

## Solution-Focused Guided Imagery

### Coping

Exercise

40-45 min.

Client

Yes

*Solution-focused therapy (de Shazer, 1985) stresses the strengths people possess and how these can be applied to the change process. Solution-focused counsellors assume that clients have the resources to resolve their issues (Sklare, 1997). Clients know themselves and their strengths better than anyone else. Recognizing client expertise is an essential process during interventions. In this exercise, clients rely on their own strengths for solving a problem they are encountering. This exercise enables clients to connect to personal strengths that they already possess to cope with a problem they are facing.*

*This exercise was tested in a study by Sklare, Sabella, and Petrosko (2003). Data from participant self-ratings showed that relative to the beginning of the activity, participants moved significantly closer to a solution by the middle, and then again by the end, of the intervention. Although the findings can best be considered preliminary, they are consistent with earlier findings on the effects of solution-focused counselling reported by Littrell et al. (1995) and DeJong and Berg (1998).*

### Author

This exercise was developed by Gerald Sklare, Russell Sabella and Joseph Petrosko. Permission to use this exercise was granted by Russell Sabella (<http://schoolcounselor.com/about/>).

### Goal

The goal of this exercise is for the client to connect to personal strengths that they already possess to cope with a problem they are facing. The exercise can be an effective tool because it can help clients set goals even when they are in crisis and feel stuck.

### Advice

- This exercise can be particularly valuable useful when a client does not know what a preferred future would look like.
- This exercise can be used with individuals to set the course for an intervention. It can help the client to formulate specific goals and action steps.
- It is advisable for clients to close their eyes during the imagery to experience the images more clearly.
- For some clients, visualization is difficult. The following advice may help these clients:
  - Clearly define what you mean by imagery.
  - Find out with your client why he/she finds it difficult to visualize. Some clients are reluctant to engage with imagery, because of fears about what the image represents. In this case, the practitioner may start with positive and neutral images to find out whether your client has access to visual imagery.
  - Engage your client in relaxation procedures prior to the imagery.

- Some clients may want to practice imagery at home. It is advisable for clients to:
  - Choose a time and place where they are least likely to be interrupted.
  - Turn off phones and other distractions.
  - Not drive while listening to or practicing guided imagery.
  - Let any thoughts or emotions that may arise during imagery pass through them without engaging or analysing them.



### **Suggested Readings**

DeJong, P., & Berg, I. K. (1998). *Interviewing for solutions*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

de Shazer, S. (1985). *Keys to solution in brief therapy*. New York: Norton.

Littrell, J. M., Malia, J. A., & Vanderwood, M. (1995). Single-session brief counseling in a high school. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 73*, 451-458.

Sklare, G. (2005). *Brief counseling that works*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Sklare, G., Sabella, R. & Petrosko, J. (2003). A preliminary study of the effects of group solution-focused guided imagery on recurring individual problems. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 28*, 370-381.

Sklare, G. (2000). Solution-focused brief counseling strategies. In L. Sperry & J. Carlson (Eds.) *Brief therapy with individuals & couples*. Phoenix, AZ: Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, Inc.

## Tool Description

### Instructions

In the following exercise you will be asked to close your eyes and vividly imagine yourself thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that would demonstrate that you were resolving your problems.

This exercise will consist of several steps. On completing each step, you will be asked to write what you had imagined. When asked to identify specific things or actions that you would be doing, I would like you to respond in concrete, observable, and detailed behaviours. That is, rather than saying “I will be friendly,” describe the behaviours you will be demonstrating to be friendly such as: “I will be smiling, saying hello, and shaking hands.” Moreover, always construct an image/picture of a behavioural action on your part. Do not describe things that you would not be doing (e.g., “I will not frown or grimace”).

