

# **Western Australian Solution Focused Interest Group (WASFIG) Meeting 17**



## **WASFIG Best Hopes: Share, Connect, Grow, Learn, Develop**

1. Share SF knowledge and update our SF knowledge since our original training;
2. Connect and network with like-minded SF practitioners to reduce isolation and enhance a community spirit;
3. Grow interest in the SFBT approach in WA and beyond and do our bit to change the world one SF step at a time;
4. Learn where and with whom SF might be best applied in our practices for greater focus;
5. Develop our clinical effectiveness and efficiency (we may only have a set number of sessions so how do we do the very best with each session as though it may be the only one or the last).

## **WASFIG Zoom Meeting 17 Review: Saturday 27 April 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time**

**When:** Saturday 27 April 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD/VIC/NSW = 11:30am-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)

**Where:** Zoom

**Attendees:** Theresa Acutt, Nadia Truong, Fiona Skahill, Roger Lowe, Ruth Leveson, Katti Jisuk Seo, Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond (Co-Coordinationators).

**Apologies:** Yvette Strawbridge, Shona Scallan, Emma Burns, Matt Cameron, Adrian Holmes, Rebekah Collins, and Lisa Jooste.

**Group Facilitators:** Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

**Group Presenter:** Kerry Drummond

## **Topic: Solution Focused Self Care – Building Resilient Clients and Vicariously Resilient Practitioners**

Our April 2024 WASFIG meeting was broken into two parts. Firstly, we explored how SFBT is good for building, or uncovering, resilience in our clients and protective against burnout for ourselves as practitioners. Part 2 looked at some self care tips with a solution focused flavour from Anne Ludz and Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs as well as some ideas from attendees.

Steve started out by inviting attendees to introduce themselves and to share their Best Hopes from the group, what has gone well and a self care tip. As we went around the group, we noticed the power of SFBT in action. As attendees shared their self care tip or what's been going well for them they would shine with energy when sharing something that works for themselves and this was inspiring for the group to enjoy:

*A power walk to start the day, caring for oneself to better care for our child, play music in the lounge to draw oneself out of bed and start the day with a dance, thinking about how to get through life transition in a good way, going shopping with a friend, setting positive intention to connect with friends in a good way, and how SF ideas have been useful to improve personal relationships as well as supporting clients.*

Even in this moment of sharing, the power of eliciting ‘strategies’ from a person is evident – building on what is already working for the person rather than suggesting something that might not be helpful, and noticing how building on the difference this makes is validating and empowering for the person and energizing for the observer to enjoy listening to these great ideas of self care.

### ***SFBT is Protective for Practitioners Against Burnout***

We began by listening to Evan George of BRIEF London talk about how SFBT is not only good for clients but is good for practitioners to protect against burnout as well: <https://www.brief.org.uk/videos.html>

Evan shared that we co-construct resilient clients, we assume the client will make the change when we provide the context in which this is most likely to happen and we elicit stories of capacity and resilience. This enables the practitioner to connect with extraordinary people managing in difficult times which supports us against burnout.

In co-constructing resilient clients we shine light on the resilient version of the client in the shadows by asking questions for the client to describe this version of themselves in more detail (either in the past, present or future). In doing so the client is more likely to notice this version of themselves showing up in future – what this version thinks, feels, senses and does when engaging with others. Most importantly, the client and practitioner discovers how this resilient version of themselves shows up when interacting with the problem. Adam Froerer of the Solution Focused Universe has clarified that how the client interacts differently with the problem is ‘the solution’. The practitioner is inspired by listening in a way to hear amazing experiences about how a client has coped – revealing their strength amidst adversity – which builds vicarious resilience.

### ***Practitioners are Strengthened from Hearing about Client Strengths***

Practitioners can become more vicariously resilient when helping clients to focus on their strengths, resources and resilience as SFBT shifts focus from trauma to preferred future, seeing through the problem details to who the client really is and who they would like to become despite trauma experiences. (Froerer, von Ciffra-Bergs, Kim and Connie, 2018)

Seeing through the problem details to who the client is by holding onto the Solution Focused mindset of believing in client capacity despite the problem presentation is a way to hold onto hope and share this with the client through our questions.

Froerer et al (2018) share a definition of Vicarious Resilience by Frey, Beesley, Abbott and Kendrick (2017: 226-227):

Practitioners can be positively affected by client resilience and experience greater work satisfaction, personal growth and happier mood.

Vicarious resilience may include the following components:

1. Being positively affected by the resilience of clients,
2. Having an alteration of the clinician’s own perspective of their own life,
3. Perceiving that the therapy was valuable,
4. Some personal growth or transformation experienced by the clinician, and
5. Feelings of gratification or happiness as a result of doing this helping work.

