



WHAT'S WORKING A SOLUTION-FOCUSED LENS

TAPS CONFERENCE 2026



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Jason is a popular speaker at national conferences; he specializes in making behavioral interventions and peer support strategies practical for frontline justice and recovery professionals.

STRUCTURAL PRESSURE TOWARD PROBLEM-FOCUS

- Risk assessments are built on risk factors
- Professional responsibility prioritizes preventing violations and harm
- Reports focus on problems, risks, and non-compliance
- Daily work becomes focused on addressing what is going wrong

BENEFITS OF A SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

- Changes the conversation from defending past behavior to planning future success
- Increases engagement
- Decreases resistance
- Provides positive reinforcement
 - 4:1 ratio
- Strengthens connection to motivation for success
- Decreases burnout

INTEGRATING A SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH



Enforcing sanctions...does not mean switching to a more heavy-handed approach. An agent can enforce orders without leaving motivational strategies behind.



- NIC

- Accountability and support can occur **together**
- Violations can still include **future-focused conversation**
- Enforcement does not prevent **discussion of next steps**
- Shift from **replaying problems** → **planning improvement**
- Consequences can still include **solution-focused questions**
- Goal: **clear expectations + collaborative problem-solving**

WHAT IS SFBT

Perspectives and techniques come from SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY (SFBT)

- SFBT is primarily a perspective, not just techniques
 - We will be focused on non-clinical applications
- Focus on what clients want instead of problems
- Focus on what is working
- Focus on small next steps and existing strengths

HOW PERSPECTIVE CHANGES

PROBLEM-FOCUSED

What went wrong

Why it happened

What needs fixing

Violations and risk

Past problems

Preventing failure

SOLUTION-FOCUSED

What's wanted instead

How it gets better

What helps it work

Progress and improvement

Strengths and resources

Next steps toward success

WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE?

PROBLEM-FOCUSED

What happened?

Why did it happen?

What went wrong?

What rules were violated?

What past problems do we need to fix?

How do we prevent failure?

SOLUTION-FOCUSED

What would you like to see change?

How does it get better?

What has helped in the past?

What progress is possible from here?

What are your strengths and resources?

What is the next step forward?

A SOLUTION-FOCUSED PERSPECTIVE

Recalculating



ONE CORE VALUE: CURIOSITY



GET CURIOUS

- What works when things go well?
- What is desired?

The goal isn't to fix or teach

3 RULES

RULE 1

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
(Maintenance is acceptable)

RULE 2

If it works, do more of it.

RULE 3

If it doesn't work, don't try harder; try something different.

4 PRINCIPLES

Clients CAN change

- Unconditional positive regard
 - Always kind, not always nice
- Change is inevitable
- Our role is to increase capacity and reorient client's perspective
 - NOT to save or fix

Draw on intrinsic qualities, strengths, and relationships

Expectancy and hope

- Be the voice of inevitable successful change
- Without this, “questions turn into techniques, not therapy”
 - *Elliot Connie*
- Are they feeling interrogated?

Focus on desired outcomes & best possible self

WHAT WE LISTEN FOR

1. Preferred outcomes
2. Exceptions
3. Previous successes
4. Progress
5. Effort
6. Strengths
7. Resources
8. Coping
9. Confidence signals
10. Moments of (partial) success
11. Next steps

“

The tragedy story and the hero story are the exact same story. It just depends on how you listen. . . Our responsibility is to listen, with a very specific ear to the hero in the trauma story. If you can train yourself to hear heroes whenever you hear tragedy, now you are doing solution-focused brief therapy at a very high level.

”

- Elliot Connie

TECHNIQUE 1 – EXCEPTION QUESTIONS

Exception questions explore times when the problem was absent, less severe, or better managed.

Exceptions are clues to solutions.

PURPOSE

- Show the problem isn't constant
- Identify existing effective behaviors
- Provide ideas for next steps
- Shift attention from failure to capability

EXAMPLES

“When was a time you wanted to use but didn't?”

