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# UNIT 4 SOLUTION FOCUSED COUNSELING AND INTEGRATIVE COUNSELING

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## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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Solution Focused counseling is a brief therapy which focuses on solution finding rather than looking at the history of the problem etc. It is based on solution focused brief therapy model. Solution focused therapy focuses on people's strength, competence, and possibilities instead of their deficits, weaknesses and limitations (O'Hanlon & Weiner Davis 1989). As such, it represents a dramatic shift in focus from previous approaches that seek to identify and explain problems and their origins. Solution focused therapy is a form of brief therapy. The number of sessions varies, but is usually under ten sessions with an average of four or five. Sometimes just one session is adequate.

Most counseling approaches focus on problems, thus implying that something is wrong with the client. This emphasis on deficits usually leads to an extensive and time consuming exploration of problems, etiology, histories and causes. In contrast, the solution focused counseling takes a positive approach of the client and puts emphasis on the generation of solutions based on the strengths and assets of the client.

In this unit we will discuss the solution focused approach in counseling and describe the solution focused brief therapy. Further we will also discuss about the integrative approach to counseling which emphasises on the integration of different approaches to address the common goal of the client's benefit and betterment.

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## 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Define solution focused counseling;
- Explain the assumptions of solution focused therapy;
- Describe how to carry out the solution focused brief therapy;
- Analyse the pros and cons of solution focused therapy; and
- Explain the concept of integrative counseling.

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## 4.2 MEANING OF SOLUTION FOCUSED COUNSELING

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Solution focused counseling focuses on what clients want to achieve through therapy rather than on the problem(s) that made them to seek help. The approach does not focus on the past, but instead, focuses on the present and future. The major emphasis is on the solutions rather than the problem. Brief solution-focused counseling is grounded in four decades of psychotherapy outcome research on the essential ingredients of therapeutic change (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). Based on multiple analyses of research in counseling and psychotherapy, Lambert and colleagues (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Lambert & Ogles, 2004) concluded that effective outcomes result primarily from the operation of four “common factors” of change. Common factors are the essential ingredients of change that operate across different clients, problems, settings, and theoretical models. These elements are also referred to as “nonspecific factors” because they operate across all theoretical approaches and are not specific to any one particular model. Successful therapeutic outcomes appear to result primarily from the operation of four interrelated factors. These factors, and their percentage of contribution to successful outcomes, are as follows:

*Client factors* (accounting for 40% of change): Everything that the client brings to counseling—strengths, interests, perceptions, values, social supports, resilience, and other resources

*Relationship factors* (accounting for 30% of change): The client’s experience of respect, collaboration, acceptance, and validation from the counselor

*Hope factors* (accounting for 15% of change): The client’s positive expectancy and anticipation of change

*Model/technique factors* (accounting for 15% of change): The counselor’s theoretical model and intervention techniques

Thus it can be seen that clients have a major contribution toward the success of counseling. Solution focused counseling believes in the strength of the clients and believes that clients have the capacity to find solutions.

The solution focused brief counseling (SFBC) was developed by Steve deShazer (1985). He discovered that by focusing on solutions rather than problems, clients were getting better faster than with traditional counseling modalities. Thus there is a shift of focus in the SFBC from the traditional problems focus to a solution focus, where exploring the problem was minimized. SFBC outlines an active role of the client, attributing the success of the therapy mostly to the client’s efforts.

Implicit in the model is the belief that clients are not always overcome by problems, e.g., depressed clients are not always depressed, there are times when they are not depressed. Thus clients can always identify times and situations when the problem was not there. By rediscovering these resources/ instances, clients are encouraged to analyse them and repeat those successes. Thus SBFC approach emphasises problem solving and client-produced solutions. It does not go for in depth exploration and the causes and origins of the problem; thereby reducing the time required for counseling; hence it is called ‘brief’. Moreover, when the focus is on solutions, actions become of primary importance and insight is deemphasised.

#### 4.2.1 Key Assumptions of Solution-Focused Counseling

Murphy (2008) delineated the following assumptions of solution focused counseling:

1) *If it works, do more of it. If it doesn't work, do something different.*

This assumption captures the pragmatic nature of solution-focused counseling. It involves identifying what works and doing more of it; encouraging the clients to build on their strength, success and other resources. If it doesn't work, then try something else. The value of any technique rests on its practical usefulness in promoting change and moving clients closer to their goals.

2) *Every client is unique, resourceful, and capable of changing.*

Adopting a position of curiosity enables us to approach every client from a fresh perspective that honors his or her unique circumstances, goals, and resources. It encourages the clients to recognise and apply their unique strengths and resources toward meaningful goals. Viewing clients as capable and resourceful does not deny the seriousness or pain of a problem. It does, however, create solution opportunities that might otherwise be overlooked.

