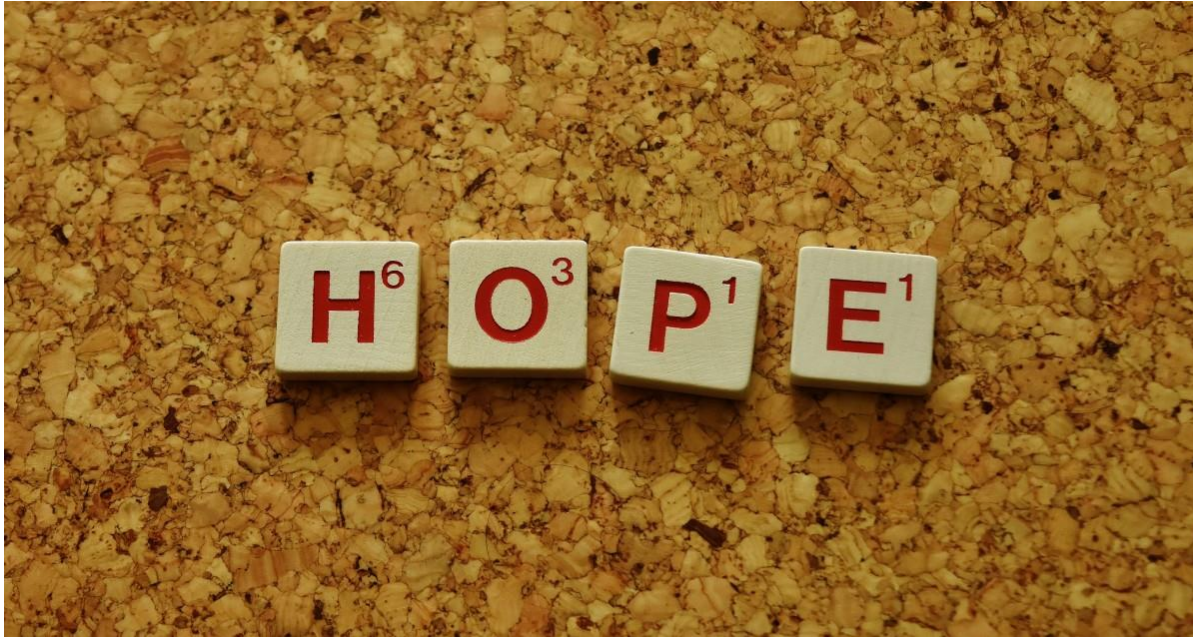


Growing the Solution-Focused Approach in Statutory Social Work Practice

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Why Solution Focused?



- As a senior leader my interface with practice tends to be in relation to my role as a budget holder or a decision maker
- Case discussions can focus on the deficits and the need to evidence the shortfall in parenting or the risks in relation to a child
- It can be very hard to understand the strengths and define mitigating factors when viewing from a lens of safe certainty

Language of Love and Hope

We were always interested in how our DBIT teams worked with families and how they talked about young people

There was a strong evidence base in ECC in relation to how successful SF was in preventing care and in reconnecting and reuniting

We could see the benefit in being more solution focused in our interaction with children and families, partner agencies and internally to enable challenging but supportive conversations

Trusting the client allows for them to create their change

- People have their own good reasons for doing what they do
- There is not necessarily a logical connection between the problem and the solution
- No problem happens all the time and no one is perfect at their problems; there are always exceptions/instances of success
- Change is constant and inevitable
- A small change can lead to bigger changes
- People bring with them so many resources and strengths
- Nothing is determined
- The future is both created and negotiable

Social Care systems are designed to highlight risk

Practice focus is often placed on admittance of blame or guilt for example Child Protection Plans:

- ☐ *“Failure to protect”*
- ☐ *“MGM does not accept the risks her daughter presents “*
- ☐ *“Failure to engage”*

People have their own good reasons for doing what they do

SF allows a space to understand why and focus on the possibilities not the limitations

