

# *SOLUTION FOCUSED RESILIENCE: Discovering and Amplifying Strengths People Already Have*

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## Welcome!

- ▶ The solution focused approach
- ▶ Includes clinical methods and techniques
- ▶ AND on another level is much more:
- ▶ A philosophy, a lens through which you see not just our clients' trauma and pain
- ▶ But also amazing strengths and resilience they already have.

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## Our road map for today

- ▶ The solution focused perspective in general.
- ▶ Using it to grow resilience both after trauma and with the stuff of daily life.
- ▶ Practice this by interviewing each other.
- ▶ Some reflection...

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## My best hopes...that you will take with you from today:

- ▶ A few ideas or tools or techniques you can add to your toolbox.
- ▶ Some ways of inviting clients to tap the courage and resilience they already have.
- ▶ Excitement about how powerful a solution focused perspective can be with people who who've experienced trauma, both large and small.

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## Who sees clients who have experienced trauma or loss?

- ▶ Think of a specific person.
- ▶ Think of a strength or example of resilience you've seen in that person.
- ▶ And another one.

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## You are already solution focused...

- 2 pieces of the solution focused approach:
1. Noticing a piece of the solution that's already happening.
  2. Doing it again.  
the "What else" question

Noticing another, and then another...  
"The most valuable answers after the 5<sup>th</sup> 'what else'..."

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Images and words of resilience...

Notice which resonate most for you.

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## Nuggets from the literature

- ▶ Most common response to trauma?
- ▶ Resilience!
  - Bannink: data from National Comorbidity Study
  - 50–60% exposed to trauma
  - Only 8% meet criteria for PTSD (Kessler *et al.*, 1995)

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### Methods for Strengthening It: Distress tolerance

- ▶ From dialectical behavior therapy:
  - ▶ Tolerating strong emotions
  - ▶ Trusting that they will pass
  - ▶ Accepting without judging
  - ▶ Self-soothing
  - ▶ Visualizing yourself in a safe place
  - ▶ Tolerating urge without acting
  - ▶ Remembering what and whom you care about
  - ▶ Sometimes it's really hard to do
  - ▶ And our clients do it anyway...

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### Methods for Strengthening It: Mental Toughness

- ▶ From sports, business, performance, coaching more than from therapy
- ▶ Precisely what makes it resonate for some!
  - Doing what you need to do under pressure
  - Making fast decisions
  - Endurance/focus, especially at critical moments
  - “Turnaround toughness”: bouncing back
- ▶ Our clients have more than they realize
- ▶ And you have a name for it...

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### A solution focused approach to resilience...

How much do you already know about the solution focused approach?

- I know a fair amount about it.
- I know a little about it.
- Other than hearing the phrase, it's pretty new to me.

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- Milton Erickson
- Mental Research Institute
  - Richard Fisch, John Weakland, Paul Watzlawick
- Brief Family Therapy Center
  - Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg

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- No matter how severe a problem, there are times it is less severe or absent.  
“Exceptions”  
When you notice and point them out, they happen more often.
- Not necessary to have a lot of information about the problem.
- Goal *not* to “eliminate problems” but to reach a goal.
- What will it look like when the goal is reached?
- “The miracle question”  
Story about how it came to be  
*More Than Miracles...*

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- ▶ Variations on the miracle question:
- ▶ **“Best hopes”**
- ▶ **Coping questions**
  - If someone has experienced trauma, hard times, it can seem disrespectful to ask about a future where pain is gone or drastically reduced.
  - Instead, “With what you’ve been through, how do you get through the day?”
  - “How did you do that?”
  - “I don’t know. I just did it.”
  - “What else?”
- ▶ **What you focus on grows...**

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- ▶ Invites recognition of choices (the person who got up to go to the bathroom...)
- ▶ “I had to get up to feed my baby.”
- ▶ “The dog needed to go out.”
- ▶ We highlight that: “He needed you.” (implicit compliment)
- ▶ **Again, what you focus on grows...**

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- ▶ How did you get here today?
  - They tell us about being nonfunctional.
  - Not getting out of the house.
  - Feeling hopeless, incompetent, overwhelmed, unable to resist substances

...and this person is here....  
◦ “How did you do that?”

- ▶ John

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## A few other techniques

- ▶ Difference questions
- ▶ Relationship questions
- ▶ Scaling questions
  - 10 as the destination, 0 the opposite
  - Where are you now?
  - Why not lower? (NOT the question they think you’re going to ask...)

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## Input at the end of a session: 3 components

- ▶ Validation
- ▶ Highlighting of strengths
- ▶ Suggestion (if client is okay with that):
  - Do more of what works
  - Notice when pieces of best hopes are already happening
  - If something isn’t working, do something different.
  - Notice how doing these things makes a difference.

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## Case examples

- ▶ Brittney
  - Adapted from Fredrike Bannink, Working from the future back
- ▶ Natalie

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## Interviewing experience

- ▶ Groups of 3 or 4: therapist, client, consultant(s)
- ▶ Clients: think of a small loss or discrepancy between what you hoped for and what you got
- ▶ Therapists: have a conversation about how you coped
  - Use solution focused tools, nuggets—but mostly do what you do
- ▶ Consultants: watch for strengths and resilience in the client
- ▶ 10 minutes...then your next instruction

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- ▶ Consultants, tell the therapist the strengths and resilience you saw and heard in the client.
- ▶ Therapists, give your client some brief end of session feedback.
  - (Maybe highlight strengths and/or invite noticing more times resilience is happening)
- ▶ Clients, share with your therapist what was most helpful about the process.
- ▶ What did you discover from this exercise?

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## Vicarious resilience

- ▶ People talk about vicarious traumatization – but vicarious resilience happens too.
- ▶ Tenacity and resilience are contagious!
  - Hoyt
  - de Jong and Berg

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## Imagining experience...

- ▶ Imagine a client who is a challenge
  - (not because of a safety issue, but in some other way...)
- ▶ You acknowledge to yourself your reaction...and begin your session.
- ▶ What is a detail you discover about this person?
- ▶ What do you find yourself liking about them?
- ▶ What is amazing about them?
- ▶ What did you discover about vicarious resilience? Your own resilience? The power of solution focused conversation?

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## Conclusion

- ▶ Strengths and resilience are already there
- ▶ In our clients
- ▶ In their worlds
- ▶ In ourselves
- ▶ So keep noticing them...
- ▶ Because what you focus on grows...

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Thank you!

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