#### *Step 1: Identifying a recurring problem*

Identify a recent recurring problem that you would like to overcome:

- a. something you would like to do
- b. something you want to stop doing or
- c. something you want to avoid doing

Write down a recent recurring problem that you would like to overcome:

Rate the severity of this problem from 0 (non-existent) - 10 (extremely high):

Scaled Score

*Step 2: Describing the problem*

- a. If your problem is something you would like to do, describe it below as if it were a video of what you would observe yourself doing behaviourally. (Do not describe what you would not be doing.)
- b. If your problem is something you want to stop doing, describe it below as if it were a video of what you would observe yourself start doing behaviourally instead. (Do not describe what you would not be doing.)
- c. If your problem is something you don't want to do, describe it below as if it were a video of what you would observe yourself doing behaviourally instead. (Do not describe what you would not be doing.)

*Step 3*

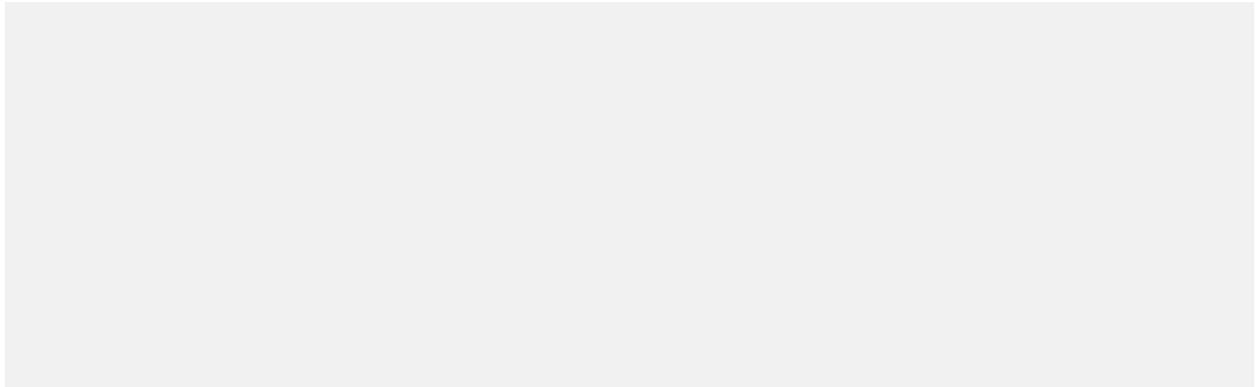
Suppose a miracle happened tonight while you were sleeping, and this miracle solved your problem and since you were sleeping you didn't know this miracle had occurred, and when you woke up you realized that you no longer had this problem. What would be the first small sign (specific observable behaviour) that would show you were doing something different the next day? Construct an image/picture of a behavioural action on your part. Do not describe something you would not be doing.

*Step 4*

Identify who would notice this different thing you would be doing and describe how you imagine they would act when they notice this different behaviour? Construct an image/picture of a behavioural action on their part. Do not describe something they would not be doing.

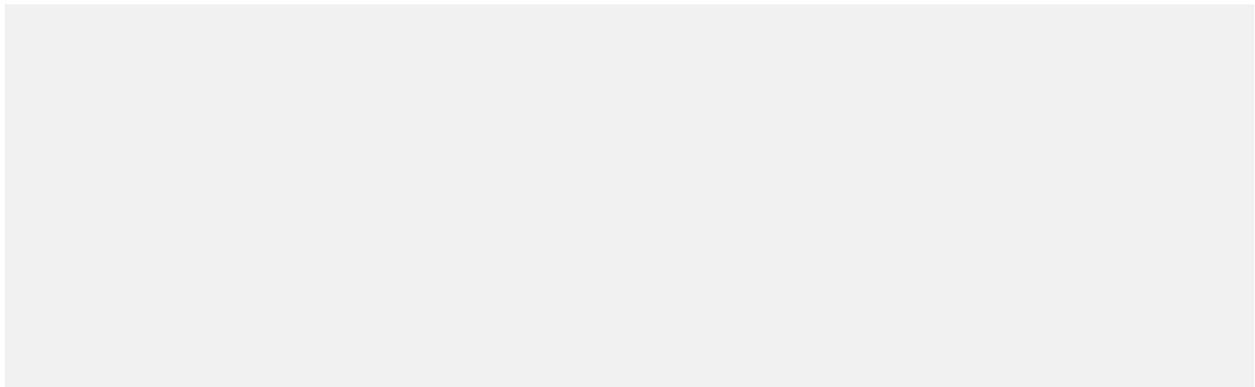
*Step 5*

Indicate what you would do (specific observable behaviour) in reply to the person's response described above.



