

## **Using the solution focused approach:helpful questions to empower patients/clients and reduce waiting lists**

These are just a few ideas and suggestions. You may already be using these kinds of questions - or have much better ones. Some may be useful and worth trying out - please select as appropriate.

Empowering patients and enlisting their hope, interest, and energy (at even the lowest level), will contribute to reducing waiting lists because:

- It puts the person at the centre of the work
- They are more likely to attend every session, reducing DNAs and cancellations
- They are more likely to use your expertise to the best of their ability
- They are more likely to do whatever is needed between sessions in order to help themselves, thus speeding and streamlining the therapeutic process
- Together, therapist and client will unite in working towards their functional goals; the therapist will not be wasting their own (and the client's) time and energy trying to push them towards unwanted goals.

### ***Finding strengths and resources which are already there***

*Ask yourself:*

- ◆ Have I found out a lot about the person's strengths and resources in spite of their (problem).
- ◆ And then some more?
- ◆ Have I acknowledged and appreciated their difficulties?
- ◆ Am I listening with interest, curiosity and admiration?
- ◆ Have I described what I see as their abilities and complimented them on their strengths and personal resources?

*Ask the patient:*

- ◆ Wow, how do you do that?
- ◆ What can you do in spite of (problem)?
- ◆ Show me your method of doing that?
- ◆ That can't be easy, how do you cope?
- ◆ Not everyone with your (problem) can manage that; what advice would you give to someone else with the same difficulty?
- ◆ What difference does being able to do that make?
- ◆ How did you learn to do that in spite of (problem)?
- ◆ What kind of help is best for you?

- ◆ How do you make sure you get it at present?
- ◆ How do you manage to be so . . . (independent, determined, philosophical, positive, etc etc etc – *but it must be real, and you must mean it - and want to know the answer*).

## ***Helping the person develop their goals for therapy***

*Ask yourself:*

- ◆ Have we spent enough time at the beginning of our work together, defining their realistic and well-formed goals?
- ◆ Am I 'leading from behind' (ie am I sure I haven't hijacked the person's goals or imposed my own?)
- ◆ Have we made a clear agreement on how long (how many sessions, what intervals, spread out over how long) we will work together on this?
- ◆ Do I understand the person's goals, and what my part is in helping him/her to achieve them?
- ◆ Does the person need my input to reach their goals, or can they do it (or some of it) on their own?
- ◆ Are the goals realistic, workable, and measurable?
- ◆ Are the goals small enough to be achievable in the time we have together?
- ◆ Can the person describe the goal in practical, behavioural detail?
- ◆ Have we agreed when we will review our progress?
- ◆ Have we got some milestones along the way?
- ◆ Are we both clear about what the person wants to change and why, and how many meetings we have to make this happen?

*Ask the person:*

- ◆ What do you think would be a good goal for us, given we have X no. of sessions?
- ◆ What difference will being able to do (X – the goal) make? (Details).
- ◆ Is our goal realistic, workable and measurable?
- ◆ Will you tell me what will be happening, or different, when you have achieved your goal?
- ◆ How important is it to you to achieve your goal?
- ◆ How confident are you, that with both of us working hard you can achieve this?
- ◆ How much work do you think you'll need to do at home to achieve this? (detail).
- ◆ Is this still our goal, or do we need to look again and agree on (perhaps) something more appropriate for your energy levels? (eg if person returns not having done what they wanted to do or said they would do).

## ***Moving in small steps***

*Ask yourself:*

- ◆ Am I recognising, complimenting and giving full weight to what the person is achieving, even if it seems very small?
- ◆ Am I still working on the person's agenda and at their pace?
- ◆ Is the solution manageable – are the steps small enough?
- ◆ Am I moving too quickly for the person?
- ◆ Am I doing too much for the person?
- ◆ Am I expecting too much from the person?

*Ask the person:*

- ◆ What's the tiniest step that will tell you you're moving in the right direction?
- ◆ When we meet next time, what do you want to have achieved? Is that realistic and measurable?
- ◆ On a scale of 0-10 where 10=your goal (agreed at the beginning of treatment) is met, where are you now on that scale?
- ◆ What will be different when you've moved up one small step?
- ◆ And what difference will that make?
- ◆ At the end of our time together today, what's the very next thing you'll do to keep on moving towards your goal?

## ***Counting down – using the arc of the therapy***

***Ask yourself:***

- ◆ At each session after the first: have I reminded the person how many sessions we have left?
- ◆ And have I checked that their goals are still the same?

***Ask the person:***

- ◆ We've had X no of sessions together and you've (briefly sum up emphasising person's achievements); so we have X no. of sessions to go: what's your next little step?
- ◆ We have X sessions to go; what can we do that will be most helpful to you in that time?
- ◆ We have X sessions to go; are you happy with what we've done so far?
- ◆ We have X sessions to go; are you happy with the intervals between or do you want to start lengthening out the time between sessions?
- ◆ We have X sessions to go; if you left here at the end of the very last session, when we say goodbye, how will you be able to tell that it's been worthwhile working together? What will be different in your life?

## ***Arms-length support***

*Ask yourself:*

- ◆ What's my referral network like?

- ◆ Who can I refer on to?
- ◆ Does the person need referring on or can they do it themselves (eg visit GP)?
- ◆ Could they ring me for advice rather than having another appointment?
- ◆ What's the best way to wean this particular client off my service while still helping them to feel safe?
- ◆ Can I be available as telephone backup in certain hours in the week?

***Ask the person***

***(in last few sessions)***

- ◆ You're doing really well even though we haven't used all our sessions. Do you want to put some 'in the bank' for later?
- ◆ How do you think we ought to deal with this other problem (eg depression)? Would you like to (eg go back to your GP) independently, or would you like me to (eg write a referral letter)?
- ◆ (If appropriate) - You've worked so hard and made a lot of progress, so how would you feel about cancelling the rest of our sessions, but calling us for telephone advice or an appointment if you should need it?
- ◆ Although we've come to the end of our agreed X no. of sessions, do we need to make a backup plan for if you feel you want help from us again?
- ◆ Who else helps you? (Eg. family, friends, church, charities, neighbours etc).
- ◆ Would you like to have longer intervals between sessions now?
- ◆ Would you like to go session by session from now on, and book the next one at the end of the last, if you think you're going to need it?
- ◆ Would you like to choose the intervals between sessions from now on, so that you can spread them out as you get stronger?
- ◆ I'm so impressed with your hard work and the fact that you reached your goals in the time we had together – well done!

***Reading:***

- Burns K; Focus on Solutions: a health professional's guide (Sage 2005) (Speech & language Therapist)
- Duncan L, Ghul R, Mousley S; Creating Positive Futures: solution focused recovery from mental distress (BT Press 2007) (Occupational Therapists)
- McAllister M; Solution Focused Nursing: rethinking practice (Palgrave Macmillan 2007) (Nursing)

*For further information and/or team facilitation to help with waiting list management in community services, contact Carole Waskett at Northwest Solutions on [carole@waskett.org](mailto:carole@waskett.org) or call 0161 959 6515*