

Solution Focused Brief Counseling

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What a difference a day makes! Imagine you have been plagued with a problem for years. Perhaps you have developed a fear of going outside and it has become so bad you don't even want walk by your front door. Then one morning, a miracle! You wake up and the fear is not just gone but you are looking forward to emerging from home and going for a walk on a beautiful fall day. Walking with a friend, they ask, what is different? What changed because of this miracle?

This is the essence of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy which places a focus, not on trying to analyze the problem, but on visualizing and implementing outcomes to how life would be different if the problem were solved. This paper will look at Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), the theoretical foundation of this strategy, how this strategy differs from other treatment plans, and a few benefits and negatives of using this strategy as part of pastoral counseling with a congregant, or a client.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

According to the Solution Focused Brief Therapy Association (2013) SFBT is “a competency-based and resource-based model, which minimizes [the] emphasis on [reviewing] past failings and problems, and instead focuses on a clients' strengths, and previous and future successes.” The Association notes, SFBT focuses on working from a client's concerns to

determine what the client would want to see different. Finally, the therapeutic focus is on the clients desired future rather than past problems or current conflicts.

According to the Solution Focused Therapy Treatment Manual (the Solution Focused Brief Therapy Association, 'SFTT manual'), SFBT is focused on finding solutions, rather than solving problems, by looking for exceptions to the problem. Exceptions are those times when the problem could have happened but didn't, and then helping the client find solutions based on those exceptions. SFBT assumes the solution already exists, that small changes can lead to a big change, and the solution might not be directly related to the problem.

Theoretical foundation of this therapeutic strategy

The underlying principles and concepts of SFBT is a "focus on developing a picture of the solution and discovering the resources to achieve it" (Iveson, 2002). Iveson continues, that the initial emphasis on looking at exceptions to the problem is replaced by a focus of what the client is already doing, or can do through small adjustments, to achieve the solution. The SFTT manual agrees with the principal that SFBT will place a conversational focus on what the client would like to change and how to go about making that change take place.

The SFTT Manual notes that SFBT is designed to be short in duration (three to five sessions) and in some cases might be resolved in a single session. During an SFBT session, the counselor should listen to small words and phrases, select key words to focus the discussion, and build on those words to help the client develop a solution. This process of listen, select, and build is repeated between the counselor and client to allow the client to continue building and collaborating to develop a preferred solution.

How SFBT differs from other counseling strategies

The SFTT manual notes, SFBT spends little time analyzing the present problem and remains focused on creating solutions.” Also, SFBT is “solution-building rather than problem-solving.” Guterman & Leite (2006) state that solution focused counseling has a principal view that clients have the strengths, resources, and skills to find solutions to their problems. In contrast the SFTT manual notes that other models of treatment rely on the view that clients need experts to access and diagnose solutions.

Another difference is a focus on the positive emotion theory “that positive emotions are not simply the absence of negative emotions, or simply a good feeling, but that they can serve as a therapeutic value in a clinical practice” (Kim & Franklin, 2015). Kim & Franklin go on to note, that this focus on hope, faith and courage, as trusted positive emotions, are an important part of the SFBT process to help clients change.

Why SFBT is well suited to pastoral counseling

Petersen (2007) states that a unique perspective of pastoral counseling is a focus on the spiritual growth and development of people. Looking at the examples Petersen provides to show Jesus as Wonderful Counselor, we see Jesus did not hold multiple discussions with people to help them come to solutions to their problems. Jesus performed many miracles during his ministry and these miracles were often focused on resolving problems. SFBT can utilize the “miracle question” to help people breakthrough barriers, where they cannot see their way out of a problem, to start envisioning solutions. While it would be a stretch to associate Jesus with a particular counseling method, the illustrations in the gospel do generally reflect short encounters and amazing outcomes for those seeking help from Jesus.

Pastoral counseling is well suited to SFBT with its focus on solutions, a limited number of counseling sessions, and emphasis on positive emotions to help people change. Pastors often do not have many hours to dedicate to congregants to help them find solutions to their problems. The relationship between a pastor and a member of the congregation, or the congregants' family, might put the pastor in a unique position to have background information to be used to help coach the congregant in finding those exceptions to the problem which can be used to develop solutions.

Benefits of using SFBT as a pastoral counselor

Benner (2003), in discussing strategic pastoral counseling notes, many times discussions between members of a congregation and a pastor are not viewed in a traditional counseling setting. Sometimes the meetings are not scheduled, the meetings can be more informal, and might not take place in an office. Interactions can be less than an hour in length and limited to one or two meetings.

SFBT, with its solution-based approach can fit well into this framework of helping members of a congregation collaborate on solutions. If a quick solution is not available, the pastor can decide to schedule more formal and additional meetings, or to refer the congregant to a more traditional counseling setting.

Negatives of using SFBT as a pastoral counselor

In SFBT, the pastor is viewed as a collaborator and the congregant should do most of the talking. This is a role-reversal of the typical pastor-congregant relationship and while this potential issue is not unique to SFBT, care must be taken to assure the congregant is playing a key part in development of the solution. Existing relationships between the pastor and the congregant could lead the pastor to feel they "know the solution" and start to "nudge" the

congregant in a specific direction to solve the problem. While this could be useful to facilitate the discussion, care should be taken to ensure the pastor adequately listens to select the appropriate area's necessary to collaborate on the solution. Finally, if too much emphasis is placed on SFBT all problems could start to be view with respect to quick solutions. This could lead to overlooking cases which require a greater focus on the problem, and missing times when additional therapy, or a referral, is the best course of action.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been a limited view of the definition, use, benefit, and potential negative impact of using Solution-Focus Based Therapy. An emphasis has been placed on using SFBT in the pastoral setting. Through the course of review, the researcher has found many benefits to the SFBT approach and an application to his area of interest in pastoral care in an elder care setting (Seidel & Hedley, 2008). Some of these benefits include the desire to help a person through listening and collaborating on positive outcomes, the recognition of spirituality as a common platform for hope, and the focus on a limited number of counseling sessions. This researcher is excited to apply these tools in the pastoral, and personal, setting.

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