# Interviewing for Solutions: Enlightenment of Solution-Focused Approach to the Work of College Counselors

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**ABSTRACT**

The solution-focused approach is a practical psychological counseling approach that focuses on the visitors and helps the visitors to construct an interviewing for solutions. The solution-focused approach is an approach of empowering the visitors, which helps the visitors to cope with the current problems and long-term development problems by tapping their strength and resources. The solution-focused approach is a pleasant psychological counseling approach, which makes people obtain higher satisfaction with life through skillful counseling approaches and techniques. The college counselors should master the essence and methods of the Solution-Focused Approach, and be excelled in applying them to their practical work, thus promoting the healthy growth and development of the college students.

*Keywords: Solution-focused approach, Solutions: College counselors.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

College counselors are the backbone for conducting the ideological and political education of the college students. They are the organizers, executors and instructors for carrying out the daily ideological and political education and management for college students. "The solution-focused approach is an approach advocating to promote the positive development of events with a positive, future-oriented and problem-solving-centered positive perspective."[1] By introducing the solution-focused approach into the counselors' work, it can change the counselors' working concepts, improve the counselors' working methods, and better promote the healthy growth of the students and the professional development of the counselors.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT AND MAIN TECHNIQUES OF THE SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

The solution-focused approach was developed by the couple Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg from the United States in the 1980s. They were subordinated to a local short course family therapy center and were social workers. In the long-term practice process, they gradually developed different treatment techniques and methods from those of the past [2]. In China, the solution-focused approach has attracted more and more attention from the psychological counseling circle and developed gradually due to its practicality and simplicity in learning. They were widely applied in the school education, medical care, family service, sports and other fields, and good results have been received.

The Solution-Focused Approach specifically includes 12 techniques, such as normalization, approval, inspiring encouragement, pre-determined inquiry, pre-counseling inquiry change, calibration, changing the first sign that appeared, miracle inquiry, relationship inquiry, exception inquiry, response inquiry and homework. Through a question-and-answer format between the counselors and the visitors, it made the visitors dig into the questions such as "what are the problems to be solved," "what have I already done," "what happened before I realized it" and "what can I do now", so that the visitors could focus on their own strength and resources and solve the problems by themselves instead of relying on others. The solution-focused approach is a psychological counseling approach empowering the visitors. The visitors can see the life they want and the impending changes to "construct an interviewing for solutions" through the questions of the counselors.

## 3. CORE CONCEPT OF THE SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

### 3.1. A future-oriented solution approach

Psychology had three major missions from the date of birth, including treating mental diseases, making everyone's life more meaningful, and studying excellent and talented people. In understanding and treating mental illness, psychologists have devoted lots of efforts and studied at least 10 kinds of intractable diseases for a long time. However, the other two missions of psychology have been seriously ignored and even forgotten. In the 20th century, the applied psychology and psychiatry mainly focused on the study of the "dark side" of human beings, namely "what problems does the human beings have", "what disease have the human beings been caught with", and "what are the causes of these diseases", such as anxiety, depression, fear, separation and trauma.

However, not everything happened for a reason, and even if there is a reason, it may not lead to a result. It was difficult to judge the causes of the current psychological problems of the visitors. Therefore, if we discussed the cause of the problems, it was not only unfavorable to solving the problems but also made the visitors fall into self-annoyance and anxiety in searching for the cause. According to the solution-focused approach, it was goal-oriented and future-oriented. It did not attach importance to trace back the childhood experiences, family of origin, personality characteristics and other reasons, and did not face the problem or reason inquiry. Instead, it attached importance to explore and discover the advantages of human beings.

### 3.2. Emphasis on active, positive, and optimistic view on problems

According to the solution-focused approach, the problem itself was not a problem, and it was the improper approach to solving the problem that led to the problem. There were both negative and positive factors that led to the emergence of a problem. In traditional counseling, we tended to pay attention to the shortcomings, weaknesses or deficiencies of the visitors, while ignoring their merits and neglecting their potential advantages, virtues and strengths. The solution-focused approach emphasized on the active, positive and optimistic view on the problems, discovered and explored the strengths of the visitors who seemed to have all the problems on the surface. On the one hand, it could reduce the impedance of the visitors; on the other hand, it could make the visitors experience the positive emotions and strength, which was conducive to the creation of a good consulting environment and the solving of problems. For example, the "approval" technique and "inspiring encouragement" technique

commonly used in the solution-focused approach: "I know you are a good girl with a great sense of responsibility from what you are talking about", "You're trying to become reconciled with your roommate when having a conflict with them, which means you're very generous." and "It's great that you could think of these methods!" By such kind of counseling, it did not make the visitors feel uncomfortable, but was a pleasant enjoyment.