## ***Building Resilient Clients and Vicariously Resilient Practitioners***

Attendees shared their ideas about how listening in a Solution Focused way builds resilient clients and vicariously resilient practitioners:

- Listening for strengths and creating lists of strengths to share with the client.
- Asking coping questions to identify and build on a client's existing strategies.
- Importance of 'validating curiosity' to keep with the client's pace and match their intensity of emotion so the client is validated and heard as we show up as a human first and have a compassionate conversation.
- Believing in the client's capacity and then finding evidence to support this belief builds a sense of possibility for the client continuing to overcome their problem – the practitioner is intentionally listening for and then tapping into client resilience.
- As we sift through the problem story in our mind, focusing on and listening for signs of the client's capacity, times they managed to overcome the problem we feel hopeful, inspired, in awe of what the client has been able to achieve despite the problem.
- As practitioners we experience this 'feel good' moment of amazement of the unconquerable human spirit despite adversity – we enjoy a sense of vicarious resilience. Experiencing a hopeful thought while listening to a problem story can be calming and energising for a practitioner, clears our mind to focus on discovering with the client what continuing on this pathway forward in a more intentional way might look like.
- Admiration for our client's capacity to overcome their problems at times and curiosity to learn how they did this causes us to respectfully acknowledge the challenge of the journey and ask the client what they did to get through despite this difficulty (validating curiosity – Mark McKergow). Adam Froerer SFU – suggests exploring with the client how great were you, what is it about you that makes you great, what does the future as a great person look like. Asking clients self-complimenting questions around their capacity to overcome challenges indirectly shares the practitioner's admiration for the client with them.
- Considering the practitioner's hopeful perspective and answering these questions can provide the client with an alternative more resilient perception of themselves and their experience. The resilient version of the client is evoked and further empowered in session. Hearing the client's answers to these hopeful questions continues to inspire the practitioner, building a feedback loop of resilience and vicarious resilience.

## ***Solution Focused Self Care Scale***

During Part 2 of our meeting, we considered some Solution Focused self care tips. Attendees were invited to rate their self care on the self care scale:

On a scale of 0-10 where 10 is your practitioner self care is at your best with good work/life balance, and 0 is 'what is a weekend?', where are you now?

What are 3 things that you are already doing that put you at X not lower?

When have you been highest on this scale?

What were you doing at this point on your self care scale that you were proud of yourself for doing?

What would be 3 things you would be doing at X+1?

How would a friend, family member or colleague know you were at X+1 on your self care scale?

Anne Ludz recently released a Solution Focused self care article where she reminded us that 'prioritising self care is an act of self respect.' She presents some great tips for self care and some Solution Focused scaling questions we can ask ourselves to better nurture our wellbeing: <https://solutionfocused.net/solution-focused-self-care/>

### ***Solution Focused Self Care Tips for Practitioners – Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs (2021)***

- *If it is not working change it and do more of what does work* – what is one thing you can do differently to work in a way that maintains energy and hope and moves towards self care instead of fatigue?
- *Search for exceptions (or instances!)* - look for sparkling moments within yourself, clients, and others in your life to celebrate and amplify these.
- *Create pockets of self care* – a moment of peace within a challenging situation – a moment to intentionally pause and create a pocket of joy.

### ***References:***

Froerer, A., von Cziffra-Bergs, J., Kim, J. and Connie, E. (2018), Vicarious Resilience. In A. Froerer, J. Von Cziffra-Bergs, J. Kim, and E. Connie, E. (Eds.), *Solution-Focused Brief Therapy with Clients Managing Trauma*, USA: Oxford University Press

George, E. (2020), *How SF Protects Us Against Burnout*, BRIEF London, <https://www.brief.org.uk/videos.html>; Accessed 24 January 2020

Ludz, A. (2024), *Solution Focused Self Care*, <https://solutionfocused.net/solution-focused-self-care/> ; Accessed 22 April 2024

Medina, A. and Beyebach, M. (2014), The Impact of Solution-focused Training on Professionals' Beliefs, Practices and Burnout of Child Protection Workers in Tenerife Island, *Child Care in Practice*, 20(1): 7-36, DOI: 10.1080/13575279.2013.847058

Pérez Lamadrid, Marcos and Froerer, Adam S. (2022), Solution Focused Brief Therapy and Vicarious Resilience in Bolivian Protective Family Services Workers, *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*, 6(1), Article 4. Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol6/iss1/4>

von Cziffra-Bergs, J. (2021) *Self Care and Compassion Fatigue*, Online Training Workshop, Completed 21 June 2021

### ***Follow up Question:***

A question was raised about how SFBT connects enough to client emotions for clients who have experienced complex trauma, and whether SFBT is too positive and does not encourage the practitioner to understand or appreciate the depth and breadth of how trauma has affected people. There is an article attached outlining the importance of using emotions in our SF questioning by Cecil Walker, Adam Froeoer and Natalia Gourlay-Fernandez (2021) *The Value of Using Emotions in SFBT*. As SF practitioners we make a choice to privilege our client's strength and resilience, appreciating the depth and breadth of their resources and coping capacity instead of focusing on their pathology and possible causes of their problems. A client will present in session with both their resilience and the impact of trauma on their lives. The SF practitioner chooses to listen for and amplify the client's history of success and capacity for future success.

