

Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Questions

Strength-Based, Solution-Focused questions are types of questions that can be used to deepen understanding of the situation and explore solutions, ultimately leading to faster change.

Past Success Questions:

By focusing on the family's past successes, you can learn, when he/she/the family was functioning well enough not to require child protective services intervention, with the goal of helping the family draw on their successes so they can again be independent.

It is empowering to the individual to realize that there was a period in his/her life when he/she was more successful than he/she feels now. It also identifies strengths for you to build upon.

- What discipline methods have worked with your daughter?
- What goals have you achieved so far in your life?
- What activities have you and your child enjoyed together in the past?
- What activities work best for your child when he/she is sad or angry?
- How have you handled this problem successfully in the past?

Exception Questions:

Are there occasions in the person's life when their problems could have occurred but did not – or at least were less severe? Exception questions focus on who, what, when and where (the conditions that helped the exception to occur) - NOT WHY; exceptions should be related to client goals.

- Are there times when you have been able to express your anger without hurting someone and if so what did it look like?
- When have you been able to manage your son's behavior without hitting him?
- What happened one time when you overcame feelings of depression/anger/sadness?

Scaling Questions:

Invite the clients to put their observations, impressions, and predictions on a scale from 0 to 10, with "0" being no chance, and "10" being every chance. Questions need to be specific, citing specific times and circumstances.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much at all and 10 being as much as you can imagine, how confident are you about being able to do the tasks we listed in your Family Service Plan?
- What would help to move you one number higher on that scale?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being that it is a high priority and 5 being it is not a priority, how would you rank your priorities in resolving your current family or personal situation?

Strengths-Based, Solution-Focused Questions (cont'd)

The Miracle Question:

The miracle question is the opening piece of the process of developing well-formed goals. It gives individuals permission to think about an unlimited range of possibilities for change. It begins to move the focus away from their current and past problems and toward a more satisfying life.

- If a miracle were to happen tonight while you were sleeping and when you woke up in the morning your life had changed, but you didn't know that it had changed, you had to discover the change, what would you first notice would be different?

Follow-up Questions:

The interviewer further extends and amplifies the impact of the miracle by a series of questions designed to guide the person in exploring the implications of the miracle in the his/her life.

- What will be the first thing you notice that would tell you that a miracle has happened, that things are different?
- What might others (mother, father, spouse, partner, siblings, friends, work associates, teachers, etc.) notice about you that would tell them that the miracle has happened, that things are different or better?
- Have there been times when you have seen pieces of this miracle happen?

Coping Questions:

Attempt to help the family member shift his/her focus away from the problem elements and toward what they are doing to survive the painful or stressful circumstances. They are related in a way to exploring for exceptions.

- What have you found that is helpful in managing this situation?
- Considering how depressed and overwhelmed you feel, how is it that you were able to get out of bed this morning and make it to our appointment (or make it to work)?
- You say that you're not sure that you want to continue working on your goals. What is it that has helped you to work on them up to now?

Indirect Questions:

Indirect questions invite the individual to consider how others might feel or respond to some aspect of his/her life, behavior or future changes. Indirect questions can be useful in asking the person to reflect on narrow or faulty perceptions without the worker directly challenging those perceptions or behaviors.

- At the coming court hearing, what changes do you think the judge will expect from you in order to consider returning your children?
- How do you think your children (spouse, relative, caseworker, employer) will react when you make the changes we talked about?

(Kim Berg, I., & Kelly, S., 2000; Saleeby, D., 2006; and, Shulman, L., 2006)