

Collaborative Child Welfare Practice

A Workshop for the Department of Social Services

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Family Institute of Cambridge

in conjunction with

The Massachusetts Child Welfare Institute

This handout highlights ideas and practices from a variety of sources in contemporary child welfare practices. It provides a framework with an overall goal of helping family members and helpers to work together in a proactively-focused partnership that concentrates on developing and carrying out a rigorous, family-enacted plan to address the seriousness of allegations and insure safety, well-being, and permanency. This framework is applicable at multiple levels and can be productively used in casework, supervision, and administration. In fact, its effectiveness at a casework level is enhanced when the organizing principles of the framework are also applied at various levels throughout an organization.

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FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

A Collaborative Stance in Child Welfare Work:

(William Madsen)

- Striving for cultural curiosity and honoring family (and worker) wisdom.
- Believing in the possibility of change and building on family (and worker) resourcefulness.
- Working in partnership with families (and workers) and fitting services (and supervision agency policies) to families (and workers).
- Engaging in empowering processes and making our work (and supervision and administration) more accountable to clients (and workers).

Highlights from Signs of Safety:

(Andrew Turnell & Steve Edwards)

- Looking for signs of safety as well as signs of risk
- Cooperating with the person, not the abuse
- Learning what the service recipient wants
- Focusing on small change
- Offering choices
- Treating the interview as a forum for change

A Framework for Collaborative Child Welfare Practice:

1. Building a foundation of family engagement (Getting to know clients in ways that humanize them, build connection with them, encourage hope for shared work, and keep important issues on the table).
2. Developing a shared proactive goal to insure safety, well-being, and permanency.
3. Identifying constraining elements (signs of risk) and sustaining elements (signs of safety) to the goal of safety, well-being, and permanency. (We can think about these elements as separate entities and view clients as being in a mutually influencing and changeable relationship with them.)
4. Helping clients shift their relationship to constraining elements and enhance their relationship to sustaining elements.
5. Helping clients develop and draw on communities of support to maintain safety, well-being, and permanency.

This framework brings together and draws on the following textual sources:

- Berg (1994), *Family-Based Services*
- Berg and Kelly (2000), *Building Solutions in Child Protective Services*
- Cooperrider, et. al. (2000). *Appreciative Inquiry*
- Kegan & Lahey (2001), *How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work*
- Madsen (2007), *Collaborative Therapy with Multi-Stressed Families*, 2nd Edition
- Miller (2002), *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, 2nd Edition
- Prochaska & DiClemente (1983), *Stages of Change Model*
- Turnell & Edwards (1999), *Signs of Safety*
- Turnell & Essex (2006), *Working with Denied Child Abuse*

And most importantly, the grounded experience of workshop participants.

IDEAS FROM STAGES OF CHANGE

(James Prochaska and Carlos DiClemente)

Stages of change is an approach to human behavior change that cuts across many theoretical models. It suggests that individuals move from being unaware or unwilling to do anything about a problem, to considering the possibility of change to becoming determined and prepared to make change to taking action and sustaining or maintaining that change over time. It also suggests that readiness to change is not a straight progression and may fluctuate over time. The model has outlined five stages of change and suggests different actions on workers' part at each stage of change. This model offers a framework to help workers target their responses to clients' readiness to change.

1. Pre-contemplation Stage:

At this stage, clients have not even contemplated having a problem or needing to make a change. At this point in time, people can respond to demands for change with reluctance, rebellion, resignation or rationalization. DiClemente suggests that we cannot make people in a pre-contemplation stage change, but we can help motivate them to move to contemplation. An important first step is to avoid becoming ensnared in an interactional pattern that inadvertently exacerbates reluctance, rebellion, resignation or rationalization and engage clients in conversations that raise their awareness of the possibility of change.

2. Contemplation Stage:

At this stage, clients begin to acknowledge that they have a problem and begin to think about solving it. However, they are far from making a commitment to change. They are open to information and ambivalent about the possibilities of change. It is important not to assume that a person in this stage is ready to make a change and to focus the conversation on tipping the balance in favor of change by helping clients examine the respective benefits of changing and not changing.

3. Preparation Stage:

At this stage, clients are ready for change in the near future and are on the verge of taking action. It becomes important to help them develop an effective and personally relevant plan for change and to help them strengthen their commitment to follow through on that plan.

4. Action Stage:

At this stage, clients engage in specific actions to bring about change. If clients do not have a sense of self-efficacy, they are unlikely to be successful in the long-term. Workers can bolster self-efficacy by focusing on successes, reaffirming client decisions and highlighting client agency (their ability to make changes and exert influence in their lives).

1. Maintenance Stage:

Making a change does not guarantee that a change will be maintained. The challenge during this stage is to sustain change accomplished by previous action and prevent relapse. This is not a static stage and can range from 6 months to a lifetime. People often slip back to earlier stages and then start through them again. Maintaining change often may require a different set of skills than making change and it is important for worker to help clients identify the possibility of backsliding and identify and use strategies to prevent it.

IDEAS FROM MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

(William Miller and Stephen Rollnick)

Motivational Interviewing provides a model to help workers utilize a “stages of change framework” in their actual conversations with clients. It is a directive, client-centered method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence. It is not a technique or set of techniques that are applied or “used on” people. Rather, it is an interpersonal style that is shaped by a guiding assumption that ambivalence or lack of resolve is the principal obstacle to be overcome in triggering change. Motivational Interviewing focuses on building motivation for change and strengthening commitment to change.

