

Solution Focused

Solution-Focused Practice (SFP) is a change-focused approach that helps people to find ways forward from difficult or challenging situations by focusing on what is wanted in the future and what is already working, and focusing on solutions rather than problems (Ajmal & Ratner, 2020).

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) originated in the 1970s in America with psychotherapists Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. SFBT and SFP have been applied in schools since the 1990s and there is increasing empirical evidence that validates the use of SFP within educational settings. SFP can be used at all tiers of the continuum of support and flexibly throughout the school community (e.g. individual students, targeted groups, whole classes, parent meetings and at a whole school level).

Solution-focused practice is about creating a context of assumed competence and moving in the direction of:

- Co-constructing meaningful goals which are framed in concrete and positive terms. To do this, we talk about what the student/teacher wants to be present, rather than a description of the absence of problems (e.g. 'stop shouting out' to 'listening more' or 'for students at our school to not feel left out' to 'students feel included and valued').
- Shifting focus from problems to solutions. To do this we need to change what we listen out for and how we listen.
- Exploring the preferred future in detail. To do this we need to explore what is really wanted that will make a difference.
- Looking for strengths and resources rather than deficits. To do this we need to be activating existing knowledge and skills and building on that.
- Exploring what is already contributing to that preferred future, think about exceptions to the behaviour, when it is not happening and explore those moments. In doing this, we are seeking and building co-operation by finding what is working and most meaningful for our students.
- Practicing unconditional positive regard.

Taking a holistic view of a situation to include the student's strengths, what is working well and what small step we can take towards achieving the 'best hopes' for the student leads to positive relationships and outcomes. Solution-focused practice not only recognises the strengths, interests and voice of the student, it also helps us in how we talk about the next steps in our planning.

Solution-focused language can be used in conversation to gather student voice, or used within structured goal-setting activities, such as planning meetings.

By eliciting best hopes, preferred future and signs of change, it provides the teacher and school staff with information that allows for co-construction of goals, and identifies specific actions that school staff can respond to in supporting the student(s).

Included in NCSE Relate is the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool, created by an SFBT advanced practitioner. This tool can be used to collaboratively set meaningful goals with a student or group of students; or for school staff to set goals for their own practice, or wider school practices. The tool also includes a review and reflection section so that the impact of any support, strategies or plans can be reviewed to ensure they are making a positive difference. Please see the video explainer before using the tool.

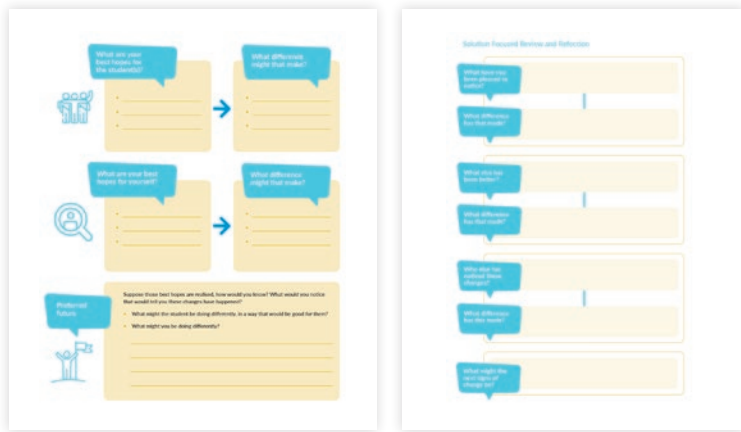
The principle of being solution focused is intertwined with many of the other principles, including student voice, unconditional positive regard and staff and student wellbeing. Alongside using the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool, a solution focused approach can be incorporated into schools in as little as five minutes, using the example questions below:

Creating Solution Focused Moments in the Classroom



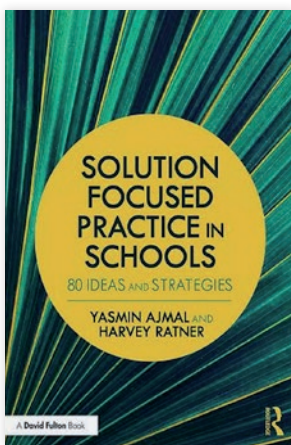
- What are your best hopes for learning about 'x' today, what will make this lesson/day most useful for you?
- If 10 is as confident as you could feel in learning about 'x' and 0 is the opposite of that, where are you now on that scale? How come you are already there and not lower? List three things.
- What three things might we notice today that will tell us this class is learning in the way that is best for each of you?
- Supposing this happened, what difference might this make?
- What are you pleased to notice about yourself today/during a lesson today?
- What three things have gone well today? What difference did that make?
- What are your best hopes for this classroom/school, what differences would you like to see that would support you to learn in the way that's best for you?

See Solution Focused Goal Setting Tool



 [NCSE Solution Focused Goal Setting Tutorial](#)

Solution Focused Practice further reading



Solution Focused Practice in Schools
by Yasmin Ajmal and Harvey Ratner