3) *Cooperative relationships enhance solutions.*

The quality of the client-practitioner alliance is the best predictor of outcomes in counseling (Wampold, 2001). Effective counseling relationships are built on mutual respect and common goals. This includes our accommodation of clients' goals, resources, and feedback, and their trust in our commitment and ability to help them reach their goals.

4) *Client feedback improves outcomes.*

In addition to creating cooperative and accountable relationships, obtaining formal feedback from clients on outcome and alliance has been shown to double the effectiveness of counseling (Lambert et al., 2003).

5) *No problem is constant.*

Regardless of how constant a problem seems, there are always fluctuations in its rate and intensity. Solution-focused counselors seek out these fluctuations or “exceptions” to the problem by directly asking for them (e.g., “Tell me about a recent time when the problem did not occur, or wasn't as bad as usual”), exploring the conditions under which they occur (e.g., “What was different about that time than usual?”), and encouraging students and others to do more of whatever they have done to bring them about (e.g., “What will it take to make that happen more often?”). In addition to providing clues to solutions, discussing exceptions may increase people's hope in the possibility of solutions and in their ability to bring them about.

6) *Big problems do not always require big solutions.*

Solution-focused counseling is based on the practical notion that one small change in any part of the problem system can ripple into larger and more significant changes.

O'Hanlon & Weiner Davis (1989) have provided the following assumptions which act as the foundation of solution-focused therapy:

People have strengths, resources, and the ability to resolve the challenges they face in life.

Change is always possible and is always happening.

The counselor's job is to help clients identify the change that is happening and to help them bring about even more change.

Most problems do not require a great deal of gathering of historical information to resolve them.

The resolution of a problem does not require knowing what caused it.

Small changes lead to more changes.

With rare exceptions, clients are the most qualified people to identify the goal of therapy. (Exceptions include illegal goals [e.g., child abuse] and clearly unrealistic goals.)

Change and problem resolution can happen quickly.

There's always more than one way to look at a situation.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1) What do you mean by solution focused counseling?

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2) Solution focused counseling puts emphasis on the present and future. Elaborate.

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3) Discuss the importance of bringing about small changes in one's behaviour in the context of solution focused brief therapy.

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## 4.3 PROCEDURE OF SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY

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Solution focused work can be seen as a way of working that focuses exclusively or predominantly on two things.

- a) Supporting people to explore their preferred futures.
- b) Exploring when, where, with whom and how pieces of that preferred future are already happening.

Thus solution focused therapy starts with the client envisioning a preferred future, i.e., what does he want, how does he want his future to be. The therapist/counselor uses respectful curiosity to enable the client to envision their preferred future. With the help of the therapist the client starts his journey of achieving his desired goals.

By helping people identify the things that they wish to have changed in their life and also to attend to those things that are currently happening that they wish to continue to have happen, SFBT therapists help their clients to construct a concrete vision of a *preferred future* for themselves. The SFBT therapist then helps the client to identify times in their current life that are closer to this future, and examines what is different on these occasions.

By bringing these small successes to their awareness, and helping them to repeat these successful things they do when the problem is not there or less severe, the therapists helps the client move towards the preferred future they have identified. To support this, questions are asked about the client's story, strengths and resources, and about exceptions to the problem.

### 4.3.1 The Miracle Question

This is a method of questioning that a coach, therapist, or counselor uses to aid the client to envision how the future will be different when the problem is no longer present. Also, this may help to establish goals.

A traditional version of the miracle question would go like this:

“Suppose our meeting is over, you go home, do whatever you planned to do for the rest of the day. And then, some time in the evening, you get tired and go to sleep. And in the middle of the night, when you are fast asleep, a miracle happens and all the problems that brought you here today are solved just like that. But since the miracle happened overnight nobody is telling you that the miracle happened. When you wake up the next morning, how are you going to start discovering that the miracle happened? ... What else are you going to notice? What else?”

In another instance/situation, the counselor may ask,

“If you woke up tomorrow, and a miracle happened so that you no longer easily lost your temper, what would you see differently?” What would the first signs be that the miracle occurred?”

The client (a child) may respond by saying,

“I would not get upset when somebody calls me names.”

The counselor wants the client to develop positive goals, or what they will do, rather than what they will not do -to better ensure success. So, the counselor may ask the client, “What will you be doing instead when someone calls you names?”

Thus the counselor enables the client to identify the resources through the use of solution talk, that is focus is on what is right and working for the client rather than what is wrong and problematic. Thus solution talk is practised rather than problem talk.