Rollnick and Miller have highlighted the following key points in describing the spirit of motivational interviewing:

- Motivation to change is elicited from the client and not imposed from without.
- It is the client’s task, not the workers’ to articulate and resolve his or her ambivalence.
- Direct persuasion is not an effective method for resolving ambivalence.
- The worker is directive in helping the client examine and resolve ambivalence.
- Readiness to change is not a client trait, but a fluctuating product of interpersonal interaction.

Research suggests that directive, confrontational approaches produce twice the resistance and only half as much “positive” client behaviors as supportive, client-centered approaches, and result in significantly reduced long-term change.

FOUR GENERAL PRINCIPLES BEHIND MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Express Empathy

Empathy involves seeing the world through the client's eyes, thinking about things as the client thinks about them, feeling things as the client feels them, and sharing in the client's experiences. When clients feel that they are understood, they are more able to open up to their own experiences and share those experiences with others. Having clients share their experiences with you in depth allows you to assess when and where they need support, and what potential pitfalls may need focused on in the change planning process. Importantly, when clients perceive empathy on a worker’s part, they become more open to gentle challenges by the worker. Clients become more comfortable fully examining their ambivalence about change and less likely to become defensive. Understanding a client’s perspective is not the same thing as agreement or approval. It is possible to accept and understand a person’s perspective while not agreeing with or endorsing it. It also does not mean not holding and expressing a different viewpoint.

Develop Discrepancy

Motivation for change occurs when people perceive a discrepancy between where they are and where they want to be. Workers can encourage this situation by helping clients examine the discrepancies between their current behavior and future goals. When clients perceive that their current behaviors are not leading toward some important future goal, they become more motivated to make important life changes. Joint work is more efficient and effective when the client rather than the worker presents arguments for change. People are often more persuaded by what they hear themselves say than by what other people tell them and motivational interviewing relies more on intrinsic motivation rather than external and coercive motivation.

Roll with Resistance

In motivational interviewing, workers do not fight client resistance, but "roll with it." Statements demonstrating resistance are not challenged. Instead workers use clients' "momentum" to further explore clients' views. Using this approach, resistance tends to be decreased rather than increased, as clients are not reinforced for becoming argumentative and playing "devil's advocate" to worker suggestions. Motivational interviewing encourages clients to develop their own solutions to the problems that they themselves have defined. In exploring client concerns, workers may invite clients to examine new perspectives, but do not impose new ways of thinking on clients. In this way, the problem is the client stance or perception rather than the client and resistance is a signal that we need to shift our approach.

Support Self-Efficacy

A client's belief that change is possible is an important motivator to succeeding in making a change. As clients are held responsible for choosing and carrying out actions to change, workers focus their efforts on helping clients stay motivated. Supporting clients' sense of self-efficacy is a great way to do that. One source of hope for clients in this approach is that there is no "right way" to change, and if a given plan for change does not work, clients are only limited by their own creativity as to the number of other plans that might be tried.

Questions to elicit self-motivational statements and help clients arguing for their own change:

Problem recognition:

- What makes you think that this is a problem?
- What difficulties have you had in relation to the sexual abuse and the disclosure?
- In what ways do you think you or other people have been harmed by this?
- In what ways has this been a problem for you?

Concern about the problem:

- What is there about the sexual abuse that you or other people might see as reasons for concern?
- What worries you about this?
- What can you imagine happening to you and your family?
- How much does that concern you?
- In what ways does this concern you?
- What do you think will happen if you don't make a change in your family?

Intention to Change

- The fact that you're here indicates that at least a part of you thinks it's time to do something. What are the reasons you see for making a change in your family?
- When you are 100% successful and things work out exactly as you would like, what would be different?
- What factors make you think that you should keep on the way you have been?
- What is there about this that you or others might see as reasons for concern?
- And what about the other side?
- What makes you think it's time for a change in your family?
- What are you thinking about your problem at this point?

Optimism:

- What makes you think that if you did decide to make a change, you could do it?
- What encourages you that you can change if you want to?
- What do you think would work for you, if you decided to change?

Questions to Assess and Enhance Client Willingness, Capacity, and Confidence

(Turnell & Edwards, Signs of Safety)

Willingness:

- On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you are willing to do anything to make your child safer (stop the abuse) and 0 means you're not willing to do anything, where would you place yourself on that scale?
- If I (the worker) were to ask you do _____, on a scale of 0 to 10, how willing would you be?
- You talked earlier about the possibility of you doing _____. On a scale of 0 to 10, how willing are you to try that?
- What, if anything, would increase your willingness to do something about these problems?

Capacity to Take Action:

- On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate your ability to do something about these problems? What aspects of these problems do you feel most able to tackle?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate your ability to implement the plans we have talked about?
- What parts of these plans would you feel most able to try?
- What or who could help you do these things?
- How much control or influence do you think you have over this situation?

Confidence:

- On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means that you are certain things will improve in your family and 0 indicates you think things will never get better, how would you rate things? What gives you that level of confidence?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that you (your family) can do things to make your child safer (stop the abuse)? What would increase your confidence?
- Thinking specifically about doing _____, on a scale of 0 to 10 how confident are you that this would improve things?

