***Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools***

*Additional Materials*

Webinar Leader: John J. Murphy, Ph.D.

[JohnMurphySFT@gmail.com](mailto:JohnMurphySFT@gmail.com)

Belleville-Kean-NJASP Webinar

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**Condensed SFC Crib Sheet (First Session)**

Client’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Session Number: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Opening**  Interests, talents, skills?  **Desired Outcome**  What are your best hopes from coming here? *(Optional—Use ORS)*  **Preferred Future**  Ask miracle/tomorrow question and elicit additional description/details.  **Scaling**  Where are you on miracle description (0-10)?  What would be a ‘good enough’ number for us to stop meeting (0-10)?  **Optional (Confidence and Willingness) Scales**  What is your confidence level in achieving desired outcome (0-10)?  What is your willingness level to work toward achieving desired outcome (0-10)? | **Exceptions/Resources**  Pre-session changes? When is problem absent/less intense? Pieces or instances of miracle/tomorrow description? Obtain additional description/details.  Other useful inner/outer resources?  **Closing**  Acknowledge concerns, hopes, exceptions, resources; Ask about next signs/next steps;  Discuss ending counseling if student/client nears or reaches “good enough” number.  Optional—Use SRS |

Adapted from: Murphy, J. J. (2023). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association. Appendix A (condensed), p. 382

**Condensed SFC Crib Sheet (Later Session)**

Client’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Session Number: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- |
| **Explore Progress**  Ask “What’s better?” and/or scale client progress on 0-10 miracle/tomorrow scale. Optional—Use ORS  **If Things are Better**  Explore/amplify details and consequences of improvements.  **If Things are Same or Worse**  Explore/amplify coping and maintaining skills (How do you keep going?)  **Revisit Desired Outcome *(as needed)***  Has it changed? Is it important/realistic? | **Exceptions/Other Resources**  Revisit/explore/amplify any exceptions or other resources discovered in session.  **Closing**  Acknowledge concerns, hopes, exceptions, resources; Ask about next signs/next steps;  Discuss ending counseling if student/client nears or reaches “good enough” number.  Optional—Use SRS |

Adapted from: Murphy, J. J. (2023). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association. Appendix B (condensed), p. 383

**Commonly Used Questions in Solution-Focused Counseling**

Questions can be altered to include the client’s key words and phrases. For a full list of questions, see Appendix A in: Murphy, J. J. (2023). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association.

**Opening (First Session—Optional)**

* What do you enjoy doing outside of school? What are you good at? How did you get good at it?

**Task 1: Setting a Direction**

* Elicit clients’ desired outcome: What are your best hopes from talking with me? How will you know it was useful?
* Elicit detailed description of desired outcome (client’s preferred future/solution description):

\*Miracle Question: If a miracle happened tonight while you were sleeping and this problem vanished, what would you notice first when you woke up? Then what? What else would be different? What else? Who else would notice? How would they react? What would that be like for you? … [*See Murphy (2023) for longer versions*]

\*Tomorrow Question: Imagine waking up tomorrow (insert client’s desired outcome, such as “being more confident”). What would you notice first when you woke up more confident? Then what? What else would tell you that you were more confident? Who else would notice? How would they react? What would that be like for you? …

\*(Other “preferred future” questions for students): \*Suppose you woke up tomorrow as the very best version of being confident at school. What would you notice first? Then what? What else? …

\*(For young students) Imagine a genie came out of a bottle and made things great at school. How would school be different? Who else would notice? What would they do? How would that be for you?

**Task 2: Building on Exceptions & Other Student Resources**

* What parts of the miracle have already happened, even a little? How did you make that happen?
* Tell me about a recent time the problem could have happened but didn’t or was less bothersome.
* How have handled other tough times?
* How could (insert student’s special interest/skills/talent) help you in school?

**Task 3: Exploring Progress**

* On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is super-confident and 0 is the opposite, where are you now? Has it ever been lower? *If yes*: How did you make it higher? What’s different now compared to then?
* What’s better since our last meeting? What has helped make that happen?

***When Things Improve from One Session to the Next***

* How did you go from 3 to 4? What did you do differently? What else helped? What does this change say about you? What advice would you give another student in a similar situation?
* What will be the first small sign(s) that things are a little better next week?