### 4.3.2 Exception Seeking

In this, the clients are encouraged to seek out instances of exception when the problem was not present, for instance ; when, where and how these instances occur, are considered and then solutions are developed based on these.

### 4.3.3 Establishing Positive Goals

In this the clients are encouraged to have positive goals (what they 'can' do) rather than negative goals (i.e., to stop doing something, e.g., fighting, disrupting, playing etc.). The counselor helps clients identify positively worded goals that reflect what they do want to happen which will be a measurable goal.

### 4.3.4 Resources can be Internal or External

Internal refers to the client's skills, strengths, qualities, beliefs that are useful to them and their capacities. External refers to supportive relationships such as, partners, family, friends, faith or religious groups and also support groups. This helps the client identify new ways of bringing these resources to bear upon the problem.

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## 4.4 POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS OF SOLUTION FOCUSED COUNSELING

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According to Iveson (2002), "Since its origins in the mid-1980s, solution-focused brief therapy has proved to be an effective intervention across the whole range of problem presentations. SFBC has wide applications, especially in the school setting. The school counselor has an enormous task of providing counseling to all the students in the school.

Given this the practicing school counselors find it difficult to find the counseling theoretical approaches which can be effectively used for the school setting. Though the counselors need to know all the theoretical approaches including psychodynamic, behavioural, transactional analysis, cognitive behavioural, Adlerian and person-centred, they face a tough task to use the counseling strategies that can actually be applied given the realities of a school setting. In this scenario, the solution focused therapy offers them a great technique which has effective application in the school setting.

SFBC gives rise to immediate observable changes in the behaviour which the clients often want. Clients, parents and teachers or other stakeholders in counseling often want immediate change and solution to the problem. Solution focused therapy helps in bringing about quick changes. This also helps motivate the client.

Some of **the merits** of solution focused counseling can be mentioned as given below:

- SFBC is more action-oriented.
- It is brief as is indicated by its name and less expensive as less number of sessions are required.

- Counselors who use this method make a conscious use of time by engaging the client quickly and keeping the client focused on goals and priorities.
- SFBC is strengths-based. It focuses on the strengths and skills and resources of the client.
- SFBC uses the positive expectations of therapists to affect client success.
- Clear goals are identified early on in the process of solution focused counseling. Because of this, both client and counselor know what success will look like and can more easily identify when therapy is no longer needed.
- SFBC may help in reducing the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression and interpersonal relationships may be improved.

**Self Assessment Questions**

- 1) What do you mean by the ‘miracle question’?  
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- 2) Explain the meaning of positive goals and describe its importance in solution focused counseling.  
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- 3) Discuss the advantages of solution focused counseling.  
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## **4.5 CONCEPT AND MEANING OF INTEGRATIVE COUNSELING**

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Counseling field is marked by a myriad of theories each with its own assumptions, procedure and techniques, contributing to the common goal of helping the client. Each theory has its own strengths and limitations. A practicing counselor is required to understand the basic concept of all the theoretical approaches to counseling. However, when it comes to implementation, the counselor may get bound by the applicability of a particular approach to the concerned situation/context. For instance, it will be difficult to apply psychodiagnostic counseling approach in the school context. Counselors have their own preferences for a particular counseling approach which may not always be applicable and effective to the concerned client’s problem and situation.

Hence there is a need to be flexible and integrate the theories in order to develop an individualised counseling style. The concepts and techniques can be borrowed from a variety of theoretical models, integrated and applied to phases of the counseling process from initial to termination stages. Integrative counseling is the process of selecting concepts and methods from a variety of systems.

However, counselors need to have a clear in-depth understanding of various theories, then only they will be in a position to integrate. Simply put, practitioners cannot integrate what they do not know (Norcross & Newman, 1992).

Thus integrative counseling is a real challenge in the sense that the counselor needs to know the clients and his situation, culture, background thoroughly in addition to the theoretical knowledge of various approaches in order to deliver success/result. Rather than stretching the client to fit the dimensions of a single theory, practitioners are challenged to tailor their theory and practice to fit the unique needs of the client (Corey, 2009).

Since the early 1980s, psychotherapy has been characterised by a rapidly developing movement toward integration. The reason behind this movement is the growing awareness that human behaviour is so complex to be explained by a single theoretical approach or a set of techniques pertaining to a particular counseling approach. Because no one theory has a patent on the truth, and because no single set of counseling techniques is always effective in working with diverse client populations, some writers think that it is sensible to cross boundaries by developing integrative approaches as the basis for future counseling practice (Lazarus, 1996).