### 3.3. Make the visitors become the problem-solving experts

In the traditional counseling process, the counselor used to play the main role in the interview and dominated the whole process of the interview. The counselors analyzed and explored the problems of the visitors. They used their own viewpoints, experiences, perspectives and knowledge structure to interpret those problems, and then proposed advice or suggestions for the visitors. According to the "solution-focused approach", it was believed that the parties concerned were the experts in their own problems and had unique ways and rich resources to deal with their own problems. The main duty of the helper was no longer to teach the parties concerned what to do and how to do it, but to help them fully believe in and use the ability and resources to solve those problems, thus promoting the solution and behavior change "[3]. This kind of counseling approach could make the visitors discover their own strengths and resources, and solve problems by their own abilities. Actually, everyone has a certain ability to think and solve the problems. The counselor used to play a role in the prompts and guidance. "Like the Yin-Yang Tai Chi diagram, once the white part is expanded d a little, the black part will become less; once the white part is increased, the whole system will be changed" [4]. The counselors guided the visitors to use their own resources to make changes and increase the white part, so that the black part would be reduced and the whole system would be changed. For example, the "pre-counseling change inquiry" technique: "I am sure you have tried many ways to change yourself. Could you tell me about them?" For example, the "exception inquiry" technique: "Is there a time when you and your mother had a slightly better relationship?" Such technique focused on provoking the visitor's thinking, stimulating their potential, flexibility and hope, and made the visitors become experts in solving their own problems.

# 4. ENLIGHTENMENT OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH TO THE WORK OF COLLEGE COUNSELORS

## 4.1. Working concept: Use the student-centered approach to construct an interviewing for solutions.

The solution-focused approach emphasized that the visitors were the experts in solving their own problems. "The counselors played a role in inspiring the visitors to discover and use their own abilities, and promote their behavior changes by using a positive and active goal guidance mode. "[5] According to the traditional education, the teachers were usually defined as the main subject of education and teaching and they were the organizers, monitors, enlightener and guide of the whole educational and teaching activities, while the students were the educated person and the object of education. During the process of ideological and political education and student conversation, many counselors also tended to define themselves as the subject of education, while defined the students as the object of education and the educated person. Therefore, the counselors usually instructed students to do things according to their own thoughts and ideas by the way of preaching in the practical work, without considering that students were the individuals with thoughts and souls. This would not only fail to achieve good educational effects, but even cause the students to have resistance and affect the development of the ideological and political education, such as "if you play games like this, you will not be able to graduate in the future, go back and do as what I have said! "

When we used our own perspectives and viewpoints to analyze the students and make decisions for them, it was incorrect and improper. It could even cause inevitable harm. According to the solution-focused orientation, it provided a new solution approach, which maximally practiced the principles of "student-centered" and "doing no harm as far as possible". The counselors should have the great confidence that the students were able to change and improve themselves. They could listen to the students' stories, explore their own advantages, strengths and resources, encourage them to work hard towards the set goals and live a rich and satisfactory life. In the process of solving the problems, what the counselors should do was to listen carefully, respect completely and respond appropriately.

## 4.2. Relationship reconstruction: building a new type of teacher-student relationship

In constructing the problem-solving process, the solution-focused approach attached great importance to the cooperative relationship with the visitors, in which the counselors and the visitors discussed together what changes the visitors wanted to make, what efforts had been made to change themselves before the visiting and what could be done in the future.

In the practical work, we often labeled the students with problems, such as Internet addiction, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety disorder, etc. On the one hand, such labels would make the students pay attention to the problems or disease itself, and have a sense of powerlessness and despair. This may prevent the students from finding out and trying the new solutions, and was not conducive to their long-term growth and development. On the other hand, labeling the students would make the students feel that they were not understood and respected. They would generate a sense of alienation and impedance to the counselors, which was not conducive to the conduction of the follow-up work. Therefore, it was very important to establish a trust relationship with the students. "According to the solution-focused approach, it emphasized that the students could study and live effectively as long as they could find their own goals, rather than the expectations of teachers and parents." [6] In the process of ideological education, the counselors could not focus solely on problem solving and use their own perspectives, experiences and knowledge structures to filter, evaluate and interpret the problems encountered by the students, but ignored the students' emotions and the understanding of things. Instead, they should act as friends to respect the students' worldviews, pay attention to their desires, affirm their feelings, and offer praise when necessary. When the students felt that they were respected and understood, they began to trust the counselors. They were willing to express their aspirations to the counselors and were willing to seek help from the counselors. Therefore, the effect of ideological education was achieved.