***When Things Stay the Same or Get Worse***

* How do you keep going? How have you kept things from getting worse?
* What would be the first small signs that things are getting a little better?

**Responding to “Don’t Know” Answers**

School psychologists and other practitioners often ask what to do when students/others answer a question with “I don’t know.” Here are a few options to consider.

*Source*: Murphy, J. J. (2023). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association. Adapted from Table 4.1, p. 111. Copyright laws and restrictions apply.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Practitioner Response** | **Description/Purpose** | **Examples** |
| Assume the best, accept the answer |  |  |
| Pause | Do nothing for 6 seconds |  |
| Acknowledge, apologize, explain | Apologize for tough questions; explain why you’re asking them | “It’s a hard question.”  “Sorry about these tough questions, but I want to…get your take on things/learn what you want from this.” |
| Rephrase | Shorten it, soften it, make it more specific | “How will you know this is working?” “What might help make that happen?”  “What will your friends notice first?” |
| Frame question as difficult | Shift focus from student to relieve the pressure to provide ‘good’ answers | “This is a really difficult question.”  “Can I ask you a tough question?” |
| Invite a guess | Encourage best guess | “If you were to guess…?”  “Have a go even if it’s a pure guess.” |
| Ask how others might respond | Shift focus from student to what others might say | “How would your teachers answer it?”  “If I were to ask your friends/parents …, what might they say?” |
| Ask coping questions | Shift to questions about coping if student feels very sad or hopeless | “How do you manage to get up each day?”  “How do you stay at it and keep going?” |
| Frame as desirable | Frame silence and ‘don’t know’ as useful | “I appreciate you taking time to think instead of just making something up.”  “The world could use more observers/reflective thinkers.” |
| Move on (last resort, especially when discussing goals) | Revisit the question or topic later. |  |

**The Change Pie:**

**Research on Common Factors of Effective Counseling and Intervention**

Research shows that the success of counseling/intervention (hereafter “counseling”) depends largely on the activation of key ingredients or *common factors of therapeutic change*. The change pie metaphor (Murphy & Duncan, 2007), which draws on extensive research on what works in therapy and counseling (Lambert & Norcross, 2019), describes each ingredient’s contribution to effective outcomes. *Client* refers to the person(s) receiving services—anyone you work with to achieve a desired outcome (student, parent, teacher, family, group, etc.). *Practitioner* refers to theservice provider (psychologist, counselor, social worker, therapist, nurse, etc.).

***Client Factors (the most powerful ingredient; the pie’s filling/main ingredient)****.* Client factors include a person’s unique wisdom, cultural background, opinions, strengths, resilience, life experiences, social supports, preferences, and feedback about services received. Counseling outcomes improve when practitioners centralize clients and incorporate “as much of the client as possible” into therapeutic conversations, goals, interventions, and decisions.

***Relationship Factors (second most powerful ingredient; the pie’s crust/container)****.*This category refers to the strength of the client-practitioner alliance as perceived by clients—their experience of respect, understanding, and goodness-of-fit with the practitioner and their approach. Effective practitioners build strong alliances by adopting a multicultural orientation characterized by cultural humility (“not knowing”) and a willingness to adapt services to fit client goals, preferences, and feedback.

***Hope Factors (essential ingredient, though not as powerful as client or relationship factors; the anticipation of eating the pie).*** Hope refers to the extent to which clients believe that change is possible (expectancy) and that *they* can change and improve their lives (self-efficacy). Effective practitioners boost hope (in themselves and clients) by inviting people to describe their best hopes/desired outcomes from counseling, treating people as capable and resourceful, building on what is available and “right” with clients and their lives, and believing in the helping process itself.

***Model/Technique Factors (everything we do/say with clients can be considered a “technique,” but techniques, like toppings of a pie, are powerless without the support of the above factors)****.* This category includes the practitioner’s intervention theory and related techniques. The usefulness of any model or technique depends on the extent to which it activates the client, relationship, and hope factors described above. Effective practitioners adjust techniques to fit clients “one client at a time” rather than trying to fit clients to their favorite techniques. They also adjust and change techniques when things are not working for the client.