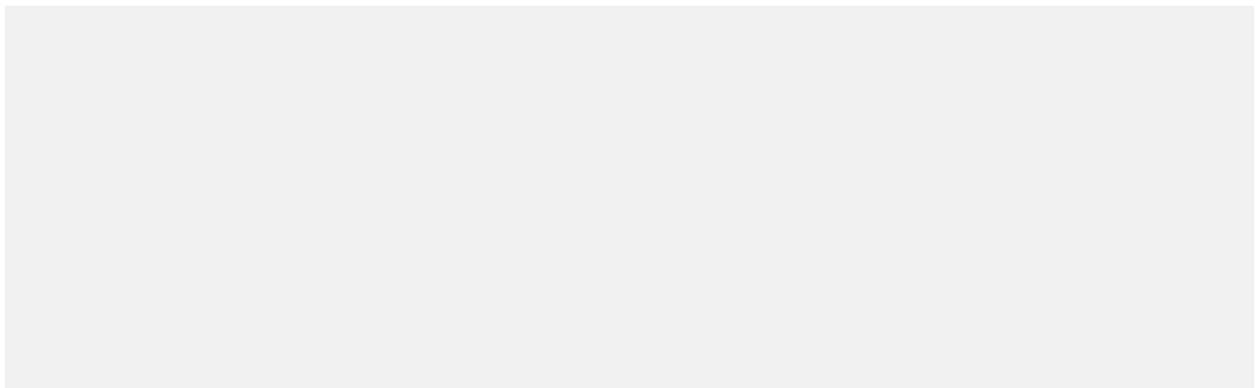
*Step 6*

What else would you notice that you would be doing (specific observable behaviour) differently after this miracle occurred? Construct an image/picture of a behavioural action on your part. Do not describe something you would not be doing.



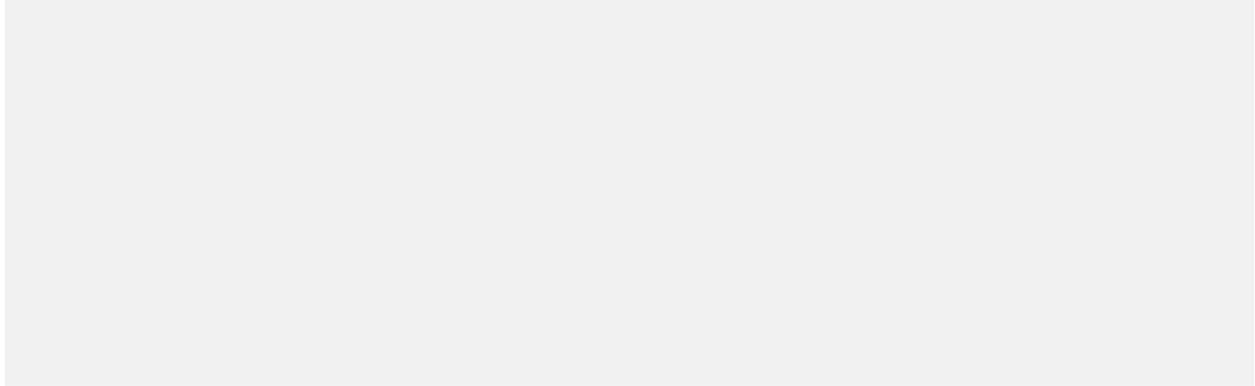
*Step 7*

Identify who else would notice this different thing you would be doing and describe how you imagine they would act when they notice this different behaviour? Construct an image/picture of a behavioural action on their part. Do not describe something they would not be doing.



