

The S-O-L-V-E Method

A User Friendly Schema That Can Bring Out the Best

Bette J. Freedson, LICSW, LCSW, CGP
Bettefreedson.com
bjfreedson@gmail.com

Problem-Solving Is US! The Business of Therapy

Who among us has ever had a client come in without a problem? Actually, could we not say that the therapy business itself is about problem solving? As practitioners of brief, focused therapy, part of the job description is to help our clients resolve their dilemmas quickly, efficiently and productively and to provide patients with tools to access problem solving resources when they are without the benefit of our brief therapy brilliance.

Perhaps we could measure our success as brief therapists by how well our clients solve their problems efficiently, effectively and easily on their own.

The S-O-L-V-E Method: An Effective and Flexible Schema

The Steps:

Still the Mind/Select an Issue

Open the Mind to Dreaming

Let go of Struggle/Let in Belief, images, Ideas

Vision, Validate & Verify

Elicit, Experience & Evaluate

The SOLVE method provides a number of multi-faceted tools for therapists to use in effective short-term sessions, as well as tools for clients to incorporate into skill-based resources for use in any situation.

While the SOLVE schema can be adapted for all ages and circumstances, its flexibility has proven to be particularly effective for use with kids and teens. The initial development of the SOLVE method came from my work in the school-based setting where SOLVE was adapted for, and employed with, students from K-12, as well as taught to and used by their teachers and administrators. The method delivered results tracked along the goals in students' IEPs. SOLVE received positive feedback from the students and their teachers with reference to both behavioral and academic goal-based results.

Research suggests that decreasing stress while increasing a sense of well-being in children and adolescents results in improved brain development and greater efficacy in executive and pro-social functioning, including relational capacity, conflict resolution abilities and resilience for coping with difficult emotions. Use of the SOLVE schema as a brief therapy approach with kids and teens can provide enduring

outcomes in all of the above categories in a diversity of settings, including individual therapy, family therapy and clinical and school-based groups.

The SOLVE schema can be utilized as an entirety in one session or parsed into sections, each of which can be used independently. The method seems to effectively reach the developing brain through accessing both unconscious and conscious resources, incorporating executive functioning skills, using outside support as needed, and practicing new behaviors, and thinking systems. In this way teens and kids develop greater self-efficacy, belief in 'I-Can!'

The SOLVE model has proven to be particularly effective with kids on the PDD spectrum, teens with behavioral issues and those with depression and anxiety, as will be discussed later in the case of Kitten.

The Solve schema itself is a user-friendly and flexible problem solving approach that provides a simple effective tool that can help any client access brain potential for learning, regulating and maturing. This schema can be adapted for use with your favorite methodology. It is compatible with CBT, hypnosis, and an Ericksonian approach, or another modality of your preference.

For the therapist the SOLVE method provides virtually unlimited potential for focused therapy sessions that anchor skills in the body and access the mental/sensate/intuitive

wisdom of the mature client or the developing thinking skills of adolescents or children.

The SOLVE schema can be utilized either as a linear progression or broken down into parts with a non-linear focus. The method provides relaxation as well as mobilization of a therapeutic dose of sympathetic arousal, the best of two brain worlds, taming the amygdala and arousing coping capacity. Used in its entirety as a single brief, effective therapy session or used as segments of the schema, SOLVE can provide skill building practice and repetition without redundancy, strengthening skills and resources within soma and soul.

With the SOLVE schema problem solving results can occur quickly. Repeated use of SOLVE over a few sessions, or many sessions helps to incorporate and automatize the skills being accessed.

SOLVE is a natural fit for the creativity of an Ericksonian Approach and a natural resource for brief therapy.

The SOLVE Schema Parsed

S--Still the mind/Select an Issue to Solve:

Settle into a comfortable position with one or two gentle, easy breaths.

O--Open your mind to Dreaming

Open your mind to any thoughts related to the problem

at hand. Thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, and ideas can come gently into your mind.

L--Let Go of Struggle & Let In Belief, Images, Ideas

Let go of mental stress by letting your thoughts float gently and peacefully into the wise space within your mind where you can believe in yourself and your wise imagination.

V--Vision, Validate & Verify

Envisioning bring choices into view. Validate and Verify your ideas by thinking them over, and discussing them with a teacher, a guidance counselor, a parent, or any other safe adult. (Specific to Kids) Think about your ideas, and consider the realities of the situation.

E--Elicit, Experience and Evaluate

Eliciting choices for action or non-action increases resilience.

Imagine what it would be like to experience a particular course of action or non-action.