Elliott Connie of the SFU has encouraged us to remember that therapy cannot 'undo' trauma but instead can build a client's resilience to endure trauma even when it is still ongoing. SF questions invite our client to focus on who they want to become despite the trauma experience. Working with trauma is hard when you focus on the problem and become overwhelmed by it, so instead to ask the client what their Desired Outcome/Best Hopes are given their experience and then stubbornly believe that the client is capable of achieving this by looking for 'evidence' of this in their life. When our client has someone believing in them they have more courage to climb another step up the

mountain. *What do you know about yourself that gives you the confidence that you can get to the next chapter in your life?* SF questions shift focus from pain to possibility.

In Elliott's new Podcast *Family Therapy* during a trauma counselling session with his client Elliott was encouraging his client to shift her attention to the positive things in her life that her mind was interpreting as 'neutral' due to her trauma history and attempts to protect herself from disappointment. The client made a comment that she would work to "fake it 'til I make it!" and Elliott responded with reminding the client not to think this way as that would imply that positive things are not happening in her life when she had acknowledged that they are, so instead he encouraged his client to "*notice it until it becomes reality*".

In preparing for his upcoming SFBT with trauma course in June 2024, Chris Iveson has recently reiterated:

*Many experts say that resolving post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a long-term process taking weeks, months or even longer. Experience tells us PTSD can be resolved in a single session. There are many complex theories about PTSD and its impact on the brain; as usual, the more complex the theory the more complex (and longer) the treatment. For the Solution Focused Brief Therapist PTSD is simply the past getting in the way of the future. Our task then becomes to **help our client see that future more clearly and trust that the strengths needed to live with PTSD will be more than enough to carry the client into the future they are seeking.***

*SFBT will teach you how to help your clients see, and even experience, a future they would love to live and how to look back into their past and discover the history they missed, a history powerful enough to support a new and more fulfilling life.*

### **Information for our Upcoming WASFIG Zoom Meeting 18 in June 2024**

Please join us for our June 2024 WASFIG meeting where **Adrian Holmes** will continue our conversation on using the SFBT approach when working with clients who have experienced trauma. Adrian will sharing his thoughts and experience in working with clients and tips from his book *Tools for Hard Conversations*.

### **WASFIG June 2024 Zoom Meeting 18: Saturday 22 June 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time**

**When: Saturday 22 June 2024 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD/VIC/NSW = 11:30pm-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)**

### **Topic: Special Guest Speaker Adrian Holmes on 'Tools for Hard Conversations'**

Adrian is a counsellor, supervisor and trainer and has co-authored a book with Jane D'Arcy called *Tools for Hard Conversations in the Helping Professions*. Building on the focus from our WASFIG April 2024 meeting, exploring how SFBT builds resilient clients and vicariously resilient practitioners, this book provides a road map to enable clients and practitioners to "walk away stronger from each therapeutic conversation." ASFA members might like to watch (or re-watch) Adrian's recorded presentation on this topic from March 2021 as a warm up to the session!

Here is a link to Adrian's book:

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Tools-Hard-Conversations-Helping-Professions/dp/1922332011#:~:text=Tools%20For%20Hard%20Conversations%20will,often%20comes%20with%20these%20roles.>

### **In preparing for our June 2024 WASFIG meeting:**

We would like to invite you to notice, from now until the June 2024 WASFIG meeting, what are your 'tools for hard conversations' that you have found useful in working with clients experiencing trauma, grief or other challenging experiences? How have these tools helped you work in a protective and hopeful way with your clients? What

difference has using these tools made for yourself and your clients? Please join us in June 2024 as we share our thoughts and continue to inspire each other in amplifying strength amidst adversity in our clients' lives.

### **WASFIG News:**

#### **May 2024:**

**SF24 Friday 3 May 2024 – 24 hour Solution Focused Worldwide Online Conference.**

**SFBT: Skills Practice and Supervision Groups via Zoom** — 2 hour bi monthly groups meeting with 4 or 5 practitioners to get support on client cases and practice SF skills together. Groups to be held on **Friday 10 May 2024 at 9:30am-11:30am WA time** and **Saturday 25 May 2024 9:30am-11:30am**. Contact Kerry if you are interested in more information which I have posted on the WASFIG Facebook page. 10% discount for the first group for WASFIG members who have attended a meeting and for ASFA members.

**September 2024 - ASFA Conference 2024 held in Sydney on 12-15 September 2024** - with Mark McKergow as key note speaker. For more information see the ASFA website below.

Join the **Australasian Solution Focused Association** to access free workshops with special guest presenters during the year (which is recorded to access at a later time if you cannot attend), articles from the Journal of Solution Focused Practices, monthly online peer group supervision on Monday afternoons, and the members only Facebook group. <https://www.solutionfocused.org.au/>

Please join our **WASFIG Facebook Group** to keep connecting between meetings, see up to date news, share great SFBT resources and get support in working with clients: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3103428583276551>

Thank you all for attending our April 2024 WASFIG meeting and inspiring the group with useful SF Self care tips! Looking forward to seeing all who can attend at our June 2024 WASFIG meeting.

Warmly,

Kerry and Steve (WA SFBT Interest Group Co-Coordinator)

*The SFBT practitioner listens to the problem and hears the hope.* – Simon and Taylor (2024, p. 39)