“When have you been able to stay on track with rules and conditions?”

“When does following the rules feel a little easier?”

“When have you been able to get through other tough situations?”

TECHNIQUE 2 – PRESUPPOSING QUESTIONS

Presuppositional questions are structured to assume that improvement or progress will occur.

It isn't if change will happen, it is how change will happen.

PURPOSE

- Encourage hope
- Focus on progress
- Shift from current struggle to future improvement

EXAMPLES

“What has been better, even a little bit, since the last time we met?”

“What are you doing that helps you stay on track with your conditions?”

“When you start to make these changes, what will be your first step?”

TECHNIQUE 3 – COPING QUESTIONS

Coping questions highlight how the client has managed to continue functioning despite significant difficulty.

Survival and resilience come before success.

PURPOSE

- Identify client strengths and skills
- Improve self-efficacy
- Identify what to do more of

EXAMPLES

“Given what happened, how did you still manage to come in?”

“Despite your slip, what stopped total disaster from happening?”

“How did you learn to cope with such a difficult situation?”

“What are you doing that keeps things from getting worse?”

TECHNIQUE 4 – PREFERRED FUTURE / INSTEAD QUESTIONS

Preferred future and “instead” questions shift the conversation from the problem to the goal.

Goals move people forward; problems only explain the past.

PURPOSE

- Describe what “better” looks like
- Move from analysis to specific behavior/outcome goals
- Identify benefits of success

EXAMPLES

“When things start going better, what will you notice that is different?”

“What would a good week look like to you?”

“If you weren’t using so much, what would you like to be doing instead?”

“What advice do you imagine your future self would give your present self?”

TECHNIQUE 5 – SCALING QUESTIONS

Scaling questions ask clients to rate their current situation, progress, confidence, or readiness on a numerical or visual scale.

Scaling questions do a lot of heavy lifting.

PURPOSE

- Reduce “black and white” / “all or nothing” thinking
- Focus on noticing change
- Identify next small steps

EXAMPLES

“On a scale of 1-10, with 0 being the least and 10 being the most. . .?”

“If you started at a 0 and your goal is a 10, where are you today?”

“Last week you said you were [X], on the same scale, where are you today?”

TECHNIQUE 5 – SCALING: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Scaling questions benefit from structured follow-up questions.

FOLLOW-UP: WHAT MAKES IT BETTER?

- Always step toward the positive
 - High end is good, ask 1 number down
 - Low end is good, ask 1 number up
- “What makes you a 7 instead of a 6?”

OTHER WAYS TO FOLLOW-UP

What helped you get to that number?

What keeps you at that number instead of moving backward?

