Making Safeguarding Personal

Practice Tool 4

Solution-Focused Communication

Solution-focused communication focuses on what people want to achieve rather than on the problems that made them seek help. Whilst acknowledging problems and past causes, its main focus is on an individual's future hopes - helping them to look forward and use their own strengths to achieve their goals.

Principles:

- Emphasis is on what it is possible to change
- Small changes lead to big results
- Change is both constant and inevitable
- Brief interventions can be highly successful when people want to change
- The techniques can be used in longer term work (for example, using motivational interviewing)
- People are experts in their own lives, with their own strengths in finding solutions to problems
- Solution-focused communication helps the person to set out their own goals and the steps to achieving these
- Focus is on what is working and on the future

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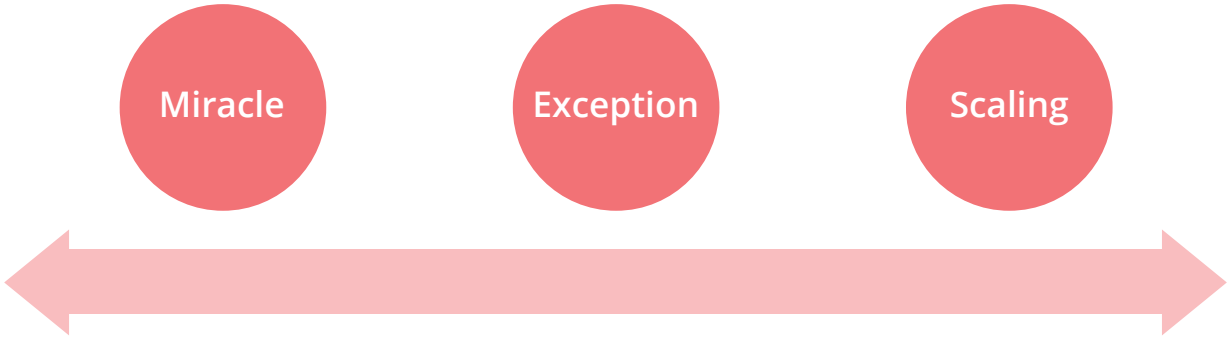
Solution-focused questioning



Miracle questions:

describe the goal in a person's own words i.e. their hoped-for outcome: "Suppose that a miracle happened and in a few months the problem was solved:

How would you know? What would be different?

What would be happening, what would you see, what would you feel, what would you notice?

What would you be doing differently?

What else? (Allow silence) ..... And what else?

Exception questions:

work on the basis that, whatever the problem, there will always be exceptions. These are the foundations for a way forward:

- Are there times when this goal or desired outcome (or part of it) happens already?
- Are there any times when you do not have the problem?
- When is the situation "less bad"?
- What is different then?
- How do you explain that the problem is less bad at those times?
- How do you explain these exceptions? How was it possible that you were able to do that? ('Positive blame')
- How did you do that?

Scaling questions:

provide a structure for the way forward, identifying small steps in achieving these. For example:

- On a scale from 0-10 where 10 is the hoped-for outcome (i.e. the presence of what is desired rather than the absence of what is not), where do you think you are now?
- What would be happening if you were at the next point of the scale? How can you get there? What strengths can you build on? What will help? Where can you get support to reach this next step?
- Scales can be constructed verbally, in a written plan, or drawn (as stairs, ladders or mountains) providing a structure for conversations about future hopes, past achievements and current strengths.