

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

1. PAST SUCCESSES

Through the interview process, you can focus on the client's past successes, that is, when he/she was functioning well enough not to require child protective services intervention. It is empowering to the client to realize that there was a period in his/her life when he/she was more successful than he/she feels at the 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?

Dialogue

Caseworker: Mr. Toker, you are having difficulty now tending to your grandchildren's needs and you say you think your dependence on marijuana is the cause of that.

Client: Yeah, but here I am in this druggies' program and, man, I am clean for the first time in years. You know, times are changing - my daughter dumping her kids on me and then me getting busted – I just realized I had to get it together for these kids.

Caseworker: How's that feel?

Client: Too weird. I'm still shaky. They told me that some guys got it worse though. You know, my grandkids have never seen me straight.

Caseworker: So, are you expecting to be different as a caregiver when you aren't using drugs?

Client: Oh yeah, I was different with my own kids, back in the 60s before I started smokin.

Caseworker: Tell me about how you were as a parent then.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Client: You know, I was good. Like, I tuned into my kids – what they were thinking about, what they were up to.

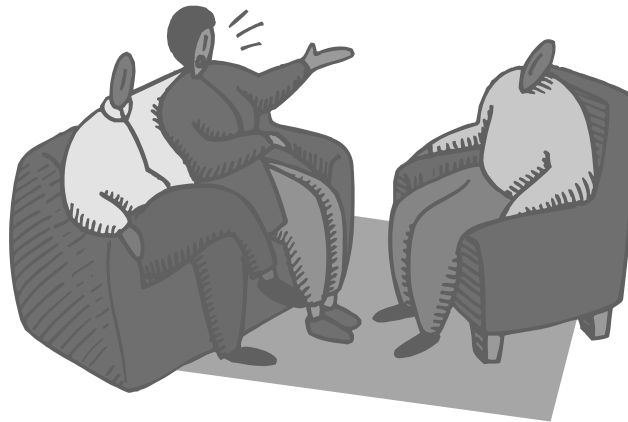
Caseworker: Like what?

Client: Oh, like I remember Sally, (that's my girl who's a teacher in Gettysburg, not the kids' mother) – she used to get her feelings hurt so easy and when that happened, man, she wanted her dad. I was the only one who she would talk to. And I could help too – her and me, we always had a special bond.

Caseworker: Do you see yourself using that special skill with your grandchildren?

Client: Yeah, I do. I think I'm pretty good at tuning into kids' feelings.

Caseworker: That will help a lot because Jackie and Joe are both feeling pretty lost right now. Let's talk some about how you can tune into your grandchildren now.



SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

2. EXCEPTION FINDING QUESTIONS

In solution-focused interviewing, exceptions are times when problems could have happened but did not. For instance, in the past there may have been similar circumstances to the present, but maltreatment did not occur. You and the client need to examine who did what, when, where, and how - so that the problem won't happen again. Essentially, what you are trying to discover is how the patterns around the problems were changed and can be changed in the future. In addition, problematic behaviors 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 client 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 yourself to get up in the morning more often?
- You are saying that you didn't drink for 5 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?

Dialogue

Caseworker: Mrs. Johnson, one of the concerns I have about Randy's safety is that he is pretty provocative –he pushes your buttons - and I don't think that's going to go away quickly. He's pretty angry at his dad for leaving the family.

Client: Yeah, well, like I say, I've learned my lesson. I lay a hand on him again, and you guys are going to take him away from me, that's what I figure.

Caseworker: So, I want to help you find some other ways to deal with his behavior that pushes your buttons. Like when he lies.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Client: Yeah, that really gets to me, alright.

Caseworker: Has there ever been a time when Randy did lie and you handled it in a different way?

Client: Well, let's see. Once he told my ex that our dog Tator knocked over the turpentine in the garage. My ex got so mad at that dog, even kicked him. But, knowing Randy like I do, I figured he lied; I figured he did it himself. And, when my ex wasn't around, I let Randy know that. But I didn't blow up or hit him or nuthin - because I knew Randy had every right to be afraid of that man, he was **violent**. So, instead, I just tried to talk to him about being more careful.

Caseworker: Do you think when he lies now he is afraid of something?

Client: Mostly I think he just wants to avoid punishment.

Caseworker: With the turpentine incident was he trying to avoid punishment?

Client: Yeah, from my ex.

Caseworker: And you didn't punish him – you talked to him. How did he react?

Client: Well, good I guess. Afterward he came and thanked me and told me he wouldn't play with the basket ball inside the garage anymore.

Caseworker: Sounds like he figured out something useful himself just from you handling things differently. I think you did the right thing on that occasion. Do you think you might use that approach again?

Client: Well, maybe. Sometimes I can talk to him so it makes sense to him.

Caseworker: Let's talk some more about how you might do that in the future when he lies.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

3. 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 client 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 different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?”

Follow up questions include:

- If the miracle happened, what would be the first thing you would do?
- If the miracle happened what will be the first change you will notice about yourself?
- What would your husband/wife notice different about you?
- If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?

Dialog

Caseworker: I know you feel pretty hopeless about ever getting to a place where you aren't fearful of getting abused. Both your husband and your boyfriend in high school have mistreated you.

Client: I feel like that. Even my dad used to hit me.

Caseworker: And you have thought about what to do but can't think of anything.

Client: Right. I go over and over in my head about what I should do but I can't come up with something.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Caseworker: Well, I can help you hook up with a counselor who can help you with that. But for right now, I wonder what it would be like for you if there were just no more abuse, it was all in your past, never to happen again. You and your kids were safe forever.

Client: Oh god, that would be something.

Caseworker: Like, say there was a miracle and you woke up one day and you knew that there would be no more abuse. What do you suppose would be different for you?

Client: It would be like night and day. I mean, really. I always feel that it is night time, you know, when its dark and you are scared.

Caseworker: What would it feel to live in the day time all the time?

Client: I guess like a bird, you know they say "free as a bird" like I could fly and be free.



SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

4. SCALING QUESTIONS

Scaling questions are a clever way to make complex features of a client's life more concrete and accessible for both the client 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 client to give a number from 0-10 that best represents where the client is at some specified 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 1-10 with 10 meaning you have every confidence that this problem can be solved and 1 means 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 1-10 how much would you say you are willing to work to solve the problems?
- 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 1 point on the scale?"

Dialog

Caseworker: Mr. Drake, you say that it is important to you to learn to control your anger, that you don't want to ever shake your baby again. On a scale of 1 –10, how much confidence do you have in yourself that, with some help you can change?

Client: Right now, pretty low.

Caseworker: How low, like what number from 1-10?

Client: Like a 2, maybe a 3.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Caseworker: You know, it's going to take some hard work. On a one to ten scale, how much hard work are you willing to put in?

Client: I don't know. Sometimes I think low, like 2 or 3. That's when I am feeling really down on myself. Then other times I think I can do this, I mean, control myself. So maybe a 7 or an 8 even. But I don't know, it's like this anger just comes over me.

Caseworker: What would it take to get you up to a 10, where you were willing to work as hard as humanly possible to get control of your anger?

Client: I think I need to feel like it could work. I guess I feel like it won't.

Caseworker: Well, Jim who runs the anger management group can have you talk to some of the members – I think that would help you to be more hopeful. You have it inside to learn to control your anger – and there are people who are ready to help you do this.

