

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

EXCEPTION QUESTIONS

Exceptions are those occasions in workers' lives 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; should be related to worker's goals.

- Are there times when the problem does not happen or is less serious? When? How does this happen?
- Have there been times in the last couple of weeks when the problem did not happen or was less severe?
- How was it that you were able to make this exception happen?
- What was different about that day?
- If your friend (co-worker, relative, spouse, partner, etc.) were here and I were to ask him what he noticed you doing different on that day, what would he say? What else?

COPING QUESTIONS

Coping questions attempt to help the worker shift his/her focus away from the problem elements and toward what the worker is 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 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 worker to consider how others might feel or respond to some aspect of the worker's life, behavior or future changes. Indirect questions can be useful in asking the worker to reflect on narrow or faulty perceptions without the supervisor directly challenging those perceptions or behaviors.

Examples:

“How is it that someone might think that you are being disrespectful to clients?”

“Has anyone ever told you that they think you have a drinking problem?”

“How do you think your client (co-workers) will react when you make the changes we talked about?”

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (continued)

SCALING QUESTIONS

Scaling questions invite the worker to put his/her 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 0 to 10, with 0 being not serious at all and 10 being the most serious, how serious do you think the problem is now?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, what number would it take for you to consider the problem to be sufficiently solved?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no confidence and 10 being very confident, how confident are you that this problem can be solved?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no chance and 10 being every chance, how likely is it that you will be able to successfully complete your safety assessment thoroughly?
- What would it take for you to increase, by just one point, your likelihood of saying “No”?
- What’s the most important thing you have to do to keep things at a 7 or 8?

THE MIRACLE QUESTION

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

“Now, I want to ask you a strange question. Suppose that while you are sleeping tonight and the entire house is quiet, a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problem which we are discussing this afternoon is solved. However, because you are sleeping, you don’t know that the miracle has happened. So, when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will tell you that a miracle has happened and the problem is solved?”

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS (continued)

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Through follow-up questions, the supervisor further extends and amplifies the impact of the miracle by a series of questions designed to guide the worker in exploring the implications of the miracle in the worker's life.

Examples:

“What will be the first thing you notice that would tell you that a miracle has happened, that things are different?”

“What might others (co-workers, spouse, friends, 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?”

“What's the first step that you can take to begin to make this miracle happen?”

(adapted from de Shazer, 1988)