Resource Panel



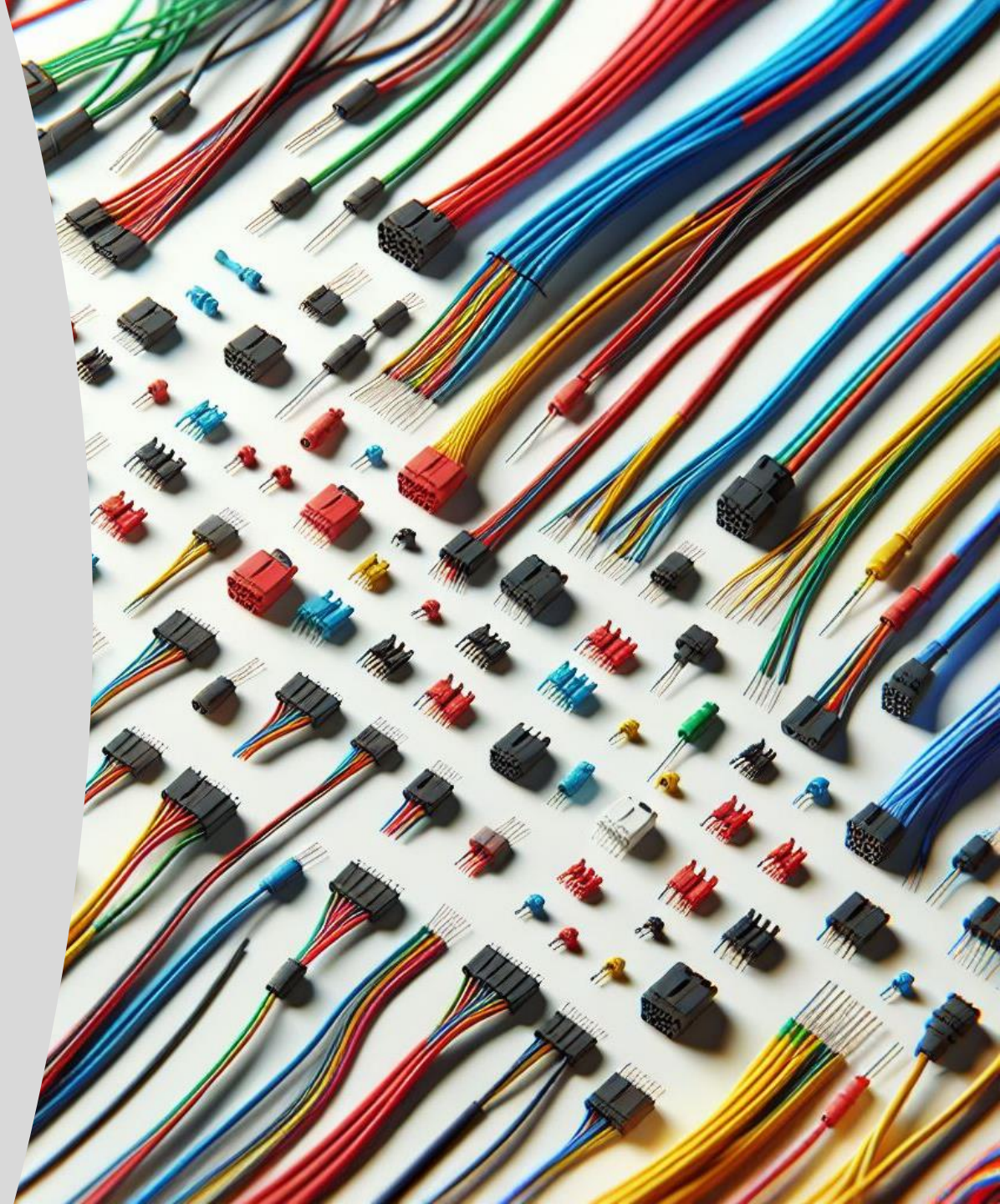
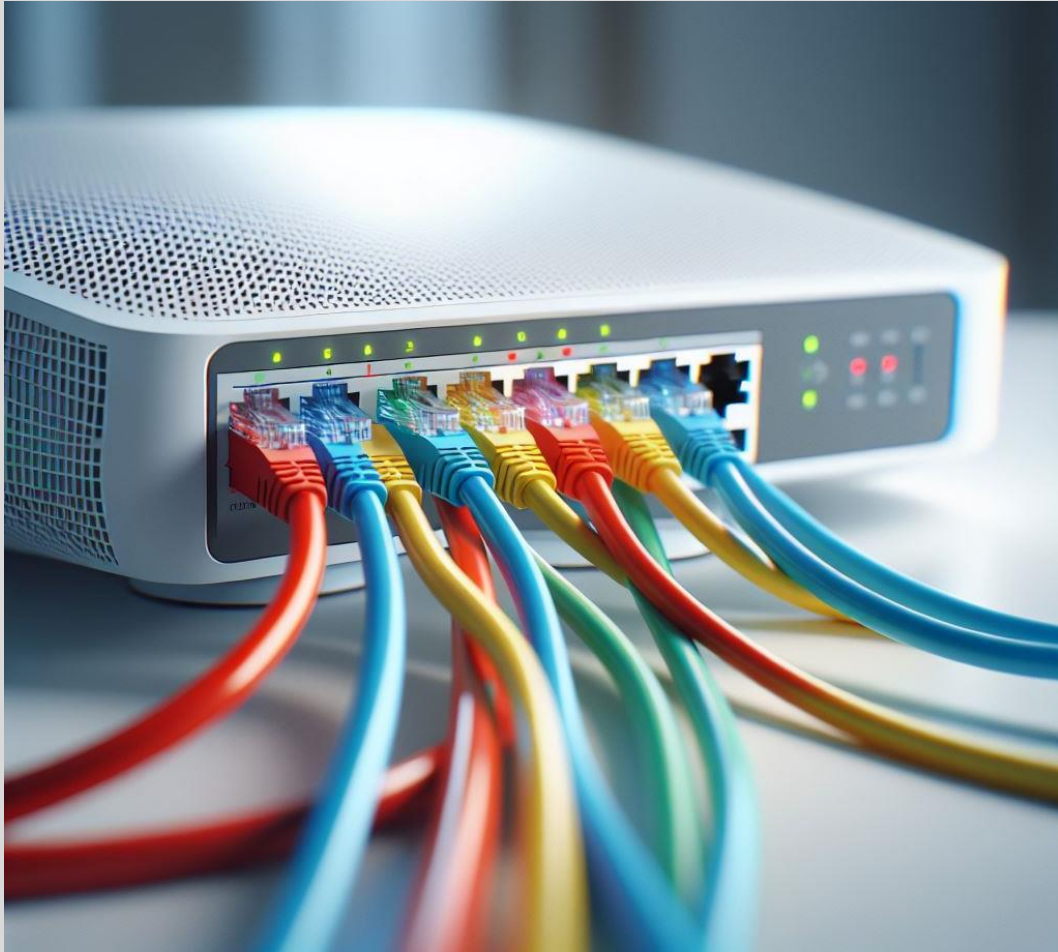
- Being more SF in our decision-making forums has enabled a different dialogue
- Allows an opportunity for description of times when the risk was lower- what was happening, who else was involved
- Opens new doors and conversations

