

## What is Brief Coaching?

Brief coaching is based on the solution focused approach developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg who worked together in Milwaukee, USA. Their research on successful interventions highlighted an interesting finding, namely that change is associated with 'solution talk'. In other words when clients are invited out of 'problem talk' into 'solution talk', they are more likely to change. So Brief Coaching is a description of a way of talking with clients – a very particular style of conversing.

## Solution talk

Brief Coaches ask questions and do so in a focused and disciplined way. The questions are not seeking 'information', they act as 'prompts' to the client to process his or her life in a very specific way.

The characteristics of Solution Talk are:

1. **Outcome focused** – Brief coaches seek to establish the desired outcome, the 'best hopes', and then invite the client to describe in detail how they will know that the desired outcome has been achieved – just description.
2. **Resource focused** – questions invite clients to 'notice and name' their resources, particularly those that are most likely to fit with the achievement of their 'best hopes'.
3. **Builds on what's working** – in moving forward Brief Coaches aim to build on those things that the client is already doing – even a little.
4. **Highlights progress** – Brief Coaches ask questions which consistently seek to highlight any evidence of progress, however small.
5. **Co-constructs an expectation of good outcome** – everything that the Brief Coach does, at a secondary level has the effect of building with the client an evidence based expectation of good outcome.

## Conversation structure for first meetings

**BRIEF** has spent the last few years involved in a project to refine and to simplify the solution focused approach and we have arrived at the following Conversation Structure

**Best hopes** - What do you want (shaping a contract)?

**Preferred future** - How will you know that (what you want) is happening?

**Instances, exceptions, scale** - What are you already doing that fits with what you want from coaching?

**Scale** - What will be the next tiny signs of progress in the preferred direction?

**Summary & Suggestion** – Summary of what the client said that fits with the likelihood of progress and watch out for change in preferred direction

## Conversation structure for follow-up sessions

Every session after the first is thought of as a follow-up and the coach's job is simply to amplify with the client a story of success and progress, a 'progressive narrative'.

**Opening** - What's better since we spoke?

**Amplify** – develop as significant and detailed a picture of change as possible

**Explore the success**

**Strategy questions** - How have you done those things that are better?

**Identity questions** – What have you learnt about yourself?

**Next small signs** – scale questions work well for this.

**Summary & Suggestion** – Summary of what the client said that fits with the likelihood of progress and watch out for change in preferred direction

## What do Brief Coaches do?

Work in and with the client's narrative

Develop detailed pictures of the preferred future.

Assume the client knows what s/he wants.

Assume the client's way to the preferred future is the best way.

Assume the client has the capacity to make the desired changes.

Resist the urge to be 'helpful' & concentrate on being 'useful' instead.

Trust the process.

## What do Brief Coaches NOT do?

Try to understand what is 'really' going on.

Have ideas about what the client should do to solve their problem.

Explore reasons for stuckness.

Action plan – it seems to slow down the change process.

Amplify the problem, through exploration or adding words to the problem description.

Have any interest in exactly what the client will do following the session.

Assume that the client will need more than one session.

## Some reading suggestions

Berg, Insoo. K., Szabo, P. (2005) *Brief Coaching for Lasting Solutions*. New York: Norton.

Iveson, C., George, E., Ratner, H. (December 2011) *Brief Coaching: a solution focused approach*. London: Routledge

**Training in Brief Solution Focused coaching**

Check out the BRIEF website [www.brief.org.uk](http://www.brief.org.uk)