

Solution-Focused Coaching

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Essentially coaching is a conversational setting where the client is encouraged to look forward and explore their views of themselves in the context of their career and in understanding the professional issues they are bringing. Opportunities are offered for clients to look at their dilemmas differently, become more empowered, determine their own way forward, and break through the limitations they had previously identified.

At its core Project-5's solution focussed coaching is directed at helping NHS staff to find solutions to professional/career issues rather than exploring problems. It focusses on building up strengths rather than investigating weaknesses, finding positive ways forward, and on overcoming barriers rather than exploring hurdles to desired goals. The solution focussed coach explores client's understandings largely using open questions (e.g. questions which start with: *why, when, where, how, who, can you tell me more*).

If clients are in a state of stress and anxiety then they should receive the support of Project-5 Stress Support and Wellbeing service, and if NHS staff are suffering severe and on-going distress or have thoughts of harming themselves or others they should be facilitated in referring themselves to their GP, NHS mental health services, or to voluntary services specialising in this aspect of mental health care. Solution focussed coaching does not have a system for mental health assessment and a coach encountering a distressed staff member should facilitate that person to seek the appropriate support.

Session 1

SEVEN-STAGE MODEL OF SOLUTION FOCUSED COACHING

Stage 1: What does the 'client' want to work on?

The first task of the coach is to find out:

1. What the client wants to achieve – the goal. In a crisis this may be in the short term, but it could be longer term. Why this goal now and not another goal?
2. What they want to achieve from the session itself and how they will know it has been useful to them.
3. The preferred future or perfect outcome anticipated by the client. At this point the coach might ask a miracle question to help the client visualise their perfect future (e.g. *Imagine that you wake up and find that a miracle, has taken place! The world is just as you would like it to be and you have resolved all the things that were bothering you. Describe what is different and what is it that tell you things have changed? Include much detail as you can*).
4. Negative implications of the goal – what might be the anticipated cost personally and to others if the goal is achieved. Does the cost outweigh the benefits?

Stage 2: Scaling

Once the client has a clear picture of their desired goal the coach can then establish where the client thinks they are already in relation to this. Using Scaling Techniques is a way of helping to quantifying this (e.g. On a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 represents the least close to the goal and 10 represents having completely reached the goal).

Stage 3: Discovering instances of personal success

Previous instances of success by the client in achieving similar goals are sought, and this might include identifying 'exceptions' where the client achieved something in the past but does not recognise that this happened. This stage of solution focussed coaching will involve identifying current personal skills and strengths of the client or those that were present in the past and need to be reactivated. Future skills might need to be acquired to achieve the goal and these likewise need to be identified.

'Exceptions' can highlight for the client an unrecognised capacity to achieve the goal and might also indicate personal skills and capacities that were not appreciated. Consequently, when they are recognised, they provide an opportunity to develop a sense of personal efficacy. The greater the challenges a person has previously overcome the greater will be the opportunity to recognise past achievement and in turn the possibility of overcoming future hurdles and achieving future goals.

Stage 4: Discovering instances of success in others

Once the client has a clearer picture of their own success the coach can get them to identify role models or respected others who have achieved goals similar or the same as their desired goal. Discussion can take place as to what the client has observed the role model doing and the extent to which they can replicate the role model. There might be opportunities following the coaching session for the client to talk directly with the role model about how to achieve the desired goal. These might be senior colleagues who can offer on-going support and advice, and act as a resource for the future.

Stage 5: Acknowledgement

Plenty of time should be taken to establish the resources the client has available to them both personally and in terms of the wider context. The coach facilitates the recognition of positive attributes by giving positive affirmation of what was identified during the session and giving context to this so that the client can begin to think about how these might be used in different situations (e.g. I was really impressed with the way you handled that situation and wonder how you might do the same in this new task?).

Stage 6: Action and Obstacles

The coach encourages the client to think about the action that needs to be taken to use skills and personal qualities identified in the coaching session to achieve the desired goal. This involves helping the client to determine what actions they will now take in order to move forward, what the obstacles there might be and how these can be overcome.

Stage 7: Review of Session

Solution focussed coaching sessions are concluded with a summary to the client about what strengths and positive qualities were identified, what they have been doing that will be helpful to them in moving forward, role models who might prove to be helpful guides, and plans for overcoming hurdles. It might also be suggested that they keep in mind what works for them for future reference. Scaling can be repeated in order that they reappraise at the end of the session where they are in relation to the goal. If issues of risk were identified, then the coach will need to discuss this with the client and explain the obligation to refer on to a mental health specialist. New goals might have been identified, and future coaching sessions could be negotiated both to follow-up on the original goal and to work on future goals.

Session 2

Should the NHS worker be showing high levels of anxiety then the coach should suggest transferring to Project-5's Stress Support and Wellbeing service. **If there are greater concerns about the psychological health of the NHS staff member then facilitating self-referral to specialist mental health services should take place.** In such circumstances going on to conduct solution focussed coaching should not be undertaken. However, the majority of coachees will continue to go through a second session following the seven-stage model of solution focussed coaching:

Stage 1: What does the 'client' want to work on?

It is important in the second coaching session to follow-up on how things have progressed for the NHS worker. Has the worker built on the ideas and plans generated in the first session? Does the staff member feel satisfied with the original goal and want to work on another goal? Is the NHS worker still attempting to carry out the plans originally made, but struggling to get to the desired goal? It is important for the coach to find out if more time is needed to explore what the hurdles were in the original plan and modify it so that it becomes more feasible or alternatively facilitate the NHS staff member to develop another goal. If the NHS staff member has not moved on but still wants coaching find out what employment goals they want to explore. In all situations the coach should highlight and celebrate with the staff member areas of development, success, constructive outcome, and positive qualities and abilities.

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In all these situations the coach engages with the NHS staff member to progress through each of the remaining stages of solution focussed coaching.

Stage 2: Scaling

Follow guidelines outlined for session 1

Stage 3: Discovering instances of personal success

Follow guidelines outlined for session 1

Stage 4: Discovering instances of success in others

Follow guidelines outlined for session 1

Stage 5: Acknowledgement

Follow guidelines outlined for session 1

Stage 6: Action and Obstacles

Follow guidelines outlined for session 1

Stage 7: Review of Final Session

In the review of the final session the strengths and positive qualities of the NHS worker should be summarised, what they have been doing that will be helpful to them in moving forward, role models who might prove to be helpful guides, and plans for overcoming hurdles. It might also be suggested that they keep in mind what works for them for future reference. Scaling can be repeated in order that they reappraise at the end of the session where they are in relation to the first and second goal.

This will be the final coaching session and will almost certainly have been important to the NHS staff member in helping to move forward in their working lives. So, time should be allocated to comment on the working relationship between the coach and NHS worker. At this point the coach can emphasise the positive qualities and strengths witnessed over the two coaching sessions.