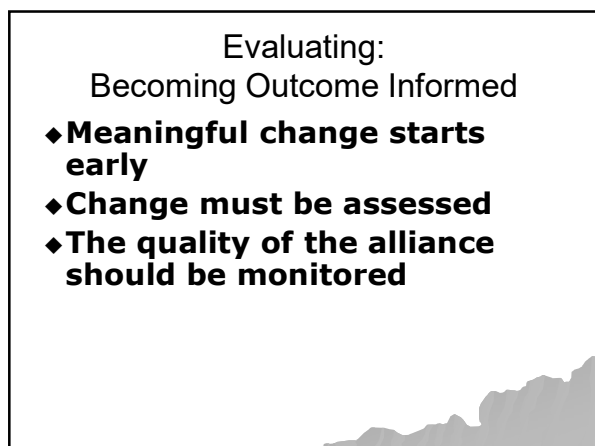
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**Evaluating  
(Becoming Outcome Informed)**

- ◆ **Scaling**
- ◆ **Permanent products**
- ◆ **Ratings by self and/or others**

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**Self-Monitoring**

- ◆ **Must be based on client's goal(s)**
- ◆ **Try to measure positive change**
- ◆ **Collaborate with the client in developing the monitor**
- ◆ **Be sure to review each session**

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**Evaluating  
(Becoming Outcome Informed)**

- ◆ **Outcome Rating Scale (ORS)**
- ◆ **Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)**

**Go to:  
heartandsoulofchange.com  
Click on measures**

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**Evaluating  
(Becoming Outcome Informed)**

- ◆ **Session Rating Scale (SRS)**
- ◆ **Child Session Rating Scale (CSRS)**

**Go to:  
heartandsoulofchange.com**

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**Closing the Session**

- ◆ **Summarize**
- ◆ **Review experiment**
- ◆ **Complete SRS**
- ◆ **Plan for next time**

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What happens in subsequent sessions?

- ◆ **Review progress**
  - Using ORS and SRS or other measures
- ◆ **Empower changes**

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### Empowering Change

- ◆ **Blame the client for success**
- ◆ **Clarify the client's intentions**
- ◆ **Highlight the ways in which change is good**
- ◆ **Help the client prepare for relapse**
- ◆ **Help the client help others**
- ◆ **Acknowledge successes**

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What happens in subsequent sessions?

- ◆ **Review progress**
- ◆ **Empower changes**
- ◆ **Adjust experiments as needed**
  - Use existing resources/exceptions
  - Modify approach to changing doing/viewing

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What happens in subsequent sessions?

- ◆ **Review progress**
  - Empower changes
- ◆ **Adjust experiments as needed**
  - Use existing resources/exceptions
  - Modify approach to changing doing/viewing
- ◆ **Wrap up**
  - Plan new experiment
  - Check alliance

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What if things got worse???

- ◆ Did the goal belong to the client?
- ◆ Did you repeat a failed solution?
- ◆ Do you believe the client can change?
- ◆ Is the client ambivalent about change?

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What if things got worse???

- ◆ Client's theory?
- ◆ Normalize/validate
- ◆ Coping questions
- ◆ Exceptions or other resources?

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## A Case Example

Combining solution-oriented and cognitive-behavioral techniques

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### Case Example: Sarah, age 9

- Rages at home
- Separation problems at school and church
- Increasing isolation from peers
- High degree of perfectionism and demandingness
- Limited frustration tolerance; verbal explosions

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### Intervention

- Combined behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and play techniques in a solution-oriented framework
  - Sarah and her parents selected and prioritized goals
  - Sarah and her parents selected solutions
  - Frequent scaling of progress
  - Lots of blaming for success

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### Sarah's Goal and Experiments

- To stop crying at school so kids won't make fun of me
- IDEAS:
  - keep a picture of mom in desk
  - keep busy with work
  - remind myself I can see mom later

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## Good Things about Independence

- People won't ask why I'm crying (cause I won't be crying)
- I can spend the night with friends with no worries
- I can make new friends

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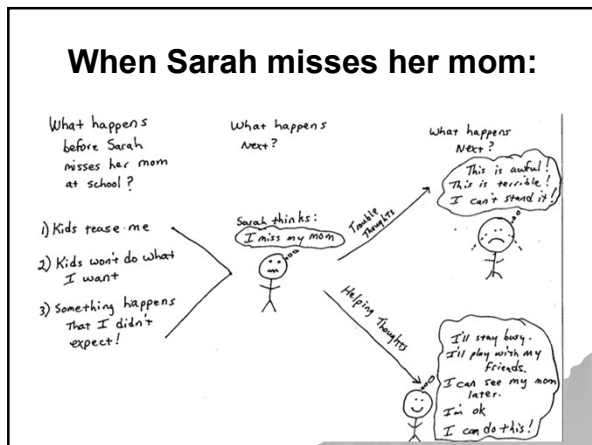
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## When Sarah misses her mom:




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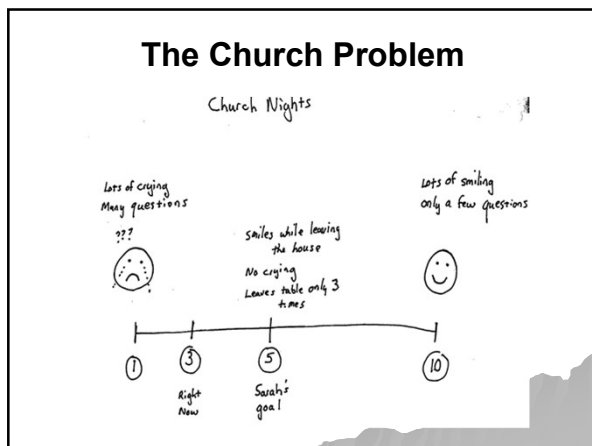
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## The Church Problem