Performance Meetings

- ❖ Using scaling and SF questions to review performance
- ❖ What would need to happen for the score to increase
- ❖ What is it you are seeing that prevents you from scoring lower
- ❖ Best hopes for the next quarter



Rethinking Our Training Offer



Example Scenario

“How have things been?”

“Not great. I’ve been cutting again.”

- **What questions might you ask from the perspective of your statutory duties and from a position of assessing risk?**
- **What questions might you ask from a Solution Focused perspective where you are looking to amplify resources and what’s working?**



Finding a Balance

Safeguarding and Contextual?	Solution Focused?
Are you okay if I ask you a few questions about that?	The last time you cut yourself, what helped you to stop?
When you say cutting, can you tell me a bit more about that?	When was there a time where you felt like cutting but didn't?
What was it you used to cut yourself?	How did you stop yourself from cutting that time?
How many times has this happened since I saw you last?	What helped?
How did you look after the wound after cutting?	What does that say about you, that you were able to do that?

Let's Try It Out

Let's try asking our questions to clarify things, gain some context *and* to build people up.

Turn to someone near you and bring to mind a difficult scenario that you have faced and worked through that you are comfortable sharing.

Ask three questions to gain some context about the scenario and what made it so challenging for them. Then go on to ask some Solution Focused questions to build them up and celebrate their skills:

- When did they first notice that they were on the road to overcoming this?
- What did they do in order to overcome this?
- How did they make this happen in those circumstances?
- What skills, strengths and abilities did they have to utilise while they were doing this?

What does all this mean for front line practice?

