

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) Notes

Introduction to Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is a short-term, goal-oriented approach to counseling that focuses on solutions rather than problems. It was developed in the 1980s by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. Unlike traditional therapies that spend a lot of time analyzing past experiences and the causes of problems, SFBT concentrates on the present and the future. The main aim is to help clients identify what is already working in their lives and build on those strengths to create positive change.

This approach is called “brief” because it is designed to achieve meaningful results within a short period, often in just a few sessions. SFBT is practical, structured, and focused on helping individuals move forward quickly. It is widely used because it is easy to understand and apply in different settings, including schools, families, and communities.

View of Human Nature

SFBT is based on a positive and hopeful view of human nature. It assumes that people are capable, competent, and have the ability to solve their own problems. Rather than seeing individuals as weak or dependent, this approach views them as strong and resourceful. It believes that every person has hidden strengths, skills, and past successes that can be used to overcome current challenges.

Another important idea is that change is always possible. Even when people feel stuck, SFBT assumes that small changes can occur and lead to bigger improvements over time. The therapy also recognizes that individuals are constantly changing, and therefore, problems are not permanent.

In SFBT, the client is seen as the expert in their own life. This means that the therapist does not tell the client what to do but instead works collaboratively with them. The therapist listens carefully, asks helpful questions, and supports the client in discovering their own solutions. This respectful and empowering approach helps build confidence and independence.

Key Concepts of SFBT

SFBT is guided by several key concepts that shape how therapy is conducted. One of the most important ideas is focusing on the present and the future rather than the past. While past experiences may be acknowledged, they are not the main focus. Instead, attention is given to what the client wants to achieve and how they can move forward.

Another key concept is the focus on solutions rather than problems. Instead of asking “Why is this happening?” SFBT asks “What can be done to improve the situation?” This shift in thinking helps clients feel more hopeful and motivated.

The concept of exceptions is also central to SFBT. Exceptions are times when the problem does not occur or is less severe. By identifying these moments, clients can understand what works and apply those strategies more often.

SFBT also emphasizes the importance of small changes. It believes that even small steps can lead to significant progress over time. For example, making a small improvement in daily habits can gradually lead to major life changes.

Language plays a very important role in SFBT. Therapists use positive and encouraging language to help clients focus on possibilities rather than limitations. The relationship between the therapist and the client is collaborative, meaning they work together as partners in the change process.

Goals of SFBT

The main goal of SFBT is to help clients create clear, specific, and achievable goals. These goals are usually focused on the future and describe what the client wants their life to look like. Instead of being vague, goals are made practical and realistic so that progress can be measured. Another goal is to help clients recognize and use their strengths. Many people focus too much on their weaknesses, but SFBT shifts attention to what they are doing well. By building on these strengths, clients become more confident in their ability to handle challenges.

SFBT also aims to promote independence. Clients are encouraged to take control of their own lives and make decisions that will improve their situation. The therapist supports this process but does not create dependence.

Because SFBT is brief, it also aims to achieve meaningful change within a short time. This makes it especially useful in situations where time and resources are limited. The focus is on practical solutions that can be applied immediately.

Techniques Used in SFBT

SFBT uses several simple but effective techniques to help clients move toward their goals. One of the most well-known techniques is the miracle question. In this technique, the client is asked to imagine that a miracle happens overnight and their problem is solved. They are then asked to describe what would be different. This helps the client clearly picture their desired future.

Scaling questions are also commonly used. Clients are asked to rate their situation on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents the worst situation and 10 represents the best. This helps measure progress and makes change more visible. It also helps clients recognize that they are not at zero and already have some level of success.

Exception questions are used to identify times when the problem does not occur or is less serious. For example, a therapist may ask, “When was the last time you felt better?” This helps clients discover strategies that already work for them.

Coping questions are important when clients feel overwhelmed. These questions help clients see how they have managed to survive difficult situations. For example, asking “How have you managed to keep going?” helps highlight resilience.

Therapists also give compliments to recognize the client’s strengths and efforts. This builds confidence and encourages positive behavior. In addition, small tasks or homework may be given to help clients practice new behaviors and notice positive changes in their daily lives.

Application of SFBT

SFBT is widely used in many areas because of its flexibility and effectiveness. In counseling and psychotherapy, it helps individuals deal with stress, anxiety, and personal challenges. In schools, it is used to support students who are facing academic or behavioral difficulties. Teachers and counselors can use SFBT techniques to motivate students and improve performance.

In family and marriage therapy, SFBT helps improve communication and resolve conflicts by focusing on what works in the relationship. It is also used in substance abuse treatment to help individuals focus on recovery and build a positive future.

In community work and social services, SFBT is especially useful because it is practical and does not require long-term intervention. It can be applied in healthcare settings to support patients in coping with illness and improving their well-being. Its simplicity makes it suitable for use in different cultural contexts, including developing countries.

Example in the Kenyan Context

In a Kenyan context, consider a student living in Nairobi who is experiencing stress due to exams and financial challenges. The student may feel overwhelmed and unable to concentrate

on studies. Using SFBT, a counselor would begin by asking questions that focus on solutions rather than problems.

The counselor might ask the miracle question, encouraging the student to imagine how life would look if the stress was reduced. The student may say they would feel calm, attend classes regularly, and complete assignments on time. This helps the student define a clear goal.

Next, the counselor may use scaling questions to understand the student's current situation. For example, the student may rate their stress level at 5 out of 10. The counselor would then ask why it is not lower, helping the student recognize what is already working.

The counselor may also ask about exceptions, such as times when the student felt less stressed. The student might say they felt better when studying with friends. Based on this, the counselor can suggest practical steps such as joining a study group or creating a study schedule.

By focusing on these small, achievable actions, the student gradually gains confidence and improves their academic performance. This example shows how SFBT can be applied in everyday life in Kenya to address common challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a simple, practical, and effective approach to counseling. It focuses on solutions, strengths, and future possibilities rather than problems and past experiences. By helping clients identify what works and take small steps toward their goals, SFBT promotes confidence, independence, and quick progress.

Its brief and flexible nature makes it suitable for use in many settings, including schools, families, healthcare, and community programs. In the Kenyan context, SFBT can be especially valuable in addressing everyday challenges such as academic stress, financial difficulties, and social issues. Overall, it is an empowering approach that helps individuals create positive change in their lives.