Bring into your mind the various options and mentally experience possible outcomes and consequences of each. Pay attention to your thoughts, emotions and the sensations in your body as you think about each choice. What would you like

to achieve with a particular choice? What choice, or choices, might accomplish your goal? Might any of your choices result in undesired consequences?

Get as honest with yourself as you can about what you want the outcome to be. What might be some possible consequences of your various choices? When you have carefully verified and evaluated, you are ready to make a choice.

Your action could also be non-action in some circumstances. Careful evaluation before and after, and even during a particular situation, will help refine your skills for managing stress and difficult situations. You will also learn more about your Self. Taking full responsibility for the consequences of your choices will help develop your problem-SOLVE-ing skills, your resilience and your Belief in yourself.

The Case of Kitten/Brief Therapy in a Temporal Context

<http://www.somaticpsychotherapytoday.com/be-your-own-super-hero-embodiment-your-vision/>



Kitten Creates an Avatar

Ability to Endure Affect

Enduring Resilience

Affectively labile, emotionally fragile and introverted at age fourteen when she came for counseling. Kitten was prone to severe anxiety with intermittent suicidal ideation. For the first three and a half years of our work together, social work services were determined as part of Kitten's IEP. Despite this obligation to show up, Kitten had a hard time sitting through a session for the first year.

Limited in resilience, and the ability to tolerate even the slightest tinge of painful affect, Kitten's emotional swings were punctuated by what appeared to be some strengths peeking out from an otherwise bleak picture. Both her deficits and strengths ultimately would motivate me to find a way to

help Kitten tap her imagination and begin to access the resources of her inner mind.

However, first I needed to help Kitten calm down enough to be able to learn and to grow. The fact that Kitten had problems with both working and procedural memory presented a challenge to this endeavor. An opening to this dilemma came when I discovered that Kitten loved to draw cartoon characters, particularly those called anime.' I determined that I would find a way to utilize Kitten's cartoons and make them my assistants. Together we would help Kitten to incorporate her characters' manifest skills into her own self-efficacy, building her resilience and coping capacities.

Despite the fact that she could not remember from week to week what we were doing, Kitten's characters might help Kitten absorb and ratify the skills she herself needed, Using the key feature of an Ericksonian approach, i.e., the magic of utilization would be the answer to both Kitten's problem and mine. Brief, focused sessions, each of which would be its own entity would allow skills to accumulate within the unconscious mind, to be elicited when resilient coping would be needed in various situations.

SOLVE-ING My Own Dilemma

Using my own *persona*/problem-solving method, i.e. gentle breathing, stilling my mind, and letting soul wisdom come in, I

dreamed up some ideas. Remembering that kids learn better when less stressed, and thinking about the potential for eliciting dormant resources of the unconscious mind, I decided to revamp aspects of an existing ABCDE stress-management schema. I wanted a system that would be an amalgam of CBT and the wisdom of the unconscious mind (which I call "soul wisdom) with experiential ingredients spiced in.

Because I like acronyms, I named the new schema SOLVE. I would focus it on problem solving and incorporate trance for settling the amygdala along with a homeopathic dose of sympathetic arousal to get the system moving and motivated.

With the new SOLVE method I would have a natural, focused strategic approach for each session. As in a brief therapy model, each session would be organized with a beginning, middle and a conclusion, moving purposefully toward achieving a goal contextualized within a schematic approach.

Viewing each session as an entity with a goal focus would allow skills to be developed experientially with didactics as needed. Growth could be indirectly elicited, absorbed within the unconscious, and anchored in the body, with healing accomplished in the mind's own time and at the mind's own pace.

All that was good. However, because this was a school setting, I needed an approach that could be operationalized, measured

and served up as evidence of positive results. I needed to externalize the internal process of my schema so that we could observe and measure outcomes. To this end, I created a large visual, a poster of the steps. In this way I could employ the visual learning aspects as my students and I developed specific goals within the lettered segments of the schema. These goals would then be observed, rated and charted in accordance with Kitten's and my other students' IEP goals.

The first day I introduced my new model to Kitten, she started to tear up, as usual, overwhelmed.

"I don't understand this." She said.

"Well, Kitten, perhaps the problem to solve first is for you to understand this new plan. I am happy to explain how it works."

Still teary, she nodded.

"This is a method that uses steps to solve a problem. We can review each step as we go along. Okay?"

Nod, less crying.

"So, let's keep it simple. You know how to breathe. That's the first step. Simply take a gentle breath, and settle comfortably into the chair. The only thing you need to do is to breathe and be. That's right..."

And so we began and so it went for many sessions, focused on each step of the process. We began each session with a breath, allowing Kitten time to settle into the chair and within her body. During many sessions there were various tribulations and vicissitudes of school that we had to address; however before long, Kitten was sitting through more sessions without becoming affectively flooded, needing to take the rest of the session to regulate, or saying she could not stay through the time.

