



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

Using a Strengths Perspective in Peer-to-Peer Relationships

A Telelearning for Connection Program Volunteers of the
National Multiple Sclerosis Society

June, 2011

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Thank you for registering for *Using a Strengths Perspective in Peer-to-Peer Relationships*. This training will provide an overview of solution focused-conversations, to include a discussion of a variety of techniques you can use in your peer-to-peer relationships in the group setting or one-on-one.

Motivation to make positive changes is based on fostering strengths, not dwelling on weaknesses. Solution-focused support emphasizes success. When successes are identified and celebrated, confidence and motivation increases. Every environment, no matter how impoverished, is full of resources that can be used for positive change.

Call Information & Schedule:

- Three calls are scheduled; it is the same agenda offered at three different times. You only need to attend one call.
- Please call in at least 5 minutes prior to the start of the call, and have the conference id number available. The call operator may ask you for this information.
- To assist in the tracking and recording of telelearning please provide your first and last name, city and state when asked by the call operator.
- The call will be recorded for those who miss it or would like to listen again. You can request the playback information by contacting your chapter liaison. The recording and associated handout will also be available for download on the self-help group leaders' resource page on the Society's website (<http://www.nationalmssociety.org/selfhelpgroupleaders>).

CALL OPTION ONE Tuesday, June 21, 2011	
7-8:30 pm ET	6 pm CT 5 pm MT 4 pm PT
Participant Dial-In Number:	(877) 715-5282
Conference ID:	74383020

CALL OPTION TWO Wednesday, June 22, 2011	
1-2:30 pm ET	12 pm CT 11 am MT 10 am PT
Participant Dial-In Number:	(877) 715-5282
Conference ID:	74387495

CALL OPTION THREE Thursday, June 23, 2011	
10-11:30 pm ET	9 pm CT 8 pm MT 7 pm PT
Participant Dial-In Number:	(877) 715-5282
Conference ID:	74388660

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Introduction

Solution focused support:

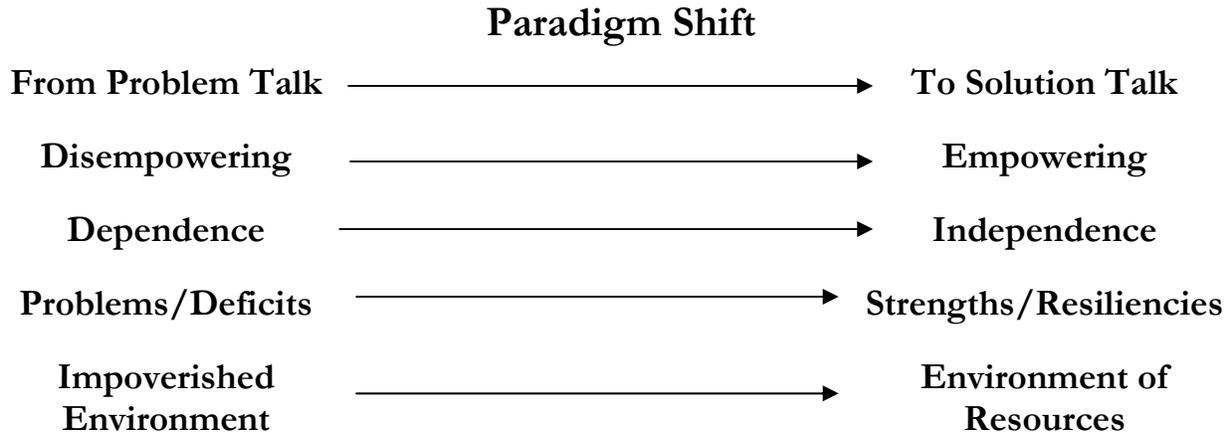
- Has been in use for over 20 years
- Is an approach for helping others by: identifying, focusing on and reinforcing people's strengths and resiliencies
- Is not counseling

Steps to solution focused support:

- Strengths based perspective
- Solution focused conversations
- Empowering concepts in a group setting

Strengths Based Perspective

Rather than focusing on someone's problems, or deficits, solution-focused conversations highlight a person's strengths and resiliencies.



