

# Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Approach to Child Welfare Practice

**Strength-based:** Identifying strengths and resources within the family system that could be used to assure safety and well-being of the child. Family strengths to be explored during the assessment process relate to parent/caregiver's past and current efforts in protecting children from harm, maintaining loving parent-child relationship, accessing extended family and other support systems, and making efforts to address past and current stress conditions (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, mental health issues, unemployment, etc.). This approach also involves the caseworker's use of family strengths and resources in developing a solution-focused case plan to prevent future abuse and neglect and to increase well-being of the child.

- ❖ What people know and have learned about themselves, others, and their world.
- ❖ Personal qualities, traits and virtues that people possess.
- ❖ What people know about the world around them.
- ❖ The talents that people have.
- ❖ Cultural and personal stories and lore from their cultural orientation.
- ❖ The resources of the community in which they live.

The principles that form the foundation of the strengths perspective are:

- ❖ Every individual, group, family and community has strengths.
- ❖ Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity.
- ❖ Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual, group and community aspirations seriously.
- ❖ We best serve clients by collaborating with them.
- ❖ Every environment is full of resources.
- ❖ The context of caring and caregiving supports strengths and solution-finding.

*Adapted from Dennis Saleebey*

**Solution-focused:** Collaborating with the client/family to identify his/her ideas of solutions that will work to assure safety, permanence, and well-being of the child. This approach emphasizes engaging families in the decision-making process, with attention to strengths and resources available to the family, and recognition of the client's hopes of taking care of the child's needs.

**Solution-focused interviewing** includes a set of different types of questions which are used during the interview as well as a set of underlying philosophical beliefs about people. The types of questions we'll use from this model are:

- *Past successes:*
  - i. What discipline methods have worked with your daughter?
  - ii. What goals have you achieved so far in your life?

## **Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Approach to Child Welfare Practice (continued)**

- *Exception questions:*
  - i. Tell me about a time when you were able to express your anger without hurting someone.
  - ii. When have you been able to manage your son's behavior without hitting him?
- *Scaling questions:*
  - i. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not very much at all and 10 being as much as you can imagine, how confident are you about being able to do the tasks we listed in your Family Service Plan?
  - ii. What would help to move you one number higher on that scale?
- *The Miracle question:*
  - i. If a miracle were to happen tonight while you were sleeping and when you woke up in the morning your life had changed, but you didn't know that it had changed, you had to discover the change, what would you first notice would be different?
  - ii. What else?... anything else?... who else would notice the change?... what would they see?

*Developed by Insoo Kim Berg, Peter deShazer*

**Protective Partnership (Child Protection Partnership Approach):** Developing a helping relationship with client families to assess family strengths and develop solutions to assure safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

1. Respecting service recipients as people worth doing business with.
2. Cooperate with the person, not the abuse.
3. Recognize that cooperation is possible even where coercion is required.
4. Recognize that all families have signs of safety.
5. Maintain the focus on safety.
6. Learn what the service recipient wants.
7. Always search for detail.
8. Focus on creating small change.
9. Don't confuse case details with judgments.
10. Offer choices.
11. Treat the interview as a forum for change.
12. Treat these practice principles as aspirations, not assumptions. *Turnell & Edwards*

**Practice guidelines that are an integral part to the Protective Partnership Approach:**

- Understand the position of each family member
- Find exceptions to the maltreatment
- Discover family strengths and resources
- Focus on goals
- Scale safety and progress
- Assess willingness, confidence and capacity (to carry out case plans before trying to implement them)

*Turnell & Edwards*

## Strength-Based, Solution-Focused Approach to Child Welfare Practice (continued)

This is a comparison of the strength-based, solution-focused approach to child welfare and the traditional approach:

<b>Strength-based, Solution-Focused Approach</b>	<b>Traditional Approach</b>
1. Identify what the client wants.	1. Diagnose the problem.
2. Let the client tell you who he or she is.	2. Gather all available information in order to classify the client.
3. The client is the “expert” about his or her life.	3. The professional is the expert.
4. Identify client strengths that can be used to promote client goals.	4. Identify the web of causality that is supporting the client problem.
5. The professional collaborates with the client to help the client identify ways to accomplish goals.	5. The professional develops a service plan that the client is expected to follow in order to achieve the case goals.
6. The unfolding of the plan may not be step-by-step, but may emerge in ways best suited to client needs and style.	6. The plan is expected to be implemented in a logical, step-by-step way.