UNDERSTANDING THE POSITION OF EACH FAMILY MEMBER (Madsen, Collaborative Work with Multi-Stressed Families)

We can approach every family as its own micro-culture and seek to learn “In what context does this behavior make sense?” (towards the goal of understanding, not justifying behavior) and “What do I need to learn so I can better understand their intentions? (towards the goal of building connections, not condoning behavior).

One way to accomplish this is to identify and understand family stances about the *problem*, *treatment* (what should be done about the problem), and *roles* (who should do what in addressing the problem). Understanding family stances can be done without agreeing with or condoning those beliefs and is a fast and powerful way of building rapport.

Questions to reflect on the stances clients hold about problems, what should be done about them (treatment), and who should do what (roles):

Questions about the Problem:

- Does client see this as a problem? For whom? In what way?
- How does client think this came to be a problem?
- Does client believe they have any control over the problem?
- What special meanings are associated with the problem for client?

Questions about Treatment:

- Does client believe something can be done about this problem?
- What does client believe would be the best thing to do about this problem?

Questions about Roles:

- Who in the family should do what about this problem?
- What should respective roles should families and helpers take in addressing this problem?

These questions are sequential because the answers to each question profoundly affect the framing of subsequent questions. For example, if the “problem” is not experienced as a problem by a client, then the question of client influence over that problem may well be irrelevant for that client. Again, understanding family stances about problems, treatment and roles is an effort to better understand their responses to our efforts without necessarily agreeing with or condoning those responses.

IDENTIFYING CLIENT STANCES AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS (From Collaborative and Solution-Focused Approaches).

Clients often hold a particular stance towards the problems in their lives. We can identify three stances in particular.

Customer Relationship:

The (presenting concern) is a problem in my life, I can do something about it, and I want your help in doing something about it. (This is known in solution-focused work as a “Customer Relationship” in which a complaint or goal has been jointly identified by clients and workers, clients see themselves as part of the solution, and are willing to do something about the situation.)

Visitor Relationship / No Problem Stance:

The (presenting concern) is not a problem in my life and I don't need to do anything about it. (This is known in solution-focused work as a “Visitor Relationship” in which a shared goal has not been jointly identified by clients and workers and in which workers and clients have different definitions of the problem and different agendas for dealing with it.)

We will refer to this stance as a “No Problem” Stance. It often develops in situations in which people are seen as being “in denial” or minimizing a problem. In this situation, helpers can fall into attempting to convince a client that a problem exists or try to force clients to acknowledge or agree with how we see things. However, client agreement may not guarantee safety and the interactional patterns that develop around a “No Problem” stance can inadvertently rigidify that stance.

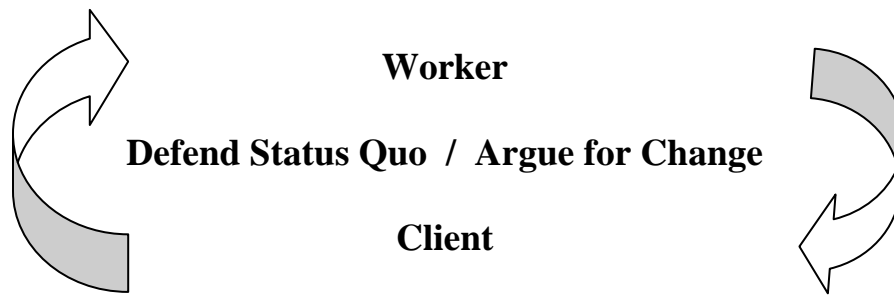
Complainant Relationship / No Control Stance:

The (presenting concern) is a problem, but there is nothing I can do about it. (this is known in solution-focused work as a “Complainant Relationship” in which clients have complaints about a problematic situation, but do not see themselves as part of the solution.)

We will refer to this stance as a “No Control” Stance. It often develops in situations where people are seen as being passive or “co-dependent.” In this situation, helpers can fall into attempting to convince a client that he or she can do something about the problem. Clients can experience these efforts as “minimizing” the magnitude of their difficulties and respond with arguments for why change is not possible. The interactional patterns that develop around a “No Control” Stance can inadvertently rigidify that stance.

While we may hope clients see difficulties as a problem, they often hold a “no problem” or a “no control” stance. These stances constrain clients from effectively addressing a problem. As workers and clients interact around these client stances, they can get caught up in problematic interactions that inadvertently rigidify these stances.

COMMON INTERACTIONAL PATTERNS AROUND A “NO PROBLEM” STANCE



STEPS TO ENGAGE CLIENTS WITH A “NO PROBLEM” STANCE

First do no harm - Try to avoid prematurely arguing for change.

Connection before correction - Connect with clients' intentions, hopes, values, and preferred view of self.