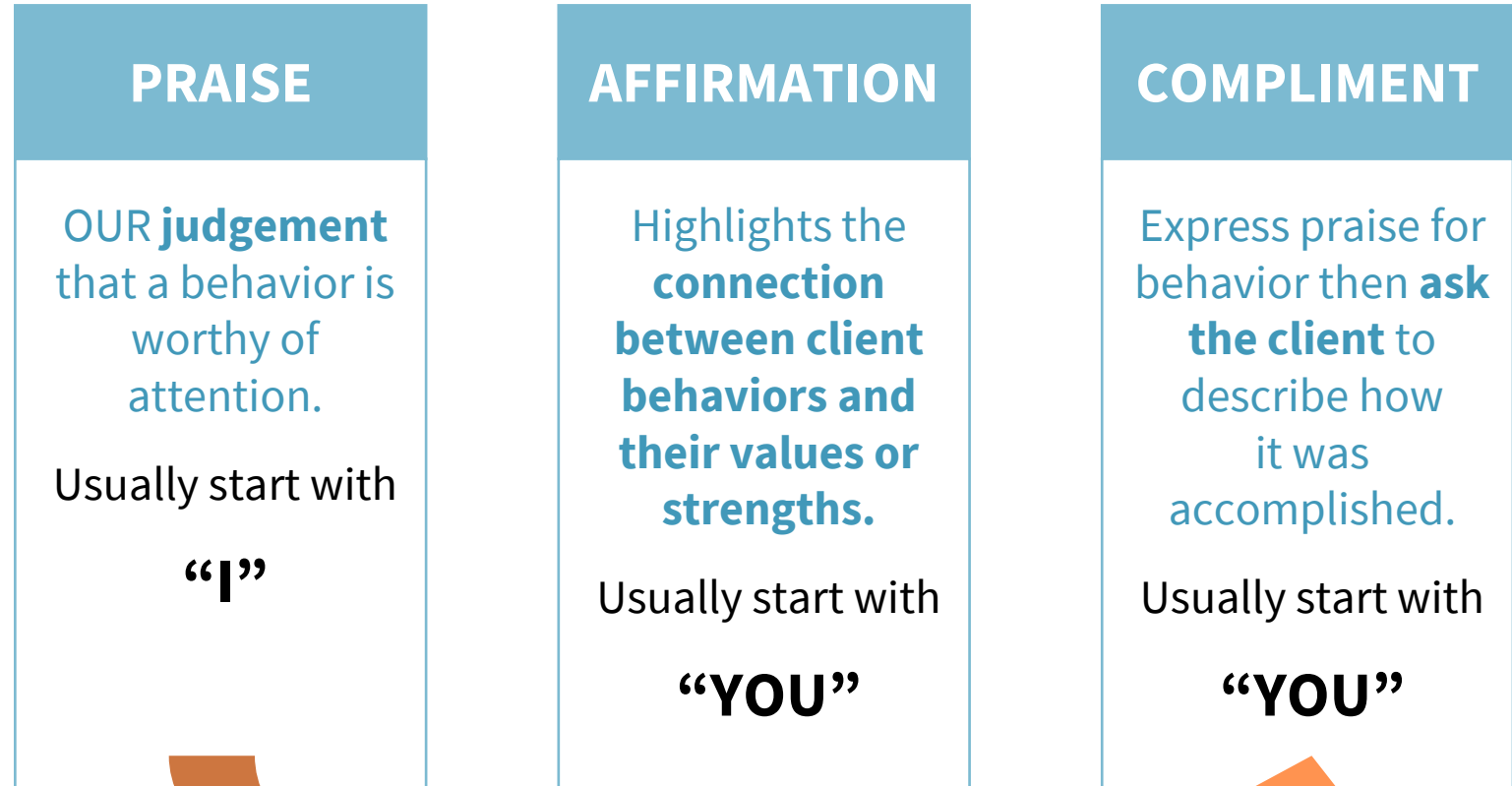
What would move it one step forward?

What would you/others notice when you take a step forward?

COMPLIMENTS

Purpose

- Validate and reinforce self-efficacy
- Must be genuine and often low-key, direct, and simple



NOTICE NO “WHY” QUESTIONS

“

Too many people ask nothing but “Why” questions. They analyze and analyze problems - but no solution. “you can analyze a glass of water, and you’re left with a lot of chemical components, but nothing you can drink”. “Why?” questions can drive us crazy. “What?” questions drive us sane. What questions lead us to practical solutions.

”

– Peter McWilliams

CHECK OUT

Take a moment to think and write your answers to these questions.

I'll ask a few members of the audience to share their answer to each question.

QUESTION 1

What will be the first things your clients notice that tells them something has changed about how you approach case management?

QUESTION 2

What difference do you want this approach to make – not just for your clients but for you?

QUESTION 3

Imagine it is 6 months from now and you have been consistently using a solution-focused approach:

- a) If someone shadowed you for a day, what would they see that shows you're working in a solution-focused way?
- b) What would you hope your most challenging client would say about you?
- c) What advice would this future version of yourself give your present-day self?



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