My Role

- I am currently working as a senior practitioner within family support and protection.
- My work includes collaborating with children and families through child in need and child protection plans of support.
- I completed my intermediate certificate in solution focused practice in June of 2024.
- My professional values include relational and strengths-based practice with clients.

Language

- I often hear from social workers first starting in their journey using solution focused language, that SF at times feels counterintuitive to safeguarding.
- Specifically, the role of information gathering and pre proceedings.
- A reflection I have had as a practitioner championing the use of solution focused practice is that language is the key!
- Whilst there is always going to be a need to hold challenging conversations with families, I believe that the use of SF language and tools, can continue to support our working relationships with families and empower during periods of difficulty.

Safeguarding through the lens of SF

The solution focused stance:

- ❖ Belief in the client, that they are the experts of their own experience and that they have the capacity to overcome challenge
- ❖ Curiosity around the clients' strengths, skills and hopes.
- ❖ Not knowing, the importance of learning from the client.
- ❖ Co-constructive, our responses and questions build from the client's responses.

Communication is a fundamental pillar of social work!

Solution focused approach is both, a method of talking with people and stance that shapes the way we talk, view and write about people.

“see the person differently and you see a different person”

Family A

- Family A are a family of 4.
- They are a nuclear family with a little girl (4) and a little boy (6)
- The family were working with us via a child protection plan of support.
- The primary worries were domestic abuse and physical chastisement actioned by mum.
- I completed direct work with both parents including two solution focused interview sessions.
- I also completed direct work with both parents around the impact of domestic abuse on children.
- The use of solution focused practice was a red thread within my communication with the family and the language was something I consistently made an effort to draw upon.



What difference did a solution focused stance make?

- People have their own good reasons for doing what they are doing.
- Families bring with them their own resources and strengths
- There is not necessarily a logical connection between the problem and the solution.
- A small change can lead to a bigger change



- Dad initially shared that his best hope was for the children to maintain a relationship with their mother. Whilst it was important to broaden this best hope, it was helpful to understand that this was a significant value for him.
- When describing the presence of his best hope dad highlighted the everyday acts, he completes to keep himself and his children safe, such as preparing his children a home cooked meal.
- We had worked with the family for a period of around 2 years. The family were experiencing a period of increased safety, I received a telephone call from dad one day asking to access refuge. There was no clear understanding in the shift in his thinking. Following this the family worked alongside us via a child in need plan of support.

Family B

- Family B are a family of 5.
- The family consists of a mother, stepfather, adult sibling and two male children.
- The local authority have sadly had to make the decision to enter pre proceedings.
- The worries are around home conditions, appropriate supervision and substance use.
- A reflection I have had is that when entering proceedings there is a shift in the way I use solution focused intervention.
- By this I mean that whilst I as the allocated social worker may not be able to hold full solution focused interview with a client, I can use micro language and solution focused tools within my communication with the family.

Using SF language within pre proceedings:

- Examples of SF language I used:
- Checking in with the family around the plan of support. This could include exploring what support they have accessed before and their hope around how they wish to be supported moving forward.
- Whilst it is a statutory responsibility to be transparent around the concerns, I also make sure to talk about the families hopes focusing on presence rather than absence.
- The importance of acknowledging difficulty and using resource talk.
- The use of scaling.



- What difference did Support A make to you?
- What are your best hopes from our meeting today?
- What instead?
- What did it take from you to come to this meeting today?
- How did you manage that?
- What does it say about you that you came to the meeting today?
- What's been better?
- One a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is the highest context possible and 0 is the furthest away from this where are you today?
- What might be the first small signs you are moving towards the next number.
- What might you notice?
- How would you know that this meeting had been useful?

The use of scaling:

- On a scale of 0-10 where 10 is (highest context from below list) and 0 is the opposite, where are you today?

Suggestions for scale:

- -readiness for exit (positive ending)
- -Confidence of good outcome
- Given your best as a worker
- -Safety
- Relationship working for us and them
- On track (PLO focused)
- What brings you up to the number given?
- What would be the first small signs you are moving up to the number above?

Supervision



Preparing for supervision:

- What difference has direct work made?
- What's been better?

Reflections:

- Supervision remains strengths based, highlighting the resources the family has.
- Prevents drift.
- It reminds you to consider “good enough” threshold.

Questions?



THANK
YOU

This information is issued by: Essex County Council

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Essex Solution Focused Centre

The information contained in this document can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.

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