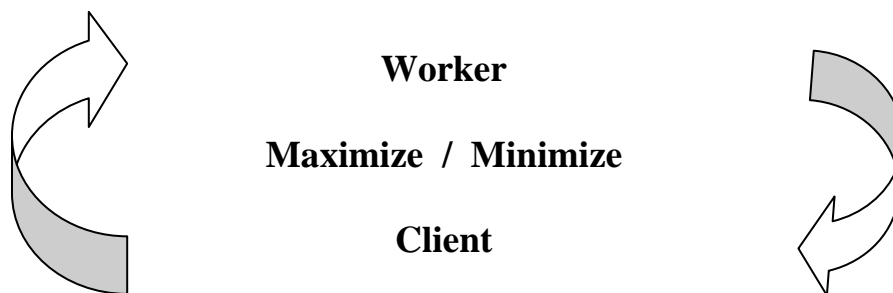
Mind the Gap - Elicit and examine discrepancies between clients' intentions, hopes, values, and preferred view of self and the current effects of their actions.

Grow the exception into a plan - Build on this exception to a “No Problem” stance to develop an agreed upon focus for shared work.

Sample Questions in this Process:

- When you slapped your son, what were you hoping to achieve?
- What were you hoping he might learn in that moment? (looking for some positive intention that we can support)
- (if we can find an intention we can support) What does that say about the kind of person you hope he'll grow up to be?
- What does that say about the kind of parent you hope to be? (looking for a preferred view of self)
- When you slapped him, what do you think it was like for him? (looking for actual effects)
- So, I'm sitting here holding on one hand the hopes you've described for your son and the kind of parent you want to be and on the other hand these effects you've just described. What's it like for you to sit with both of those? (examining the discrepancy between intentions and effects)
- What helps you remember your best intentions for both you and your son?
- What helps you face the effects of your actions?
- As you think about your description of feeling bad about this situation, what do you think it tells me about the person you want to be that you're willing to face feeling bad rather than ignore it or run away from it?
- As you think about the parent you'd rather be with your son, are there times you've been more that parent?
- How have you done that? What has helped you to do that?
- Can you think of other times when you've been more like that?
- What makes being that way important to you?
- If you could bring more moments like that into your life, would that be a good development?
- Would it be useful for us to focus on helping you do that more?

COMMON INTERACTIONAL PATTERNS AROUND A “NO CONTROL” STANCE



STEPS TO ENGAGE CLIENTS WITH A “NO CONTROL” STANCE

First do no Harm

Avoid prematurely arguing for change.

Connection before correction

Search for the hopes behind client complaints. (What a person despairs against may point to what he/she hopes for.)

Taking the first step

Elicit and examine instances of self-efficacy or agency as clients' descriptions of their responses to a problematic situation.

Growing the exception into a plan

Build on this exception to a “No Control” stance to develop an agreed upon focus for shared work.

Sample Questions:

- What is it that bugs you most about this situation?
- What would you like to see differently?
- What makes that hope important to you?
- How have you responded in this situation? (looking for moments that contain bits of hope,
- When your partner went to hit you, how did you respond? You know, what did you do? (looking for responses that contain bits of self-efficacy)
- How did you do that? Then what happened? What else did you do?
- Can you think of other times when you've taken similar steps? (connecting with other moments of self-efficacy)
- What were you trying to accomplish there?
- If you could bring more moments like that into your life, would that be a good development?
- Would it be useful for us to focus on helping you do that more?

SOME SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ELICIT PROACTIVE GOALS

A question from Steve deShazer:

- What needs to happen for us to stop meeting like this?

A question about progress since first meeting from solution-focused therapy:

- What has been happening since our last meeting (or between when you called and today) that you would like to see continue in your life together?

Examples of questions to elicit family's safety goals:

- Okay, we both see the need to make your child safe. What I'm really interested in are the ideas you have for doing this.
- How can we help you make things better and make your child safer?
- What do you suppose you, your partner, the child, other family members can do to increase safety?
- Let's suppose we could do anything to make your child safer. What would that be? It's really clear to me that you don't want us continually in your life. What do you think we need to see to close the case?
- If you got exactly the sort of support you wanted to deal with these problems and resolve them, what would that support look like?

The miracle question from solution-focused therapy:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you are sleeping and the problem that brought you here is solved. What do you suppose you will notice different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?

Questions to elicit the presence in a described absence:

(Influenced by Johnella Bird and by Michael White's "absent but implicit")

People often come in focused on what is missing – "She never listens to me anymore. She's always running around and doing whatever she wants. I feel like I'm losing my daughter."

When we hear the absence, we can inquire about what could be present.

Possible Responses to "I feel like I'm losing my connection with my daughter."

- When did you notice this connection with your daughter getting lost?
- Do you think there has been a shared connection in your relationship before that happened?
- How did the two of you develop that connection in your relationship?
- Has this connection in your relationship ever been lost in the past and then found again? How did you do that?
- What would tell you that a renewed sense of connection had been achieved in this relationship? What would have changed?

QUESTIONS FROM APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

(From David Cooperrider and Colleagues)

Appreciative Inquiry is an organizational consultation approach that “draws on the best of what is” to “envision what could be” and “develop what will be.” It can also be very useful in work with clients and families. Because the vision that is developed through Appreciative Inquiry is based on actual moments and grounded in real experience and history, it is both meaningful and achievable for families.