**\****The above ingredients apply to any change-focused activity—school-based teams (RtI, MTSS, …), teacher/parent consultation, group work, supervision, etc. In addition to incorporating these elements in our work, we can encourage caregivers to do so in their work with students. Refer to Murphy (2023) for more discussion of common factors of change in school-based counseling and intervention.*

**Presenter Bio & Resources**

John J. Murphy, PhD, is a Licensed Psychologist and Professor Emeritus of Psychology & Counseling at the University of Central Arkansas. He has worked as a high school teacher, school psychologist, therapist, and consultant. Dr. Murphy is a former finalist for NASP School Psychologist of the Year and an internationally recognized practitioner, author, and trainer of strengths-based/solution-focused practice with young people, families, schools, and others. His books have been translated into several languages and include the award-winning *Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools, 4th ed.* (2023) and (with Barry Duncan) *Brief Intervention for School Problems, 2nd ed.* (2007). His work is featured in the NY Times bestseller *Switch*, the DVD training series, *Child Therapy with the Experts*, and other sources. Dr. Murphy serves as a consultant/trainer for the North American Chinese Psychological Association (NACPA) and a Project Director with the Heart & Soul of Change Project, an international research/advocacy group that promotes client-directed services for marginalized, underrepresented persons and groups. Dr. Murphy consults and teaches throughout the world for professional associations, mental health agencies, universities, school systems, and others.

**Books**

Murphy, J. J. (2024). *Solution-focused therapy*. American Psychological Association.

Link: [Solution-Focused Therapy (apa.org)](https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/solution-focused-therapy)

\*Murphy, J. J. (2023). *Solution-focused counseling in schools* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association. Link: [Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools, Fourth Edition](https://imis.counseling.org/store/detail.aspx?id=78182)

Murphy, J. J. (2013). *Conducting student-driven interviews*. Routledge. [Conducting Student-Driven Interviews: Practical Strategies for Increas (routledge.com)](https://www.routledge.com/Conducting-Student-Driven-Interviews-Practical-Strategies-for-Increasing/Murphy/p/book/9780415636025)

Murphy, J. J., & Sparks, J. A. (2018). *Strengths-based therapy*.Routledge.

[Strengths-based Therapy: Distinctive Features - 1st Edition - John Mur (routledge.com)](https://www.routledge.com/Strengths-based-Therapy-Distinctive-Features/Murphy-Sparks/p/book/9781138684140)

Murphy, J. J., & Duncan, B. L. (2007). *Brief intervention for school problems.* (2nd ed.). Guilford.

[Brief Intervention for School Problems: Second Edition: Outcome-Informed Strategies (guilford.com)](https://www.guilford.com/books/Brief-Intervention-for-School-Problems/Murphy-Duncan/9781606239308/contents)

\*This book includes many real-life examples and dialogues of techniques covered in this workshop.

**DVDs**

DVD from Psychotherapy.net: *Solution-Focused Therapy with Dr. John J. Murphy* (*“Child Therapy with the Experts” Training Series*). Full-length session involving single parent and two children; discussion and Q & A with Dr. Murphy. [Solution-Focused Child Therapy Video (psychotherapy.net)](https://www.psychotherapy.net/video/solution-focused-child-therapy)

DVD from APA: *Solution-Focused Therapy in Practice (John J. Murphy).* Dr. Murphy collaborates with a client to set a direction for therapy, build on exceptions and other client resources, and construct a client-directed solution.[Solution Focused Therapy in Practice (apa.org)](https://www.apa.org/pubs/videos/solution-focused-therapy-practice)

**Website**

[www.drjohnmurphy.com](http://www.drjohnmurphy.com) Respectful approaches to helping people change by building on their resilience, strengths, and other resources; translation of research into practical applications in schools, mental health centers, child welfare, and other contexts; books, tapes, and workshop offerings.

Solution-Focused Counseling in Schools

Notes

Thank you for your participation. Feel free to contact me for questions or comments about the webinar or solution-focused counseling in schools.

[JohnMurphySFT@gmail.com](mailto:JohnMurphySFT@gmail.com) www.drjohnmurphy.com [John Murphy | LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-murphy-4100a63b/)