

In June 2014, in Amsterdam, in a conference entitled “Just suppose...”
I gave a keynote presentation on the principles of solution-focused therapy.

I proposed that successful solution-focused therapy is made up of following four ingredients or elements:
hope, collaboration, pride and creativity.

I then shared some simple methods for making all those four elements happen.

The list of methods is not meant to be exhaustive.

It is simply made to be illustrative.

There are many more ways of making those four ingredients happen.

Instill hope

1. Show your own self-confidence and optimistic radiation
2. Make testimonials from other clients available for the client
3. Create a playful rather than a solemn ambience to your sessions
4. Focus on the desired future rather than the past
5. Operate with specific rather than vague goals
6. Convert problems into skills to learn
7. Use various forms of scaling (1-10)
8. Prefer small steps and the go slow idea
9. Explore abilities, skills, talents and other resources (“You have what it takes!”)
10. Explore progress and exceptions (“You are already on the way!”)
11. Investigate resilience and coping
12. Share stories of hope
13. Normalize, de-pathologize
14. Use reframing to develop more hopeful explanations to problems
15. Avoid psychiatric diagnosis’s and replace with more optimistic names for problems
16. Explore client’s previous successes with overcoming similar problems and challenges
17. Explore client’s previous successes with overcoming different kinds problems and challenges
18. Refer to optimistic statistical data

Promote feelings of pride

1. Discuss various areas of client’s competence
2. Analyze client’s successes
3. Give generously compliments
4. Show interest in client’s resiliency and coping
5. Discuss progress already made
6. Congratulate and celebrate progress
7. Plan to celebrate future progress
8. Talk about pride (“Who will be most proud of you?”)
9. Record desired behavior on video
10. Give certificates
11. Write appreciative letters
12. Give a round of applause
13. Use encouraging gestures (e.g. High five)

14. Say “Good try” when something didn’t work
15. Help not only your client but also others to feel proud of progress by acknowledging their contribution
16. Make the client feel proud of their core values (“What does the way you have handled this say about you as a person?”)

Build collaboration

1. Show compassion & curiosity
2. Be interested in criticism and feedback
3. Show that you are impressed, excited and thrilled by things the client says or does
4. Use “yes-set”
5. Focus on clients’ own goals
6. Be multipartial – try to be understanding also to the members of the client’s social network
7. Practice positive gossiping
8. Be generous with thanking and acknowledging people’s contribution and willingness to help
9. Show your appreciation in many ways
10. Create a cheerful and playful atmosphere to the sessions
11. Ask client’s to help you
12. Don’t expect too much from family members – acknowledge every little bit of support
13. Assume the not-knowing position
14. Prefer explanatory models that do not pathologize clients or blame families
15. Be transparent with records, reflections, and methods you use
16. Share your personal stories (with discretion)
17. Give your clients as much choice as possible
18. Allow your clients to decide who to invite along to the sessions
19. Allow the client to set the goals for therapy
20. Ensure that there is consensus in the social network of the goal of therapy
21. Give, and accept symbolic gifts
22. Take responsibility for lack of progress

Inspire clients’ creativity

1. Use future projections and fantasies
2. Use dolls and puppets
3. Use role-plays and enactments of challenging situations
4. Be delighted about clients’ ideas and give positive feedback
5. Externalize problems as in narrative therapy
6. Acknowledge everyone in the system for help, support and participation
7. Analyze progress and successes
8. Cultivate humor & playfulness
9. Share inspiring stories
10. Reveal your own crazy and wild ideas
11. Promote thinking outside the box
12. Help develop solutions based on client’s resources
13. See if you can combine problems so that one problem helps in solving another one

14. Use imagination, fantasy and games
15. Seed ideas with stories and anecdotes
16. Offer several tentative suggestions (not just one)
17. Take far out ideas and dilute them until they become doable
18. Use imaginary helpers and power creatures
19. Get ideas from friends

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