Sample Questions:

- Everyone has days when they are “off,” when they are not “at their best.” As you might guess, I am going to need to ask you about that in a bit. But, before I do, can I ask you a little bit about when you are “on,” when you are “at your best” as a parent?
- Can you think of a particular moment when you felt good about yourself as a parent? What was happening? What were you doing? How were your children responding?
- What did you particularly value or appreciate about you were in that moment? What makes that important to you? What does that say about your hopes and dreams for your self as a parent? What does it say about what you stand for as a parent?
- Imagine it is a year from now and your relationship with your kids is totally grounded in those things you most value about your parenting. How would you know it? Concretely, what would be happening? If we had a videotape of you in this future moment “at your best,” what would we see on the videotape?

MOVING THROUGH COMPLAINTS TO COMMITMENTS

(From Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey)

Sometimes, people have a difficult time drawing on the “best of what it” and can experience that request as invalidating the challenges they are facing. At those times, we can switch our focus and draw on the “worst of what is” to envision what could be and develop what will be.”

Sample Questions from Kegan and Lahey:

- What complaints do you have about this relationship?
- What would you like to see instead?
- If your complaint and your preferred alternative were somehow a message to you about what you really care about, what is important to you, what you really value, what would that message be? (It can be helpful to put the answer in the frame of “I am committed to the value or importance of _____ in our relationship.)
- If your relationship were grounded in those commitments, concretely how would we know? What would we see happening that is different?
- Would that be important to you and why?

The combination of these two sets of questions offers us the flexibility of developing a vision of future possibilities and preferred directions in life by focusing on either clients’ best moments or greatest frustrations. David Cooperrider suggests that we all have a natural tendency to evolve toward the most our positive images. In this way, a concrete vision of possibilities can become an irresistible magnet that gives our work positive direction and inspires clients.

MAPPING CONSTRAINING AND SUSTAINING ELEMENTS

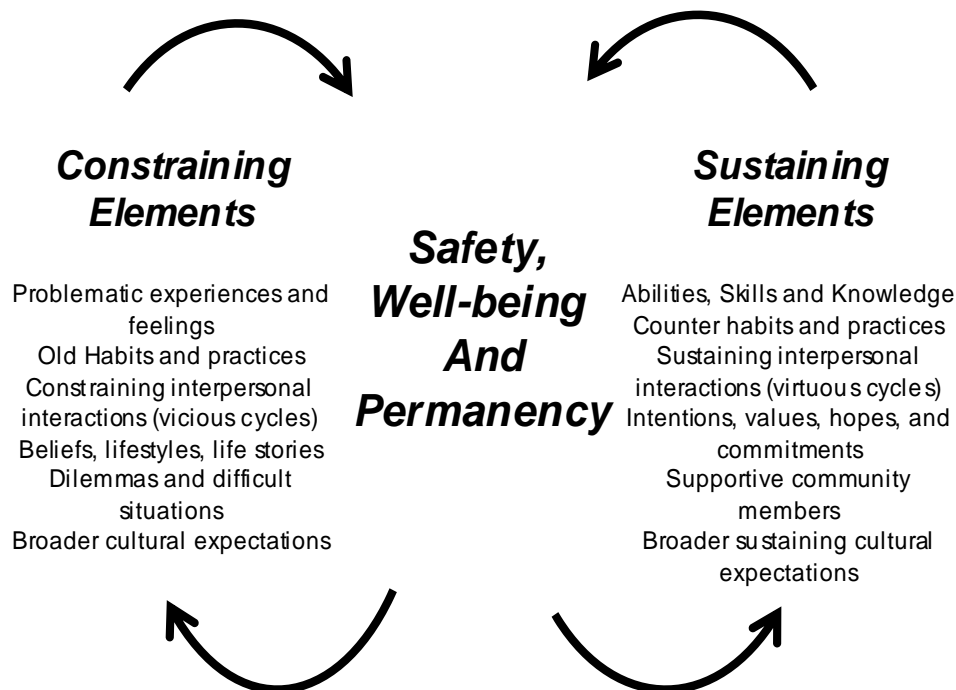
Once we have an agreed upon focus for work, we can join with clients to identify various elements that serve as obstacles or constraints to safety, well-being and permanency as well as elements that can support and sustain safety, well-being and permanency. We can identify constraining elements (signs of risk) and sustaining elements (signs of safety) at individual, interactional, and socio-cultural levels.

The Importance of identifying both signs of risk and signs of safety

“Most risk assessments are too one-sided. Focusing exclusive attention on risk and harm is rather like mapping only the darkest valleys and gloomiest hollows of a particular territory.”

“Change and safety in child protection is about the presence of something new, not just the absence of risk.”

- Turnell and Edwards, Signs of Safety



We can think of clients as being in an on-going and modifiable relationship with constraining and sustaining elements and see our work as helping them shift their relationship with constraining elements and enhance their relationship with sustaining elements. If we think about these elements as separate entities, we can use externalizing conversations to examine the influence of the particular element on the life of the person as well as the influence of the person on the life of the particular element. When people experience themselves as being in a relationship with a problem rather than having or being a problem, they often experience a sense of relief and an increased ability to do something about the problem. Externalizing creates a space between people and problems that enables people to draw on previously obscured abilities, skills, and know-how to revise their relationship with the problem.

SIGNS OF SAFETY AND EXCEPTIONS

(from Turnell & Edwards, Signs of Safety)

It's important that we assess signs of risk, signs of safety, and exceptions to signs of risk. All families have strengths, resources, their own way of solving problems, even their own goals. These are signs of safety. Exceptions to signs of risk offer ways of both addressing risk and enhancing safety.