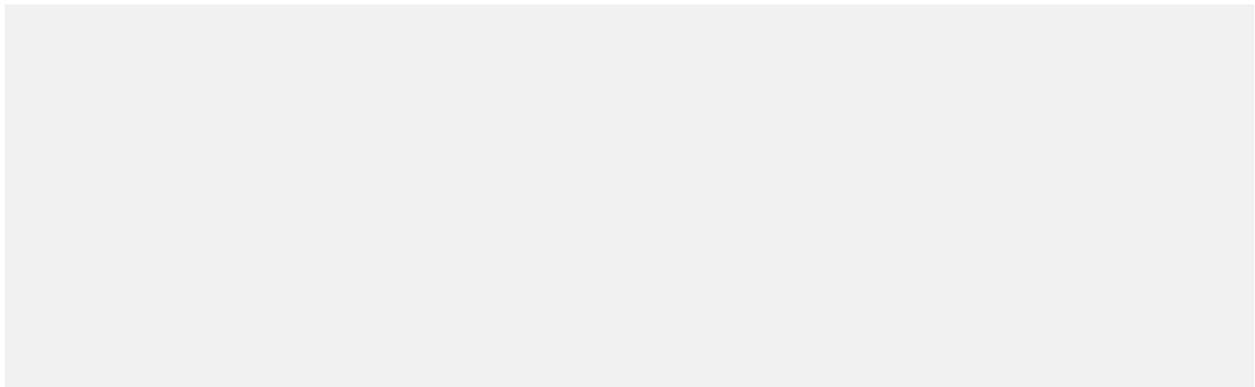
**Step 8**

Indicate what you would do in reply to the person's response described above. Construct an image of a behavioural action on your part. Do not describe something you would not be doing.



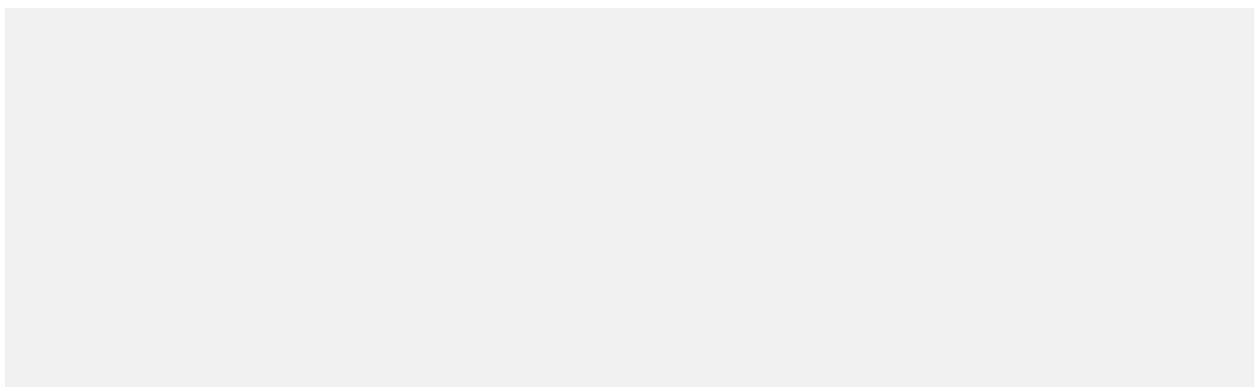
**Step 9**

Describe a time when some of this miracle has already happened, even if only a little bit, during problematic times.



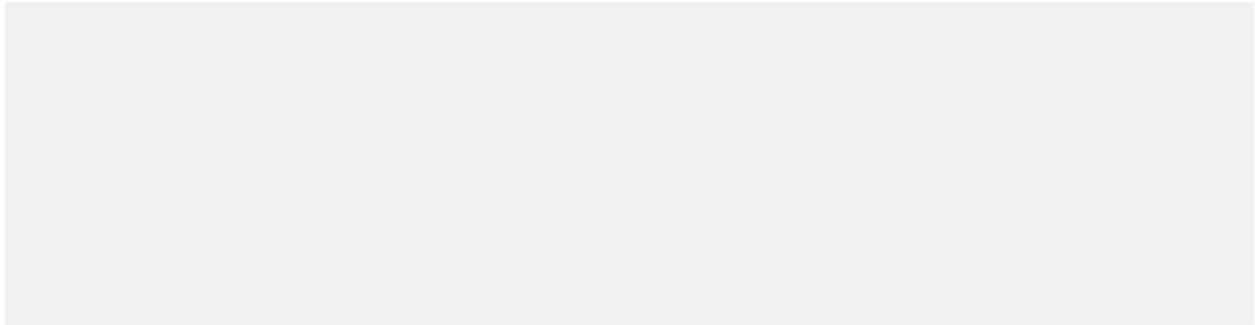
**Step 10**

How did you make this part of your miracle happen during this problematic time? Things you thought or did differently—commitments you made—new behaviour you tried, etc.