Problem Talk Scenario

***Jerry:** Hello, Mary. How are you today?*

***Mary:** Not good. I've been depressed lately. My MS is acting up and I'm feeling tired all of the time. My husband and teenage daughter just don't get it.*

***Jerry:** That sounds awful. I can understand why you have been feeling depressed.*

***Mary:** Yeah. It has been so bad that I really haven't been able to go to work. I stayed home three days last week and haven't been able to do much around the house. My family should know that I'm exhausted. My daughter told me that I look fine. I think she thinks I'm lazy.*

***Jerry:** Those must have been some very depressing days. Missing work and feeling that your family doesn't understand.*

***Mary:** I spent most of the day in bed or on the sofa. It was really too much for me to deal with.*

Solution Talk Scenario

Jerry: Hello, Mary. How are you today?

Mary: Not good. I've been depressed lately. My MS is acting up and I'm feeling so tired. My husband and teenage daughter just don't get it.

Jerry: That sounds awful. Have there been days that you've felt less depressed than others?

Mary: A few. I was able to keep focused and get some work done from home. I also watched a video with my daughter - which we enjoyed.

Jerry: What do you think made those days better than the others? What might have helped on those days that you felt less depressed?

Mary: I'm not really sure. To be honest, I think it was my attitude toward the day. I was just as tired, but I was determined not to let it ruin the day. I also told my family in the morning that it was a high fatigue day, and that seemed to help. They said they were glad that I told them.

List some of the differences between the **problem-talk scenario** and the **solution-talk scenario**.

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Impoverished or Resourceful Environment

Every environment, no matter how impoverished, is full of resources that can be used for positive changes.

Readiness for Action

People seek support for various reasons:

- Looking to make changes
- Feel that they are not alone
- Others may not be clear about why they are coming to a self-help group.
- Many people will show determination to meet their new challenges
- Others simply may not be ready for change.

As a connection program volunteer, it's important to accept each person you encounter where they are at.

Your role includes:

- Support
- Validation
- Collaboration
- Let person take lead in identifying change
- Brainstorming

The Language of Solutions

Refer to problems in the past tense

Example: *I yell at my partner every day.*

When reflecting back say: *So, you've yelled at your partner every day for some time now.*

Demonstrate an expectation of change: use *yet*, *when*, and *will* instead of *if* and *would*.

Example: *What will be different in your life when the two of you are getting along better?*

Instead of, *What would be different if the two of you could get along better?*

Turn a noun or adjective into a verb

Example: *Charlie's listening skills are poor.*

Instead of, *Charlie is a terrible listener.* (Describes the behavior, not the person.)

Re-label to remove potential value judgment

- Problem = Challenge
- Crisis = Transition
- Hoarding = Keeping
- Bull-headed = Independent
- Narrow minded = Singularly focused
- Dependent = Rely on

Modify generalizations to specifics

Example: *I'll never get a job.* Reflect back with modification: *So, you haven't found a job yet.*

Review

- Listen empathetically while focusing on persons strengths
- Be aware and accepting for a persons readiness for action
- Use solution talk

Solution Focused Conversations

- We all have variations in our lives
- The power of exceptions
 - You can find exception by simply asking one of the following questions:
 - What's been better?
 - What's good?
 - What's the best thing that happened in the past week?
- Determine person's readiness for change

The EARS guide:

E = Elicit the positive exception

- help identify a positive exception

A = Amplify the exceptions

- ask questions to gain more information about the exception

R = Reinforce the exceptions

- validate the exception
- celebrate

S = Start over

- Find a new exception, amplify, reinforce, start over

EARS Scenario

***You:** So, what's better, Peggy?*

***Peggy:** Nothing*

***You:** All the days the same?*

***Peggy:** Yes*

***You:** Which was the worst day?*

***Peggy:** Thursday*

***You:** So what was better about Wednesday?*

***Peggy:** I seemed to have a little more energy, my fatigue wasn't as bad.*

***You:** What did you do on Wednesday?*

***Peggy:** I had a visit from my son, Robert, and his wife, Barbara. And they brought their little girl, Stephanie. She is such a sweetheart.*