As we proceeded in this way, Kitten more easily entered a light trance state, and began to enjoy it. During these moments, I would offer indirect suggestions for stress to lessen and for Kitten's mind to open to images and ideas, ratifying with "That's right, Kitten."

Kitten's Characters; Utilization Becomes Fun

During the time Kitten was in trance, I would invariably check in with her at some point to get a sense of what was happening. It was during one of these times that Kitten's characters began to take part in our sessions.

"What's happening now, Kitten?" I asked during one particular effective trance experience.

"I was imagining one of my characters, the one with the sword who is not afraid of anything!" She replied with a smile.

“Help me know more about your character.” I invited. “Are there others?”

“Oh, yah, many.” She answered. “Would you like to see my sketch-pad?”

“Oh, I would love to see it, Kitten!”

From this session forward, Kitten, the sketchpad and I were a trio, and I began to understand how much of her Self Kitten was pouring into her characters.

Continuing to use the SOLVE steps, which I was also developing, I ratified Kitten’s imaginary creations and asked her if she would be willing to create an anime’ character for as many feelings as she and I could come up with. Kitten loved the idea.

After many goal focused and trance included sessions, Kitten’s motivation, her delight and excitement took ONLY this one session to be elicited! Something had endured over time, and Kitten went to work behind the scenes to design pictures for the growing awareness of her own emotional states.

Many sessions that followed were devoted to examining the facial expressions, body postures and inner emotions and sensations of each of the characters Kitten was creating. Now

almost each session included many if not all of the five SOLVE steps.

When we would get to “E” for experience, at times I would ask Kitten to take the posture and make the facial expression of the character we were discussing. She was able to do this without becoming flooded. While each of these sessions was a brief therapy session in itself, there was a temporal progression of Kitten’s growth. She was smiling more in our meetings, and going more easily into trance. She was tearing up less and needing to leave prematurely hardly at all. Her teachers were also reporting more ability to stay in class when stress ratcheted up.

In each short session, Kitten’s endurance was increasing and her skills for tolerating stress and affect were growing.

Back to Kitten’s Future

Now after many years of using the SOLVE Method, Kitten has graduated from high school and is a college freshman. She is currently more functional under stress, with the help of an SSRI low dose, less anxious and depressed and much less labile. She is still an avid cartoonist, now a follower of Japanese-style video games, and hoping someday to make a career out of creating video game characters with stories in the Japanese style, which, she explained, unlike American stock-plot superheroes, are multi-dimensional. Now Kitten herself is more multi-dimensional, having integrated many aspects of Self that were previously fragmented and dissociated.

As Kitten continues to become a more cohesive Self, we continue to utilize SOLVE. Although Kitten is now much better equipped to hold onto the center thread of therapy, many of our sessions stand alone as brief entities that have a beginning, a middle and a conclusion around solving some small, medium or large issue.

In one of our most recent meetings, Kitten, who is now a private patient, disclosed she is working on a special new character.

Kitten says she is making the character “like I want to be.” In this session after relaxing into a light trance, Kitten happily discussed her super-woman, courageous and currently no-name “main character.”

Kitten explains. “After an alien spaceship crashes into her yard, the main character discovers a robo-dog and alien technology. She explores the spaceship and finds gloves that give her special powers. She finds power boots that can make her jump higher. Her mission is Justice, and I am creating her like I want to be. She does good work. She has a lot of friends and she is brave. I’m not brave.”

“If you are creating your main character to be like you want to be,” I ask, “Would it not be possible that you are already becoming a little more like her?”

“I dunno,” Kitten replies, tearing up again.

“Four years ago you were not as organized or confident as you are now. Now, you are doing good work in school and coping better with life. If you had cried in a session back then, you might have bolted. Now you are staying. Could we not say that you might be feeling a little braver than you think?”

With tears at the edges of her eyes, Kitten replies, “I dunno.” Then, after a thoughtful pause, “But... I didn’t blow up!”

“Kitten,” I ask, smiling. “Remember the feeling cards?”

Smiling back, she says. “Yup! The only thing is... I don’t know where they are.”

“Could they be right where you need them?” I gently ask.

With her hand at her heart, Kitten replies. “I think they’ve gone in here.”

“Yay,” I thought, “One Problem Solved!”

Bette J. Freedson, LCSW is a clinical social worker, certified group psychotherapist, and the author of *Soul Mothers’ Wisdom: Seven Insights for the Single Mother*. Bette’s specialties include stress management, parenting issues, recovery from trauma and the development of intuitive

insight. She maintains a private practice in southern Maine with her husband, Ray Amidon, LMFT.

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