Exceptions are based on the assumption that problems are never complete in their effects, i.e., they may be happening but not all the time. All families have some history of sometimes being able to act in ways that somewhat contribute to their children's safety, well-being, and permanency.

While exceptions can be small and easy to overlook, they provide "windows of opportunity" for the development of safety, well-being, and permanency. Listening with "two ears" is critical and persistence is important – exceptions are often hidden, neglected, and minimized.

Details of the exception are important and can help you and the people you work with find truly meaningful exceptions. Family members themselves may be unaware of exceptions in their own lives – their own choices for future action may be reduced as a result. In this way, questions about exceptions are an intervention.

Sometimes exceptions spontaneously arise in conversation and sometimes they have to be actively sought out.

Sample Questions to Elicit Exceptions:

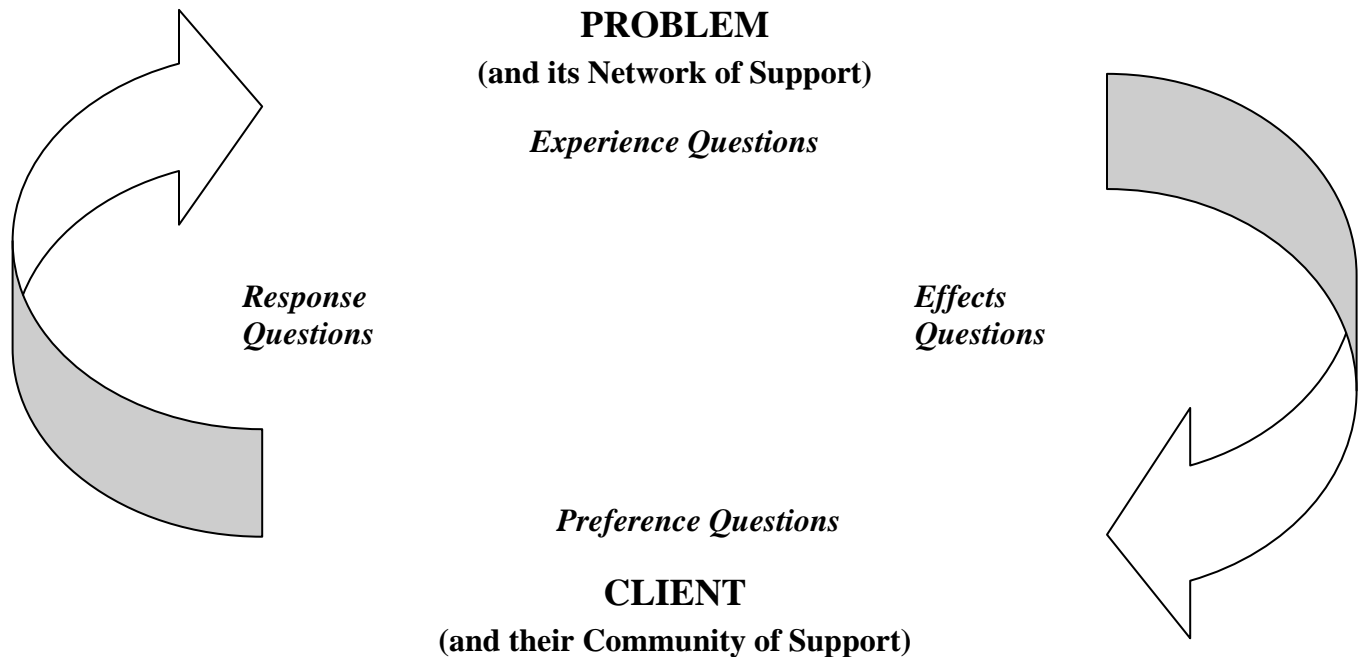
- Clearly, things have been really difficult for you. How have you coped with these pressures? What's kept you going?
- You have been telling me about how really bad things are now between (X+Y). Have they always been like that? Has there ever been a time when (X+Y) were able to have a different kind of relationship?
- When was the last time this problem happened? How have you managed to avoid it since then?
- Have you been in this situation before? What did you do that helped?

Sample Questions to Clarify Exceptions that Clients Mention:

- You said earlier on that it's not always like this. Can you tell me more about the other times?
- Did I hear you mention that things sometimes do go well – Can you tell me more about this?
- What was different about the times you felt like you handled the situation well? When did you do you that? What did you do?

A SIMPLE OUTLINE FOR EXTERNALIZING CONVERSATIONS (from Madsen, Collaborative Work with Multi-Stressed Families)

We can use the idea of externalizing to move from the idea of “protecting children from malfunctioning parents” to “partnering with parents to help them address things that pull them away from their better judgment, and better parenting. This shift has the potential make our work much easier. Externalizing conversations can be organized around four areas: clients’ *experience* of the problem, *effects* of the problem, client *preferences* about the problem’s effects, and client’s preferred ways of *responding* to the problem.



Purpose of Experience Questions

To separate the problem from the client through externalizing language and develop a rich understanding of a client’s experience of their relationship with that problem.

Purpose of Effects Questions

To develop a thorough understanding of the effects the problem has had on the client in different aspects and different relationships in his/her life. While we may learn about mixed effects and possibly beneficial effects, the primary focus is on negative effects of the problem.

Purpose of Preference Questions

To invite a client to consider how the problem’s effects fit or don’t fit with their preferred direction in life. To offer them an opportunity to take a position in relation to the problem, make their intentions and values known, and mobilize emotional energy behind that position.

Purpose of Response Questions

To elicit and elaborate a story of the client’s efforts to develop a different relationship with the problem (which may be to resist it, oppose it, overcome it, cope with it, contain or outgrow it, use it constructively, etc.). To invite the client to give meaning to this story and examine future possibilities as that story unfolds.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS IN EXTERNALIZING CONVERSATIONS

Experience of the Problem

- In what situations is XX most likely to come into your life?
- How do you notice it when XX shows up?
- What's it like having XX in your life?

Effects of the Problem

- When XX comes into your life, what effects does it have on you?
- What has XX gotten you to do that goes against your better judgment?
- What toll has XX taken on your life? (inquire about various aspects of life)
- What effects has XX had on others close to you?
- Has XX created problems for you in relationships? If so, in what ways?
- What does XX try to convince you about yourself? If XX were making decisions for you, where would it take you in your life?
- If XX were to get stronger in your life over the next 6 months, what do you think your life would look like then?

Preferences about the Effects of the Problem

- As you think about the various effects XX has had on your life and relationships, would you say these are positive or negative developments?
- Are those effects something you'd like more of or less of in your life?
- Why is that? In what ways do these effects fit or not fit with your hopes for your life?
- Where would you rather take your life?
- What do those intentions say about who you are and what you stand for in your life?

Response to the Effects of the Problem

- You say that you don't like the effects of XX and that you would like to find a way to keep it in its place. Towards that end, would it be okay if I ask you a little about some of your success in doing that?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to keep XX in its place a bit or keep on in the face of its attempts to hold you back?
- What did you do differently? How did you do that? Who helped you to do that? When or where are you more able to do that? (Go for details.)
- What steps did you take to develop a different relationship to XX? What did you do first? Then what?
- Was this a new development for you or have there been times in the past when you were able to do that?
- What does it mean to you that you've been able to do this?
- What does it tell you about yourself?
- What capacities or abilities or know-how does it show?
- How did you develop those capacities? Who helped you in developing them?
- How would you describe somebody who was able to do that? Does that description fit for you?
- As you continue down this new path, how will that affect other aspects of your life?

RE-THINKING “STENGTHS” (From Michael White, Narrative Therapy)

There is an increasing focus on the idea of building on client “strengths” in child welfare. While this is a positive development, we can take conversations about “strengths” even further in two ways:

1. We can elicit “strengths” not as stand alone entities (e.g. he is a good cook, she is a good basketball player), but as elements that sustain clients in relation to an agreed upon goal (e.g. elements that support a parent’s “best judgment” with his/her children).
2. We move from an *internal view* of strengths (thinking them as “belonging to people, as being inside them, as being lacking in some people or as being amenable to growth, harvesting, mining or extracting”) to an *intentional view of strengths* (thinking about them as achievements, qualities, skills of living, values, hopes, dreams, beliefs, and activities).

With an *intentional view* of strengths, we can view the Strength as an externalized entity and have richer conversations about the Strength by asking about:

- The ways in which a particular Strength is put into practice.
- The abilities, skills and wisdom that comprise this Strength.
- The history of the development of this Strength.
- The important people in a client’s life who have contributed to this Strength.
- The meaning this Strength holds for a client.
- The intentions, values and beliefs, hopes and dreams that stand behind this Strength.
- What this Strength says about who a client is and what he/she stands for” in his/her life.

Sample Questions to Externalize the “Strength” of Serenity:

- Can you tell me more about this Serenity?
- If Serenity was not a quality that you have, but something you do, what are the skills that go into it? What, for you, are the practices of Serenity?
- How did you develop those practices?
- How would you like to use Serenity in your life?
- Why is it important for you to use it in that way?
- What values are important here?
- When you think of those values, what hopes or dreams do they reflect?
- What do those hopes and dreams say about what you are committed to or what you stand for in your life?
- As you think back across your life, who do you think might particularly appreciate your pursuit of Serenity in the face of your son’s provocations?
- How have those people contributed to your development of Serenity?
- If they could witness your practice of Serenity, what do you think it would tell them about you?

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT FOR SAFETY, WELL-BEING AND PERMANENCY

(from Narrative Therapy)

Problems can disconnect people from important others in their lives. When this happens, problems often become stronger and people lose sight of aspects of their life outside the influence of problems. If problems gain influence when people are disconnected from others, then helping people reconnect to a supportive community can assist them in life. The development of a community of support can counteract the isolating effects of problems and help people stay in touch with alternative, preferred versions of who they are in their life. We can use a questioning process to help clients evoke and hold the presence of important others in their heads and hearts. This questioning process is called “re-membering conversations.” Re-membering conversations build a sense of solidarity with important others or “allies” in order to help clients better resist the influence of problems and pursue preferred directions in life.

