

The Solution-Focused Approach: History, Values & Principles

HISTORY & VALUES

History of Solution-Focused/Solution-Building Model

Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg pioneered through their work the Solution-Focused/Building approach. Beginning in the mid-1970s, de Shazer, Berg, and their colleagues, through an inductive process of observing clients in therapy, sought to determine what activities were most helpful to clients. In 1982, de Shazer hit upon the idea that there is not a necessary connection between problem and solution – namely, that helpful solutions could emerge from the client/therapist interaction not directly connected to the presenting problem. This was a significant shift from the medical model, which requires a detailed examination of the problem, a more formal diagnosis, and treatment specifically connected to the problem and diagnosis.

Influenced by the research of others in the field of communications, and their own research, de Shazer and Berg recognized that the way in which the practitioner phrases and uses questions has a discernable relationship to the way in which the client responds and how the helping process unfolds. From this research and practice, de Shazer and Berg developed the Solution-Focused Model. Effective use of questions to help clients recognize, explore, and use strengths is a key feature of the Solution-Focused approach.

Value Base for Solution-Focused Intervention (Saleebey, 1992)

1. Despite life's struggles, all persons possess strengths that can be marshaled to improve the quality of their lives. Practitioners need to respect these strengths and the direction clients wish to apply them.
2. Client motivation is increased by a consistent emphasis on client-defined strengths.
3. Discovering strengths requires a process of cooperative exploration between clients and helpers.
4. Focusing on strengths turns practitioners away from the temptation to judge or blame clients for their difficulties and toward discovering how clients have managed to survive.
5. All environments – even the most bleak – contain resources.

Solution-Focused Approach Core Principle

*If what you are doing doesn't work, stop doing it
and do something else.*

If what you are doing is working, do more of it.