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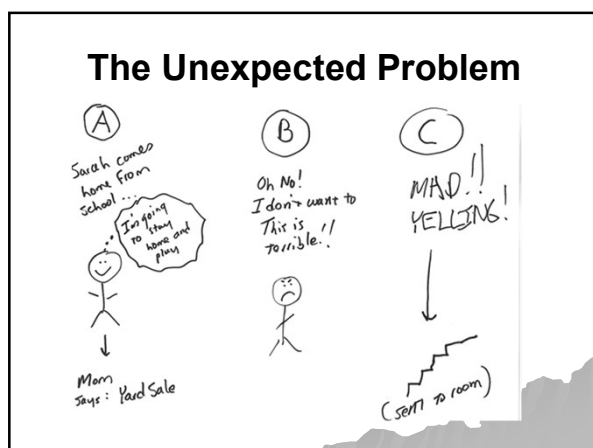
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### The Unexpected Problem




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### The Homework Problem

1. Look at the homework.
2. Do I understand the directions?  
YES? Start the homework.  
NO? Ask for help
3. Here's one I don't know how to do!  
Am I already mad?  
NO? I will ask for help  
YES? Go to my room and calm down. After I'm calm I'll ask for help.

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### Outcomes

- Rages eliminated
- School-based problems reduced to manageable levels
- Successfully stayed overnight with relatives

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### Narrative Approaches

- ◆ **Knowledge is socially constructed**
- ◆ **"Professional" knowledge is but one of many potentially useful ways to understand a situation**
- ◆ **Clients are invited to "re-author" their stories**

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### Narrative Approaches

- ◆ **Think of a student who is well known to the disciplinarian in your school.**
- ◆ **Jot down a one or two word description of the student.**

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### Narrative Approaches

- ◆ **The student is not the problem.**
- ◆ **The problem is the problem.**

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### Externalizing Conversations

- ◆ **Allow the individual to be known *apart* from the problem**
- ◆ **Allow some space between the individual and the problem**
- ◆ **Allow the counselor and client to join together against the problem**

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### Externalizing Conversations

- ◆ **Naming the problem**

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### Externalizing Conversations

- ◆ **Mapping the influence**
  - Length
  - Breadth
  - Depth

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## Externalizing Conversations

### ◆ Discovering abilities/ Detecting Cues of Competence

- Sparkling moments
- Times when things are a little less bad
- Areas of life less affected by the problem
- Actions or intentions to act

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## Externalizing Conversations

### ◆ Developing the counterplot

- Determine the client's interest in a different, more preferred story
- Interrogate the "sparkling moments" (exceptions) with the same vigor as the problem
- Name the counterplot
- Identify the appreciative audience
- Project into the future
- Document the evidence

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## Externalizing Conversations

### ◆ For adolescents:

- Lund, T., Eron, J., & Dagirmanjian, S. (2016). Narrative solutions: Using preferred view of self to motivate individual and family change. *Family Process*, 55 (4), 724-741.

### ◆ For children:

- Dykes, M.A., & Neville, K.E. (2000). Taming trouble and other tales: Using externalized characters in solution-focused therapy. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 19 (1), 74-81

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### Externalizing Using Stories

- ◆ **Metaphorical stories can enhance externalizing conversations**
- ◆ **Vehicle for:**
  - Providing therapeutic suggestions
  - Reinforcing learned strategies

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### Externalizing Using Stories

- ◆ **Identify the problem to address in the story and the desired outcome.**
- ◆ **Select a context for the metaphor.**
- ◆ **Think through the isomorphic connections**
- ◆ **Provide a resolution that fits the problem situation.**

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### A Case Example

**Combining  
solution-  
oriented,  
cognitive  
behavioral and  
narrative  
approaches**

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## Case Example

- ◆ **Naming the problem:**
  - “the worries”
- ◆ **Mapping the influence**
  - 50% of the time worrying
  - Affected friendships, her parents, her happiness
  - She missed the “old” happier her.
- ◆ **Cues of competence:**
  - “sparkly moments”

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## Between Session Letter

Feb. 26

Hello, Official Worry Tricks Detective!

I was thinking about our meeting this week. I hope that you are staring those worries right in the face and figuring out their many tricks and lies.

I realized there are times when you refuse to let them win. Even though the worries grab you on Sunday nights and tell you lies like “you must worry” and “tomorrow will be bad,” somehow you still beat them back and come to school. That is wonderful. With practice (and with discovering all of their tricky ways) you will find more times when you win and the worries lose.

Happy detecting!

Dr. Minke  
Official Observer of Detectives

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## Gwendolyn Stories




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How do I get started?

- ◆ **Read and then read some more**
- ◆ **Start small**
- ◆ **Talk with colleagues**

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Additional Reading

◆ **For further reading...**

- ◆ Murphy, J.J. (2008). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- ◆
- ◆ Murphy, J.J., & Duncan, B.L. (2007). *Brief intervention for school problems: Outcome-informed strategies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford.
- ◆
- ◆ Sklare, G.B. (2005). *Brief counseling that works: A solution-focused approach for school counselors and administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- ◆
- ◆ Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (2007). *Narrative counseling in schools: Powerful and brief* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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Brief Solution-Focused Counseling  
in Schools



Contact: minke@udel.edu

Thanks for playing!

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