**Step 11**

Recall your thoughts about how pleased you were with your efforts at the time.



**Step 12**

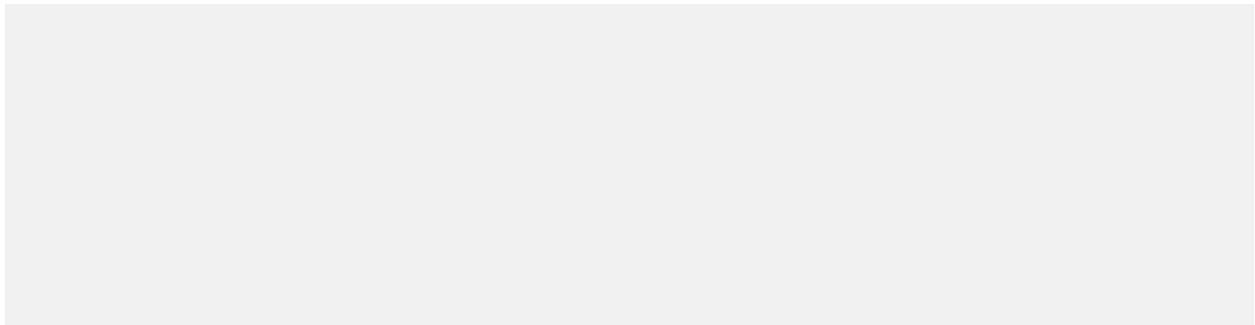
On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 representing the non-existence of this problem and 10 being the worst this problem has ever been and, where do you think you are right now on the scale?

Scaled Score



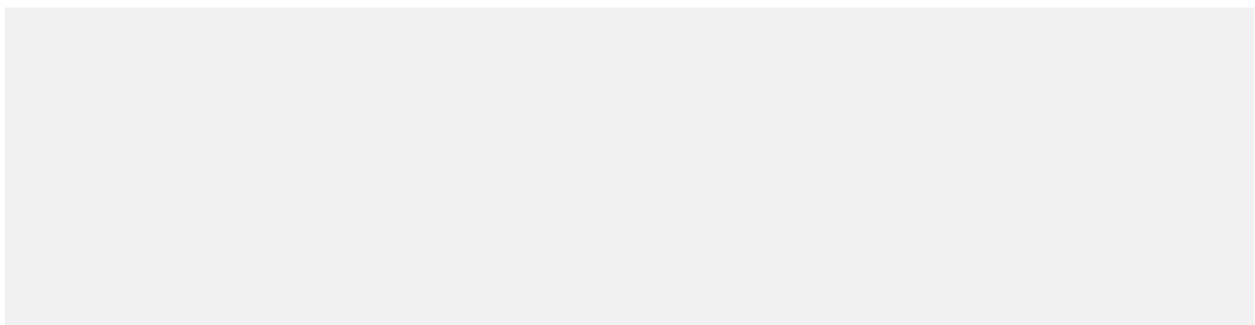
**Step 13**

Describe how you have gotten yourself to that number? Construct an image of a behavioural action on your part. Do not describe something you would not be doing.



**Step 14**

When you are one number lower, what will you and others see you doing (specific observable behaviour) differently that you're not doing now? Do not describe something you would not be doing.



**Step 15**

Write yourself a short note describing what you discovered or rediscovered about yourself and your situation. You can use the back of this sheet if needed. Rate the severity of this problem from 0 (non-existent) - 10 (extremely high):

Scaled Score

Short note: