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Solution-Focused Brief Therapy SFBT Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · Miracle Question

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How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Miracle Question

The Miracle Question helps clients envision how the future could be different if their problems were suddenly solved or significantly improved.

1. Imagine the Miracle: "Imagine you go to sleep tonight and while you're sleeping, a miracle happens, and the issue you have is resolved. However, because you were sleeping, you don't know that the miracle has occurred. What will be the first signs tomorrow morning that will make you say, 'Something must have happened; my problem seems to be solved!'"

2. Detail the Differences: Describe in detail what would be different in your daily routine, interactions, feelings, and environment if the miracle happened.

3. Identify the Signs: List specific, observable signs that would indicate the miracle has occurred. Consider how you, and others, would notice these changes.

4. Explore the Impact: Reflect on how these changes would impact your life, relationships, work, and overall well-being.

5. Recognize Your Strengths: Identify personal strengths, past successes, and resources that could help you make these miracle scenario changes a reality.

6. Develop Action Steps: Based on the envisioned miracle, outline small, achievable steps you can take starting now to move closer to making this scenario a reality.

Exception Finding

The Exception Finding technique is designed to help individuals identify times when the problem they are seeking therapy for does not occur, or occurs less intensely. By focusing on these exceptions, they can discover what is different about these times and potentially apply these insights more broadly to improve their situation.

1. Identify the Problem: Briefly describe the problem or issue you are facing. Be as specific as possible about the situations in which it typically occurs.

2. Discovering Exceptions: Think about recent times when the problem did not occur or was less severe, even though you might have expected it to. List these exceptions, noting as many details as possible.

3. Analyzing Exceptions: For each exception listed, identify what was different about your behavior, thoughts, or environment.

4. Strengths and Resources: Reflect on personal strengths, resources, or support systems that you utilized during these exceptions.

5. Application of Insights: Based on your analysis of exceptions, consider how you might replicate or expand upon these successful strategies to address the problem more generally.

6. Planning for Change: Develop a plan for how you can intentionally create more exceptions or enhance the factors that contribute to these exceptions. Set specific, achievable goals.

Exception Finding Questions

- Can you recall a time recently when the problem you're describing was not present, or was less intense? What was different about that time?
- Think about the last week. Were there moments when the issue seemed more manageable? What were you doing at that time?
- Have there been days or parts of the day when you felt better than usual, even slightly? What were you doing differently on those days?
- Looking back, can you identify a period when this problem did not have such a strong impact on your life? What was happening then that is not happening now?
- Can you think of a situation where you would have expected the problem to occur, but it didn't? What do you think prevented it?
- Are there certain activities or situations where the problem seems to fade or become irrelevant? What are those activities or situations?

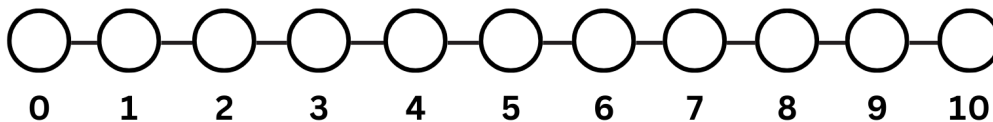
Scaling

The Scaling technique helps individuals assess their progress, understand their current position regarding a specific issue, and identify steps they can take to move closer to their goals.

1. Define the Issue: Describe the issue or challenge you are facing.

2. Define Desired Outcome: Describe what success or resolution of this issue would look like for you.

3. Set Your Scale: Define a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents the worst the issue has ever been or could be, and 10 represents the desired outcome being fully achieved. Determine where you currently are on the scale regarding your issue. Provide a rationale for your rating.



4. Identify Previous Successes: Reflect on times you were at a higher point on the scale. What were you doing differently? What factors contributed to being at a higher point?

5. Define Next Steps: Considering your current position and previous successes, identify small steps or changes that could help you move up even one point on the scale. Be specific about actions, thoughts, or support needed.

6. Explore Resources: Identify resources or supports that could assist you in taking these steps. Consider people, skills, and external resources.

Coping Questions

The Coping Questions technique is designed to help individuals recognize their resilience and strengths in managing difficult situations.

1. Acknowledge the Problem: Briefly describe the current problem or challenge you are facing. Be honest about how it affects your life.

2. Identify Coping Mechanisms: Think about what you have been doing to cope with this issue, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem. List all the ways you have managed to keep going despite the difficulties.

3. Explore Effectiveness: For each strategy listed, assess its effectiveness. Has it helped you manage the situation better, even if just slightly? Note any positive outcomes or relief you've experienced.

4. Recognize Strengths and Resilience: Reflect on what your coping strategies reveal about your strengths and resilience. What personal qualities are you drawing on to manage this problem?

5. Enhance Coping Strategies: Based on your evaluation, consider how you might improve your current coping strategies or add new ones. Think about other resources or supports that might be available to you.

Coping Questions:

- How have you managed to keep going despite the challenges you're facing?
- What have you found that helps you when you're feeling down?
- Can you think of a time when the problem was not as intense? What were you doing differently then?
- What do you do that makes you feel a little better, even if just for a moment?
- Who in your life brings you comfort or support, and what do they do that's helpful?
- How do you manage to get up and face the day, despite everything?
- Looking back, what advice would you give yourself about handling tough situations based on your experiences?

Problem-Free Talk

The Problem-Free Talk technique emphasizes exploring areas of the individual's life that are not directly related to the problem at hand. This approach helps to build rapport, identify strengths, resources, and exceptions to the problem, and shift the client's focus towards positive aspects of their life.

1. Identify Problem-Free Areas: Write down aspects of your life where you feel competent, successful, or simply happy. These can be relationships, hobbies, work achievements, personal traits, etc., that are not overshadowed by your current problem.

2. Explore Successes and Strengths: For each area listed, describe why it feels problem-free. What strengths or skills do you use in these areas? How do these successes make you feel?

3. Apply Strengths to Problem Areas: Reflect on the strengths or skills identified above. Consider how these could be applied or adapted to address your current problem.

4. Envision a Problem-Free Future: Imagine your life if the current problem were resolved. How would it change the areas you've listed? How would your use of strengths and successes expand into other areas of your life?

5. Plan Action Steps: Based on your reflections, outline concrete steps you can take to apply your identified strengths and skills to your current problem. Include small, achievable actions that you can start with.

Problem-Free Talk Questions:

- What are some things in your life that you're proud of right now?
- Tell me about a time recently when you felt really good about something you did.
- What do you enjoy doing in your free time, and how does it make you feel?
- Can you share an achievement or moment of success from the past week, no matter how small?
- Describe a day recently when you felt particularly positive or happy. What was different about that day?
- What are your strengths or talents that not everyone knows about?
- Are there any aspects of your daily routine that you particularly look forward to?

Strength-Based Questions

The Strength-Based Questions technique is designed to help individuals identify and leverage their strengths, abilities, and resources to address current challenges.

1. Recognize Personal Strengths: Reflect on your personal strengths and abilities. Consider qualities that have helped you overcome past challenges or contributed to your successes.

2. Explore Successes and Achievements: Write down significant successes or achievements in your life. These can be related to any area, including relationships, career, personal growth, or hobbies.

3. Strengths in Action: For each success listed, identify which personal strengths or abilities you used to achieve it. Explore how these strengths contributed to your success.

4. Application to Current Situation: Reflect on your current challenge or problem. Based on the strengths identified, how can you apply these to your current situation? Be specific about strategies or actions you can take.

5. Vision for the Future: Imagine how your life might look when applying these strengths more consistently. What changes or improvements do you envision?

6. Plan for Utilization: Develop a concrete plan for how you will use your identified strengths to address your current challenge. Include specific steps, resources needed, and a timeline.

Strength-Based Questions

- What are some strengths you possess that have helped you cope with challenges in the past?
- Can you recall a time when you overcame a similar obstacle? What did you do that worked?
- In what areas of your life do you feel most confident, and how can we apply that confidence to this situation?
- What personal achievements are you most proud of, and what do they reveal about your capabilities?
- Who in your life sees the best in you, and what do they say about your strengths?
- What values are most important to you, and how have they guided your actions in challenging times?
- When you think about the people you admire, what qualities do you share with them?

Future Perfect Technique

The Future Perfect Technique is designed to help individuals envision a future where their problems are resolved or their situation has significantly improved.

1. Envision the Future Perfect: Imagine you wake up tomorrow, and a miracle has happened: your problems are solved, and your life is as you wish it to be. Describe in detail what your life looks like now. What has changed? How do you feel?

2. Identify the Changes: What specific changes have occurred in your life, relationships, and within yourself? Consider your daily routine, work, personal life, and interactions with others.

3. Recognize Signs of Change: Identify what signs would indicate that the changes have begun to happen. What would you notice about yourself, and what would others notice about you?

4. Outline Steps Towards the Future Perfect: Based on the future perfect you've described, outline small, actionable steps you can take starting now to move towards this future. Consider behaviors, thought patterns, and interactions that align with this future.

5. Acknowledge Current Successes: Reflect on aspects of your future perfect that are already present or partially present in your life. How can you build on these successes?

6. Plan for Obstacles: Consider potential obstacles that might hinder your progress towards the future perfect. How will you address or overcome these obstacles?

Future Perfect Technique questions:

- Imagine waking up tomorrow, and a miracle has happened, making your problem disappear. What is the first sign you would notice that tells you the miracle occurred?
- If this problem were solved overnight, how would your day look differently? Describe your day from the moment you wake up.
- Once the issue is resolved, what will you be doing more of? What will you be doing less of?

- In this perfect future, how do you see yourself interacting differently with others around you?
- How would your friends and family notice that you are feeling better or that the situation has improved? What changes would they see in you?
- In this ideal future, what strengths or qualities have you developed or utilized to overcome your problem?
- Imagine your future self, who has overcome this problem. What advice would this future self give you about how to reach this point?
- How would achieving this future impact your overall life satisfaction and happiness?
- In a world where your problem has been resolved, how do you handle stress or challenges differently?
- What are you most proud of in this future where you've overcome your current challenge?
- In this future scenario, what are some things you are now able to enjoy or appreciate more fully?
- How has your daily routine or lifestyle changed in this future where the problem is resolved?
- What changes in your self-perception or self-talk occur in this future perfect scenario?
- When you imagine this perfect future, what hobbies or activities have you taken up or returned to?
- In this envisioned future, how do you deal with setbacks or difficulties in a way that prevents the old problem from taking over again?
- What has become possible for you in other areas of your life once this problem is resolved?
- Reflecting on this perfect future, what is one small change you can start with today that moves you in that direction?

Reframing Questions

The Reframing Questions technique involves changing the way a situation is perceived and interpreted, thereby opening up new ways of thinking about and responding to that situation.

1. Identify the Situation: Briefly describe a current problem or challenging situation you are facing. Try to be as specific as possible.

2. Original Perspective: Note your initial thoughts and feelings about the situation. How do you typically perceive this challenge?

3. Reframing Questions

- What strengths are you showing by facing this situation?

- How might someone you admire view or handle this situation?

- What opportunities for learning or growth could this situation provide?

- How might this situation look if viewed as an opportunity rather than a problem?

- In what ways could this challenge be seen as a normal part of life or personal development?

- How might you view this situation differently if you knew it would be resolved positively in the future?

- What positive outcomes could potentially emerge from this situation?

4. New Perspective: Based on your responses to the reframing questions, write a new narrative or perspective about the situation. How do you now view the challenge differently?

5. Action Steps: From this new perspective, identify actionable steps you can take to address the situation. Consider how your reframed view can inspire different actions.

Experiment

The Experiment technique encourages individuals to try new behaviors or actions to solve problems or improve their situation.

1. Define the Goal: Identify a clear, specific goal you want to achieve or an area of your life you wish to improve.

E.g., Improve my work-life balance to reduce stress.

2. Brainstorm Experiments: Brainstorm a list of actions, behaviors, or small changes you can try to achieve your goal or improve the situation.

E.g., - Delegate more tasks at work.

- Set specific work "shut down" times each evening.

- Schedule "me time" into my weekly calendar.

3. Select an Experiment: From your list, choose one experiment to try first. Ensure it is actionable, measurable, and achievable within a short timeframe.

E.g., Set specific work "shut down" times each evening at 6 PM.

4. Plan the Experiment: Outline the steps of the chosen experiment, including what you will do, when you will do it, and any resources or preparations needed.

E.g., For one week, stop all work-related activities by 6 PM regardless of what I'm doing.

5. Predictions: Before conducting the experiment, note down what you expect to happen. How do you think this action will impact your goal or situation?

E.g., I expect to feel less stressed in the evenings and have more quality time for personal activities or with family.

6. Reflect on the Outcome: After completing the experiment, reflect on what happened. Did the outcomes match your predictions? What did you learn from this experiment?

E.g., The outcome was positive. I felt significantly less stressed and enjoyed my evenings more. It was challenging to stop work at times, but the benefits were clear.

7. Next Steps: Based on your reflections, decide on your next steps. Will you repeat the experiment, try a different experiment from your list, or adjust your approach? Outline your plan.

