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EDCP 616

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Case #2: Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) with Feminist Theory

Demographic Information:

Leila is a 10-year-old girl who has shown significant social-emotional and academic success. Leila's parents are from Guatemala, and they moved to America hoping to provide a better life for their children. Her parents are working long hours of blue-collar jobs to provide for their family, and there are both language and financial barriers. They have limited education, and it is difficult for them to be involved in school activities. Leila is the youngest of three siblings, and she shares a small apartment in a culturally diverse neighborhood. Within her school, she is one of the few students of color in the school

Personality Style, Problems, & Symptoms:

Leila's presenting problem is that she is being bullied in school by her peers. Teachers have reported incidents of laughing and notes being passed around directed towards Leila. This caused Leila to be visibly upset, as she was found crying during recess. However, she refuses to identify who is bullying her.

Through the lens of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), it is assumed that Leila may approach me in a "problem-oriented" state, possibly convinced that the ongoing bullying she faces is destined to persist in the future. The perception of her current bullying as unchangeable may be a reason why she does not want to report it. Nevertheless, through

collaborative efforts, Leila is competent enough to come up with a solution to her problems. She will know the best course of action for herself and will come in with a sense of what has or has not worked in the past. Acknowledging Leila's high achievement in social-emotional and academic domains suggests that these will later serve as strengths when facing her bullies.

With SFBT, we will primarily focus on Leila's goals and solutions rather than on the problem. When I discuss Leila's presenting problems with her, it will be because I am allowing her to express her problems and validate her. With this approach, I would not prioritize understanding Leila's history and finding the root causes of her problems.

Focus & Course of Therapy:

With Leila, my approach involves guiding her in establishing realistic goals and solutions to address the challenges posed by her bullies. Through my positive and encouraging demeanor, she will understand that she possesses the capabilities and resources necessary to overcome them. The process will be collaborative, with Leila taking on the role of the expert in identifying and crafting her solutions.

To start, I would encourage Leila to openly share her thoughts and feelings, providing a space for her to express any current struggles or frustrations she is experiencing. Staying true to the SFBT lens, it is crucial to validate her emotions, but not delve too deeply into her history. After doing so, I would then explore Leila's goals and desired changes. Given her young age, posing a miracle question would be appropriate and helpful. I would perhaps say "This pencil right here is your magic wand. If you were to wave it, all of your problems would go away. What would be different?" Leila's answers will identify her desired outcomes and goals, shaping our collaborative work.

Recognizing that Leila might initially be negatively deterministic about her problems, my strategy involves shifting her perception to a more optimistic one. This can be achieved by asking if she has done anything that had a positive impact before our session. Expectation questions such as "Have there been instances when the bullying bothered you less? What was different then?" would help Leila explore times when she was successful in not allowing her problem to be too prominent in her life. Another approach is to ask, "Recall a time when you successfully made a friend." Given her high social-emotional skills, this will serve as a reminder of her capabilities in social interactions. Asking these questions will help Leila recognize moments of success, affirming her capability to improve her current situation. Her small wins are signs of her progress toward solutions and change. It will also offer valuable insights into effective solutions, as we had to walk through the steps she took to succeed. Following this, I would pose scaling questions, and work through with Leila what are some possible steps that could be taken to move her up the scale.

Concluding our initial session, I would offer feedback to Leila, summarizing her strengths, signs of hope, and expectations. This feedback aligns with her desired goals. Then after the bridge, I'd assign tailored homework tasks. These tasks, based on our discussions, are intended to be empowering and supportive. The ultimate aim is that, with the implementation of Leila's solutions, she will experience improvement in coping with the bullying. If successful, the need for continued sessions would no longer be needed, and we are able to terminate our sessions.

Evaluation or critique of theory

Given her young age, Leila might not have fully developed all her social skills just yet. After our counseling sessions, the skills and solutions she acquires could prove

valuable for her current challenges and for navigating future social situations as she grows older. It may also empower her, as learns how to effectively solve her problems, and see that it is possible for her to do so. Additionally, with SFBT, the student generates solutions without feeling compelled to take actions they are not comfortable with. Since Leila has expressed reluctance to identify her bullies, this provides an alternative way for her to address her problem.

SFBT also highlights small victories and past achievements. As Leila has been having a difficult time at school lately, optimistically reminding Leila of her own strengths could uplift her, fostering a more positive perspective on her current situation and environment. SBFT is also notoriously known for being short-term, which would work well in my favor, as I do have a caseload of other students.

While entrusting Leila as the expert has its merits, it also introduces potential challenges to consider. At the age of 10, she might rely on me, the adult, to take a more leading role in coming up with appropriate ways to deal with her bullies. It might be challenging for Leila to clearly articulate her thoughts and feelings, therefore impacting the depth of discussions around goals and solutions. Next, not focusing on the root causes of Leila's problems serves as a limitation, as it does not allow us to address the potential impact of systemic issues such as oppression. Leila's unique background (immigrant parents, low SES, being one of the few students of color in her school) might introduce elements of systemic challenges and cultural differences that play a role in her experiences of bullying. Ignoring or not explicitly addressing these factors could limit the

effectiveness of counseling Leila, as it might not fully acknowledge the broader context shaping her experiences. Additionally, It could have been used to tailor her solutions better.

Integrative Approach

Leila's intersecting identities, including being a person of color, a second-generation child, a girl, and coming from a low socioeconomic background significantly influence her current struggles with bullying. SFBT neglects to explore the complex intersections of identity and systemic issues. However, when combined with Feminist Theory, it will allow a complete understanding of Leila's experiences and the broader social context contributing to her bullying. With Leila, goals include identifying and challenging her internalized messages of oppression. We aim to replace these with more self-enhancing beliefs. For example, if the students in her class are making fun of her skin color, I would reeducate her that her skin is beautiful and that looking different from her peers does not make her uglier. Additionally, Leila will gain a better understanding of how sexist and oppressive societal practices negatively influence her, and she will develop the skills needed to bring about positive change in her current situation in relation to these challenges.

Through the technique of self-disclosure, I plan to open up about times when I felt excluded or treated unfairly because I was different from my peers. Hopefully, this opens up a discussion about ways in which we both have experienced cultural and social

pressure to conform to hetero-normative ideals. Leila will be comforted and affirmed by seeing there is another woman of color who does meet society's expectations, but is still comfortable with my identities, and how it has worked in my favor instead of against me. Hopefully, she would be inspired and adapt to the same sentiments when considering her conclusions or facing her peers. Leila could also greatly benefit from assertiveness training. We would walk through which form of assertiveness is appropriate and inappropriate within her social context. If it is a possible solution, Leila would then understand standing up for herself against her bullies is not a "bad" or "aggressive" behavior. This technique may give power and confidence back to Leila when confronting her bullies. In many ways, the feminist theory and SFBT share a lot of the same ideals in the sense that both aim to empower students. In both approaches, we are looking for solutions and ways that are tailored to Leila, and carrying out her goals.

Additional Analysis

Considering the fact that Leila is 10, introducing the concepts of oppression and multicultural and social justice may be too complex and complicated for her. I would not expect Leila to partake in social action at her school or completely understand the power dynamics that are at play. I would have to find a way to explain the oppression and marginalization that she is experiencing in a more age-appropriate way, which can be very challenging.

"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

Vivian Huynh