

STRENGTHS-BASED SKILLS IN ACTION



SCENARIO:

Ari is 16 years old and has been feeling a bit meh for ages. He is quite shy and doesn't often come to church with his parents. Most teens at church think Ari is a bit of a snob because he hates small talk. Ari has three private Instagram accounts and in all of his bio's Ari identifies as a "freak". The youth group leader has struggled to engage Ari this term and wonders if he'd respond better with a volunteer like you. When you meet for the first time, Ari says: "I'll never fit into this youth group. There's no point trying." Ari is finding it difficult to imagine how things might be better in the future.

SKILLS	How I could respond
1. Normalising and validating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps the young person understand that their responses to a problem or situation are normal given the circumstances Offer verbal cues such as "that's understandable" to validate their experience and alleviate blame or guilt – but not responsibility Relieving and opens the path for change 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2. Externalising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The problem is the problem; the person is not the problem The problem becomes external and separate Helps the young person see it as something they can respond to Especially powerful with labels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Criminal' becomes 'engaged in criminal behaviour' 'Depressive' becomes 'experiencing depression' 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. Reframing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redefine the problem and see it in a way that is manageable, specific and possible Discover together what the positives might be in the situation, such as learning a new skill or expanding horizons Be cautious not to rescue, diminish or say "at least..." 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

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SKILLS	How I could respond
6. Using questions	
<u>The Miracle question:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pretend things are different• What <i>will</i> be happening (not what <i>won't</i>)• ...and what you will be doing differently.	
“If a miracle happened overnight, and when you woke up the problem had disappeared, what would be different?”	
And what are you doing that’s different?”	
<u>The Special Person question:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remember someone in our life with whom we have a special relationship (grandmother, teacher, sibling, etc.)• To understand how well we are doing, think about what they might say?	
“What would [name of special person] say about how you are coping?”	
“What would they say you’re good at?”	
<u>Exception questions:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anything that is happening when the problem is absent or lessened• Clues to possible solutions.	
“When were things better than they are now? What are the exceptions to this problem? What happens when it’s less of an issue? In other times like this, what have you tried?”	
<u>Scaling questions:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noticing /measuring change and progress towards goals	
“On a scale of 1 and 10, with 1 being when things are at their worst and 10 being when things are at their best, where are things now? Where would you like to be? What might it take to move?”	
How will you know that this has shifted one point up the scale?	
7. Scaling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recording progress and keeping the scale as a ongoing symbol• Much more than evaluation	

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SKILLS

How I could respond

8. The Five Columns: the process of change

1. Current issues, feelings and situation	3. Roadblocks, obstacles and challenges	4. Strengths, exceptions and resources	5. Action plan / what I can try	2. Picture of the Future
Use their words Who holds the pen? Be specific	What might hold you back? Name structural, cultural and personal obstacles	Be free and celebratory Be concrete and explicit Be creative Name how these help move towards column 2	Goals and strategies Brainstorm and then prioritise 1. 2. 3. 4.	Aspirations, hopes and dreams Is this list longer than column 1?

9. Developing concrete description

- Strengths-based practice does not exclusively nor simply focus on personal strengths. We have to name the frame we wish to change.
- Listen, listen, listen
- Unpack the issues
- Name the feelings

“When people act as experts on other people’s problems and try to fix them, those who are facing the problem are denied the opportunity to participate, take control and learn.” – Wayne McCashen

10. Goal setting

- Scaling and the miracle question can help discover goals
- Holding **H.O.P.E.** is an active task!
 - Helping
 - Other
 - Possibilities
 - Emerge

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11. Affirmation

- Ensure you have space to acknowledge, praise and celebrate the authentic and meaningful progress young people make
- Find small yet significant examples

“I’ve really been impressed with the ways you have persevered with...”

“This does seem really complicated and I am stunned that you are still working towards your goals.”

12. Survival and coping

“The strengths perspective obligates [youth] workers to understand that however downtrodden or sick, [young people] have **survived** (and in some cases have even **thrived**). They have taken steps, summoned up resources, and coped.”

“We need to know *how* they have done it, what they have *learned* from doing it, and what *resources* (inner and outer) were available in their struggle to surmount troubles.” - Dennis Saleebey, 1992

How would you link this to Covid-19?

- What got you through today?
- How do you cope?
- What suggestion would you give to a young person in another country if they were just starting a lockdown?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What are you looking forward to?



Keen for more? Check out Wayne McCashen’s *The Strengths Approach*, 2nd edition (2017) available from www.innovativeresources.org