#### 4.5.1 Approaches to Integrative Counseling

There are multiple pathways to achieving an integrative approach to counseling practice. Three of the most common are technical eclecticism, theoretical integration, and common factors (Arkowitz, 1997). Technical eclecticism refers to selecting suitable techniques from different theoretical approaches according to the client's needs and resources and using those to achieve the counseling goals.

Whereas theoretical integration refers to generating a new theory based on the best of different theoretical approaches. Each theory has its own strong points and merits. Theoretical integration aims at taking those best parts of each theory and formulating a new theory which will be the best. The *common factors* approach attempts to look across different theoretical systems in search of common elements.

Although there are differences among the theories, there is a recognisable core of counseling composed of nonspecific variables common to all therapies. This perspective on integration is based on the premise that these common factors are at least as important in accounting for therapeutic outcomes as the unique factors that differentiate one theory from another.

Arnold Lazarus (1997), the founder of multimodal therapy, espouses technical (or systematic) eclecticism. Multimodal therapists borrow techniques from many other therapy systems that have been demonstrated to be effective in dealing with specific problems. This approach has been widely used. However, it should not be a mere collection of different techniques from other theories, the counselor should be sound in understanding each theoretical approach and justify the selection of counseling techniques.

Thus the counselor may have preference for a particular theoretical orientation. But during the process of counseling, he may decide on a range of counseling techniques



derived from different theoretical approaches and apply these in the counseling setting. This becomes much more significant and relevant especially in the present day multicultural and multilingual context.

However, the challenge is for counselors to think and practice integratively, but critically. In order to develop integrative approach to counseling, counselors need to have in depth knowledge of all the theories, then only they will be in a position to synthesize and integrate. As already pointed out, it is not simply borrowing techniques from different theoretical approaches. Developing an integrative perspective is a lifelong endeavour that is refined with experience. It requires time, effort and experience.

#### 4.5.2 Potentials and Limitations of Integrative Counseling

Human being is always considered along the three dimensions of thinking, feeling and behaviour. An integrative approach to counseling focuses on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of the client. Effective counseling should address all these three aspects of behaviour to achieve desirable goals. Hence the counselor needs to make use of the cognitive, affective and behavioural counseling techniques. Such a combination is necessary to help clients *think* about their beliefs and assumptions, to experience on a *feeling* level their conflicts and struggles, and to actually translate their insights into *action* programs by behaving in new ways in day-to-day living.

Preston (1998) contends that no one theoretical model can adequately address the wide range of problems clients will present in therapy. He says it is essential for therapists to have a basic grasp of various therapeutic models and for them to have at their disposal a number of intervention strategies. For him, the pivotal assessment question is, “What does this particular person most need in order to suffer less, to heal, to grow, or to cope more effectively?” Preston recommends that a practitioner’s selection of interventions should be guided by their assessment of the client.

The limitations of the integrative counseling depends on the sincerity and seriousness with which the counselor approaches this. An undisciplined way of picking techniques from different counseling approaches is a major drawback of integrative counseling which the counselor needs to guard against. Integrative counseling involves real work and thorough understanding of different approaches and careful selection of various techniques keeping in mind the client’s values, resources and cultural background.

<p><b>Self Assessment Questions</b></p> <p>1) Explain technical eclecticism.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2) Discuss the challenges to integrative counseling.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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The present unit describes two significant approaches to counseling such as Solution focused counseling and Integrative counseling. It has explained the meaning and assumptions of both solution focused counseling and integrative counseling. Given the present day realities of fast-paced life, no one has the time for spending long sessions in counseling. Further in certain settings, for example in the school context, immediate solution is required. Solution focused brief counseling has the answer to it. It focuses on the solution and starts with the solution in mind; and then works back to find out the modalities to achieve it.

The Solution focused counseling puts a premium on the client, believing in the client's capability to identify the resources available with him, capitalise on these and find the solution with the help of the therapist. Clients are able to deal with a wide variety of concerns using SFC if they are able to set a goal for change. The method is effective for many of the concerns with which clients come to the counselor. Integrative counseling has also started gaining acceptance as it is based on flexibility and having the client's betterment as its ultimate goal. However, it requires real effort and in depth knowledge and experience to successfully practice integrative counseling.

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## 4.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Explain the key assumptions of solution focused counseling.
- 2) Taking a case example, describe the procedure of solution focused counseling.
- 3) Discuss the merits of solution focused brief therapy in the present day school context.
- 4) Client plays a central role in solution focused counseling. Elaborate.
- 5) Discuss the meaning and approaches of integrative counseling.
- 6) Discuss the advantages of integrative counseling in the present day context.

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