It is important that we think broadly and creatively in the process of identifying potential allies. We can draw on people who have been important to clients in the past as well as the present. We can evoke important people who have passed away. Potential allies do not have to be directly known in order to be significant in people’s lives. They can be authors, characters in books or movies or comics, musicians, sports figures, or celebrities who are admired by clients. Allies also do not have to be people. They may be imaginary friends, important toys or favorite pets. Re-membering conversations that draw on important spiritual figures can lead to poignant and powerful conversations.

Sample Questions to Help People Evoke a Community of Support:

- As you think back across your life, who stands out someone who would be likely to recognize and appreciate your efforts to pull your life together in the face of the difficulties you’ve described?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with this person? How are they important to you in your life? How do you think you might be important to them in their life?
- What do they know about you or what have they witnessed you doing that would tell them that this commitment is important to you?
- How do you think their witnessing of this commitment on your part may have touched their life?
- If they were somehow here now and listening to our conversation, what do you think they might be thinking about it? What would it tell them about you?
- What’s it like for you to think about their response?
- What’s it like for you to be invoking their presence here?
- What could help you to hold onto their presence (virtually or actually) in your work?

AN OUTLINE FOR ELICITING WORKER BEST PRACTICE

(William Madsen adapted from Andrew Turnell)

Questions to Clarify the Purpose of the Conversation

Purpose:

- To clarify the purpose of the conversation, keep it focused and insure that supervisor and worker moving in the same direction.

Sample Questions:

- What would you like to focus on in this conversation?
- What would tell you this conversation had been useful to you?
- What could happen in this conversation that would make it worthwhile for you?

Questions to Elicit Best Practice or Exceptions

Purpose:

- To elicit worker's best practice or exceptions in challenging situations.

Sample Questions:

- Can you tell me about a piece of work that you felt good about?
- Can you tell me about a family you worked with where you were stuck and yet still made some progress?
- Can you tell me about a "train wreck" situation that had one small component that you felt okay about?

Possible questions if worker has a difficult time identifying a best practice or exception:

- What bugs you most about doing the work these days?
- What would you like to see differently?
- If you put your complaint and your hope together, what does it say about what you care about in this work? (I'm committed to the value or importance of ____.)
- What makes that important to you?
- Can you think of a time when you were able to bring a little bit of that into your work?

Questions to Develop the Practices of Best Practice:

Purpose:

- To jointly develop a concrete description of the details of best practices or exceptions (e.g. who, what, where, when, how) and to ground worker in the experience of that moment.

Sample Questions:

- What happened in this situation?
- When did this happen? Where did this happen? Who else was involved?
- How did you make this happen? What else did you do? What else? And what else?
- How did you get the idea to do it that way?
- Was that hard for you to do?
- What was the hardest part of doing this piece of work for you?
- So even though that part was hard, how did you keep it going?
- How did the other person helped to build this success?
- What would X say you did to contribute to achieving this outcome?
- How did you know what you were doing was helpful?
- What differences did you see in X that told you what you were doing was working?
- What is the thing that you feel proudest about in this situation?
- If we had a videotape of you doing that (the proudest thing), what would we see on the videotape?
- What are the practices that go into doing that?
- What concrete steps went into those practices?
- How did you prepare to take those steps?

Questions to Develop the Principles of Best Practice

Purpose:

- To draw out the principles/lessons from Best Practice and examine how principles/lessons might be applied in other work.

Sample Questions:

- What from this piece of work would you like to bring into other similar situations?
- If you were to consult with other colleagues working in a similar situation, what suggestions would you offer to them?
- When you think about this piece of work, what was the most important thing you learned?
- What would you like to do with those learnings? How would you like to bring those learnings more into your work?
- If you were to generate principles for your work based on these learnings, what might they be?

Questions to Develop the Meaning of Best Practice

Purpose:

- To learn more about the meaning of Best Practice (what it says about the worker's intentions, values and beliefs, hopes and dreams in their work) and why that is important to the worker.

Sample Questions:

- As you think about what you would like to do with those learnings, what does that say about what you value and what is important to you in your work?
- What does that say about your hopes and dreams for your self in doing this work?
- What does that say about what you are committed to and what you stand for in this work?

Questions to Develop a Community of Support for Best Practice

Purpose:

- To evoke the presence of other important members of worker's life who might appreciate the meaning of their Best Practice and stand in support of them in bringing Best Practice more into their work. This can be done through questions that evoke others who are not present or through acknowledging by other members of the team who are present.

Re-membering Questions:

- As you think back across your life, who would be most likely to recognize and appreciate your efforts to bring these Best Practices into your work?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with this person? How are they important to you in your life? How do you think you might be important to them in their life?
- What do they know about you or what have they witnessed you doing that would tell them this Best Practice is important to you?
- How do you think their witnessing of that may have touched their life?
- If they were somehow here now and listening to our conversation, what do you think they might be thinking about it? What would it tell them about you?
- What's it like for you to think about their response? What's it like for you to be invoking their presence here? What could help you to hold onto their presence (virtually or actually) in your work?

Questions for other Team members who may be witnessing the conversation:

- What stood out for you in what you have heard?
- How does that connect to events in your own life or work?
- What learnings do you want to remember and take away from listening to this?

Worker Response

Purpose:

- To offer worker an opportunity to respond to and build upon the conversation.

Sample Questions:

- What do you want to take away and remember from this conversation? Have you gotten what you wanted here? If not, what else needs to happen to help you achieve that goal?

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