

Being “solution focused” as a transdiagnostic approach to mental health in primary care

Part 2: Actionable problems and solution-focused
next steps

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Acknowledgements

- Many colleagues from many projects including the teams participating in the Pediatric Integrated Care Collaboratives (National Child Traumatic Stress Network/SAMHSA)
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' Task Force on Mental Health – for support and the opportunity to be a part of and learn from their efforts
- NIMH grants related to mental health interventions in pediatric primary care

Disclosures

- No conflicts of interest
- No off-label prescribing suggestions
- Funding for portions and past versions from the US NIMH, SAMHSA (National Child Traumatic Stress Network), US Indian Health Service (though we alone are responsible for content)

What we will cover

Session 1

- What's a “transdiagnostic” intervention?
- Thought processes while stressed (or sad or anxious)
- Setting the tone
- Getting the agenda

Session 2

- Framing actionable problems
- Taking a solution-focused approach

Solution-focused therapy

- Based on the way the client sees the world; they are the expert; we work within their values; we are their humble partner
 - Their connection of solution to problem may differ from ours
- Strengths-based – find what worked for them and when; points out strengths
- Look for successes that can be re-created, expanded
- When things went better, what was different?

What's an actionable problem?

- Vague, hard to measure goals are a set-up for frustration to both sides
 - Change “attitude”
 - Show “respect”
- More concrete goals lend themselves to more concrete and easily formulated advice
- Framed as something we want to happen vs. something we don't want to happen
- Often a first small step with good probability of being attainable

From the problem to the solution

- Ask for permission to move to this step
- Check on shared understanding
 - Play the story back to the family; ask for corrections and what sounds right
 - Use this as an opportunity to point out strengths, resilience, your appreciation (especially of parent)
- Acknowledge that you are optimistic, that you have some thoughts, but want to work with the family to find the solution they'd most like

Getting the family's ideas to try

- What was the thing that worked best, even if it was only a little
- Ask about exceptions – ever a time when things were good for just a bit?
- Despite all the difficulties that you face, what has made it possible for you to continue to manage?
- What first small step do you think you could take?
 - Breaking down complex problems into manageable ones
 - Taking advantage of complexity: no wrong place to start

While you are listening to the family's ideas...

- What in your “transdiagnostic” pediatric toolkit does this match up with?
 - Connecting with the parents
 - Reducing overall stress
 - Looking for treatable co-morbidities
 - Working on parent-child interactions
 - Helping children self-regulate
 - Helping children learn how to solve problems

Universal interventions

- Connecting with the parent as well as the child
- Attention to context and basic needs
 - What else is the family juggling?
- Looking for co-morbidities
 - Could there be learning or other developmental issues?
- Looking for ways to decrease stress on child or caretakers
 - What tasks can be prioritized or deferred?

Universal interventions

- Trouble-shoot parent-child interactions
 - Often the chief concern anyway
 - Acknowledge that any child mental health issue generates difficult interactions
- Promote/prescribe positive interactions
 - Help with clear and consistent rule setting
 - Minimize punishments
 - Special time or child's game
 - Reach Out and Read

Helping children self-regulate (1)

- “Scaffolding” – we do best with a “heads up”
 - Anticipating and talking through day-to-day situations
 - Rehearsing key behavioral tasks in the child’s day
- Give the child extra time to stay organized and oriented.
 - Rehearse what to do when you are confused, bored.
- Helping children read emotions in others and name them in themselves
 - Not a bad way to co-watch TV
- Making sure that parents know how to help a child calm down
 - Speaking calmly
 - Developing comforting rituals
 - Age-appropriate co-play

Helping with self-regulation (2)

- Learning how to break tasks down into manageable parts
 - Includes out-loud problem solving
- “Mindfulness”
 - Safe body first
 - Slow breaths
 - Visualizations
 - Letting thoughts come and go
 - Distractions
 - Self-care

Short and long-term plans

- What's the one thing they will try next?
- Concrete short-term outcomes
 - Rate it 1 to 10
 - Where are you now?
 - How would you know if it was one unit better?
- The promise to check in and work on next steps
 - Can always foreshadow what that might be
- The ideal end of treatment
 - Family feels they did it themselves
 - Family feels they are finished but know where to turn for help in the future

Ask about barriers

- Easy to skip this step in a quick visit
- Evidence suggests even motivated patients appreciate help with logistics
- Asking allows people to think through and get more committed to plan
- Opportunity to build alliance

The frame we hope to adopt

- Thinking about the present and future more than the past
- Change and the need to adapt to it are inevitable
 - We are all on a journey
 - Small changes are as important as big ones
- Through positive regard and recognition of strength we seek to:
 - Reduce shame
 - Give hope and a sense of capability

Summing up ways to create space for change

- **Use less information before perceiving threat**
 - Opportunity to think about situations in a safe place
- **Reduced search to evaluate context**
 - Place to reflect on context in a non-judgmental way
- **Reduced mental energy**
 - Provide positive regard – relax so can think
- **Reduced flexibility**
 - Help person dig into their toolkit – realize they have it
- **Lack of expectation of rewards**
 - Points out existing accomplishments
 - The affirmation of partnership and positive regard

Reflections:

- Anyone formally use this already?
- Are there aspects that you incorporate into other forms of treatment or work with individuals or families?
- Have some good stories?