## 4.3. Solution-based conversations the combination of solving ideological problems and solving practical problems

It was pointed out in Document No. 16 of the central government that it is required to strengthen and improve the ideological and political education of the college students, improve their ideological and political quality, and cultivate them to be builders and successors of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The ideological and political education should not only educate and guide the people, but also care for and help the people, study and solve the practical problems related to the healthy growth and vital interests of the college students timely. The counselors should endeavor to become the life tutors of the students and their bosom friends for healthy growth.

College period was the key period of life development. In this period, the college students' psychological development and physiological

development were uncoordinated, and their psychological development was extremely immature. However, the plasticity of the students was very strong. They were faced with many developmental problems, such as study, love, interpersonal relationship, employment and other key problems. If those problems could not be solved timely, the mentality and future development of the college students would be affected. By solving the practical problems of the college students, it could make them feel close to and trust the counselors, which was conductive to the conduction of the ideological and political education. The solution-focused approach was focused on a more practical, faster and effective solution-focused way to solve the current practical problems of the college students. On the basis of understanding, respecting and listening to the students' problems, the counselors should try to change from the "problem-based conversations" to the "solution-based conversations." Through the "solution-based conversations", it made the students focus on what they want to change in their lives and how to do it, rather than focusing on the emotions such as frustration, pain and anxiety. Through this approach, it could help the students find their own strength and resources, which could not only help them to solve the current problems and temporary troubles, but also enabled them to find the methods and strategies to cope with the difficulties and setbacks in the future development, and realize their true growth.

### 4.4. Reasonable expectations: make the students have a sense of control

It was shown in psychological research that any kind of psychotherapy had its effect because the uncertainty was reduced. Once the visitors felt that the level of uncertainty was reduced to a level that they could control, their anxiety would be reduced and they could adapt well to the subsequent life.

In the practical work, the counselors usually had high demands and high expectations on the students, and expected the students to change dramatically in a short term when they were faced with problems. However, the students' problems were usually not formed overnight, nor could they be solved overnight. When the students were given high expectations that could not be reached by them through their efforts, they would have a sense of powerlessness and despair, and their sense of self-control would be reduced. It was easy to cause anxiety, tension and other emotions. The students would think that their problems could not be solved no matter how hard they tried. Then they would give up, set up their own barriers and make matters worse. The solution-focused approach emphasized that "small changes" could bring "big changes". The successful solving of problems could improve one's problem solving ability and create a sense of self-

efficacy to solve the problems. The sense of self-efficacy could be used to solve other subsequent problems. The counselors should not be anxious for success and expect too much. Instead, they should discuss and explore goals with the students and formulate practical goals and steps. Small changes could bring about big changes and form a snowball effect.

### 4.5. Happy work: provide new ideas and methods for the counselors' work

The ultimate goal of education is to achieve human happiness. On the one hand, the use of the solution-focused approach could mobilize the students' positive power and realize their happiness; on the other hand, it helped the counselors to find out their own advantages, apply them to their life, and improve their sense of happiness. In the practical work, many counselors lacked both the theoretical guidance and the practical conversation techniques and methods. Relying on the experience and unsystematic counseling methods, it usually led to a low recognition degree by the students and made it difficult to solve the practical problems. At the same time, the counselors would have a sense of frustration. The solution-focused approach had clear objectives, clear ideas and was easy to learn. The counselors should be good at applying its principles and methods to the practical work, and good work results would be certainly achieved. At the same time, it was shown from the research that the solution-focused therapists were happier than other therapists. Their personal careers were smoother than those of the counselors who used other treatment methods, and the occurrence of "job burnout" was less [7]. In practice, the counselors are under tremendous pressure. They have to face various kinds of students and various work tasks. Therefore, they often feel stressed, sad and unable to deal with them. Those who helped others helped themselves. The solution-focused approach could make the counselors themselves much happier. By learning the solution-focused approach, the counselors can become more confident and apply the methods and techniques of solution-focused approach to their actual lives with higher satisfaction and happiness towards life.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The solution-focused approaches constructed a brand-new solution with its positive, goal-oriented and future-oriented ideas. In the practical work, the college counselors should have a deep understanding and flexible application of the solution-focused approach, establish a student-centered philosophy, and set the expectations reasonably, reconstructing a new type of relationship between the teachers and students, aiming at the happy development of the teachers and students, and build brand-new solutions to the problems.

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