E.g., Continue with the current experiment for another month to solidify the habit. Consider delegating more tasks at work as the next experiment to further improve work-life balance.

Externalization

The Externalization technique is designed to help individuals separate themselves from their problems or negative self-talk. This separation allows for a more objective examination of problems and identifies ways to address them effectively.

1. Identifying the Problem: Write down the issue you are facing as if it is a character or object separate from you.

2. Naming the Problem: Give your problem a name. This could be anything from a monster to a nuisance, whatever resonates with you and makes it distinct.

3. Characterizing the Problem: What does this problem "monster" look like? How does it behave? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

4. Understanding the Relationship: How does this problem interact with you? When does it show up? What does it try to convince you of?

5. Strategies to Confront: If you were to confront this problem as the entity you've described, what strategies would you use? Consider tactics, supports, and resources you could employ.

6. External Support: Who or what could help you in your battle against this problem? Think about people, activities, or thoughts that strengthen you.

7. Action Plan: Outline a plan of action against this problem, using the strategies and allies you've identified. Be as specific as possible about what you will do and when.

Goal Setting and Action Planning

Goal Setting technique helps individuals clearly define their goals and develop actionable steps to achieve them.

1. Define Clear, Achievable Goals: Think about what you want to achieve or how you want your situation to improve. Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

2. Explore the Desired Outcome: Describe in detail what achieving these goals will look and feel like. How will your life be different? How will you feel once these goals are accomplished?

3. Identify Steps Toward the Goals: Break down each goal into smaller, manageable steps or actions that you can start taking now. Consider what has worked in the past and how you can apply those strategies here.

4. Anticipate Challenges: Think about potential challenges or obstacles that might arise as you work toward your goals. How can you prepare for or address these challenges?

5. Identify Resources and Supports: Identify resources, people, or supports that can help you achieve your goals. Consider personal strengths, supportive individuals, and external resources.

Goal Setting Questions:

- Imagine a future where the problem that brought you here is resolved. What is the first thing you notice that tells you things are better?
- What are the most important things you wish to achieve through our work together?
- If we achieved your goal, how would that change your day-to-day life?
- What are the small steps that might indicate you are moving towards your goal?
- How will achieving this goal affect your relationships with others?
- What's one thing you can start doing today that would help you move one step closer to your goal?
- How confident do you feel about reaching your goal, and what can increase this confidence?
- What barriers do you anticipate might hinder your progress towards your goal, and how might you overcome them?
- How will you maintain the changes you've made once you've reached your goal?

EARS

EARS stands for Elicit, Amplify, Reinforce, and Start Again. This model helps individuals focus on building solutions rather than dwelling on problems.

1. Elicit: Start by identifying a recent success or a time when the problem was less severe. Describe this situation in detail.

2. Amplify: Focus on the strengths and abilities that contributed to this success. How can these strengths be used more often or in different situations?

3. Reinforce: Reinforce the client's efforts and successes, no matter how small. What does this success say about you and your abilities?

4. Start Again: Based on the elaboration and amplification of successes, start planning specific actions or steps the client can take to replicate or build upon these successes. What small step could be taken this week?

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: No diagnosis under this title · not a DSM-5-TR diagnosis
- ICD-11 CDDR: · not an ICD-11 mental disorder diagnosis
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 16. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Do not infer a disorder from worksheet endorsement. Assess duration, severity, distress or impairment, medical/substance causes, cultural context, and relevant differentials when symptoms warrant evaluation.

Document-specific corrections

- Describe SFBT as a collaborative therapeutic approach rather than a diagnosis-specific treatment or guaranteed brief solution.
- Do not use miracle, scaling, exception, or coping questions to bypass grief, abuse, structural barriers, psychosis, or immediate safety needs.
- Clarify that externalization is not unique to SFBT and should not erase responsibility for harmful behavior.
- Use client-defined goals and document when a problem-focused, diagnostic, medical, or safeguarding assessment remains necessary.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Pages [8, 9]: identify each measure and rights holder; verify intended population, reliability/validity, scoring and cutoffs, reproduction permission, and current license. If these are author-created items, label them informal, remove diagnostic cutoffs, and do not claim validation.

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Pages [2]: require topic-qualified clinical review for consent, readiness, contraindications, escalation thresholds, and whether clinician-guided use is necessary.

Crisis and current resources

- SAMHSA SFBT resource; pair with condition-specific guidance as needed.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/solution-focused-brief-therapy>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>