***You:** How old is she?*

***Peggy:** She just turned two. She toddles around the house looking at us with those big eyes. She is adorable! She makes me smile.*

***You:** When did they come over?*

***Peggy:** It was just before dinner.*

***You:** So you ate dinner together. Where? In the dining room?*

***Peggy:** No, in the kitchen. Barbara was afraid Stephanie would spill on the new tablecloth and I was afraid I would spill too.*

***You:** That sounds like a real nice time. What else is better?*

Peggy: *Well before he left, Robert fixed my VCR. And they brought over some of my favorite movies they have collected, so I can watch them.*

You: *Which movies did they bring?*

Peggy: *Oh, the Laurel and Hardy series, and the Charlie Chaplin collection. They'll make anyone feel better.*

What's Positive? and Other Helpful Questions

Four helpful questions:

- 1) Pre-meeting change question
- 2) Scaling question
- 3) Coping question
- 4) Miracle question

Pre-Meeting Change Question

- *What have you done to make things better since the last meeting?*
 - Puts the emphasis on change
 - Reinforces the member's ability to make change

Scaling Question

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being as good as things get, and 1 being as bad as things get, where are you today?
- Today the member is a 3. Then ask, *When you are a 4, what will be different?*

Coping Question

- *How do you cope?*
 - Used when member seems overwhelmed with life circumstances
 - Demonstrates empathy
 - Reminds member of his/her strengths and coping skills

Miracle Question

- *I would like to ask you a question that will let you use your imagination. Suppose tonight...after you finish dinner and go to bed...and go to sleep... a miracle happens while you are sleeping. The miracle that happens is that all the problems that you have called to talk about have been solved. Since you were sleeping you don't notice anything. When you wake up in the morning, things will be different. My question is, what will you notice is different the next morning?*
- When the members state a miracle, you repeat it back (or write it down) and ask, *What else?*

Review

- EARS: Exception, Amplify, Reinforce, Start Over
- Exception finding questions: pre-meeting, scaling, coping and miracle

Empowering Concepts in Peer to Peer Relationships

A solution-focused peer relationship will be noticeably different than most peer to peer relationships. It may take time and perseverance to shift the focus from “problem talk” to “solution talk.”

Qualities to cultivate in solution-focused relationships:

- **Help the peer define how the relationship can be helpful**
 - *What do you need from the group so you will consider this meeting helpful?*
 - *What do you need from our call today so you will consider this meeting helpful?*
- **You are a collaborator, not the expert**
 - Cultivate a culture of shared responsibility.
 - In a solution-focused relationship your role is to keep the person focused on solutions.
 - Warning signs that you are beginning to play the expert.
 - *If he/she would just do the following_____.*
 - *Here is what I would do in your position _____.*
 - *Others do the following_____.*
 - *When that happened to me, I did....*
 - *My suggestion is that you go home and*
 - *I recommend_____.*
- **Create a sense of community**
 - Confidential
 - For those in one-on-one relationships, encourage your peer to seek out greater support community (such as attending a self-help group)
- **Focus on solutions**
 - Avoid “pity parties.” They are NOT helpful.
 - Keep the person focused on solutions, strengths, and resiliencies.

- **Develop a brainstorming culture**
 - Rely on each other to brainstorm ideas
 - Reflect each other's strengths
 - When used in the group setting, the group will be nearly self-sufficient.
- **Encourage diversity**
 - Multiple perspectives can be very useful
 - Diversity of age, disability, gender, backgrounds, treatment choices

Conclusion

Solution-focused support techniques can be used one-to-one or in a group setting. Solution-focused support is positive, respectful, empowering, and successful.

Consider:

Do you currently use the concepts identified in the strengths based perspective? If not, begin there.

If you believe you already use most of the language and concepts, begin looking for positive exceptions. Begin where you are at.

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