

BOOK REVIEWS

The Solution-Focused Parent : How to Help Children Conquer Challenges by Learning Skills by Ben Furman

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This book's main idea is that children don't have problems, they just haven't yet learned certain skills. A vital, creative, highly practical and enjoyably-written child rearing guide that celebrates collaboration with children, hope, and useful change.

The Solution-Focused Parent: How to Help Children Conquer Challenges by Learning Skills by Ben Furman

Routledge, 2024, 182 pages, ISBN 9781032564791, paperback £18.99 (eBook available)

The Solution-Focused Parent is a beautifully crafted, practical book about the skills approach to parenting. It contains a treasure of child-friendly and community-oriented tools that parents, grandparents, teachers, caretakers, and everybody who has child rearing at heart can use as and when needed. Ben Furman invites us – ever so softly – to think of the skills approach as a lens that lets us see people in a different light.

“When viewing the world through this lens, instead of seeing a multitude of people with flaws and problems around us, we see people who have stumbled upon challenges and who are capable of overcoming those challenges by learning skills with the help and support of other people.” (p 177)

The book has nine chapters with a brief afterword and a highly informative Links and Resources section. Furman starts by telling us two types of stories, both equally engaging, and making the basic idea of the skills approach easy to grasp. The first is an allegory about children of a faraway village who resolve many mysterious problems through the joint efforts of themselves and the adults of the village. The second exemplifies how the skills approach was used by a woman to help her 6-year-old goddaughter overcome a challenge and acquire a specific skill. Admirable in this second account is the active

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participation of the child – bravely taking all the steps in the skill-learning process. Both stories hold the key to understanding the skills approach: “Children participate actively, others support them” (p 16).

The next three ‘how-to’ chapters build on the principles and tools of Solutions Focus, making sure we know what the benefits of the skills approach are – hope for change, learning and collaboration being among the most significant. Converting children’s challenges into skills, choosing from a number of ways to motivate children to learn these skills, and venturing into using the approach in day-to-day parenting frame the skills approach.

From chapters six and seven, the book’s practical strand develops. In Chapter Six, Ben Furman presents true stories about how skills orientation has helped children handle various types of difficulties and more serious mental health issues. Chapter Seven provides an extensive A-Z list of children’s challenges and problems and suggests ways to address them. Despite his concern that we cannot directly draw a line from a child’s problem to what would be a relevant skill for the child to learn (importantly, we need to first establish a connection and have conversations with the child), Furman does suggest how to understand and tackle these issues using the skills approach

To add to the book’s practical value, Chapter Eight puts forward six reminders of what we need to do to make the approach fun and rewarding.

The last chapter – Skills Approach in Schools – is the one I closely relate to. A year or so ago, before this book was published, I collaborated with a school in Sofia to overcome the disruptive behavior of four nine-year-old boys. Neither warnings nor dismissals had brought any consistent results, and the school principal was worried about the emergence of a school culture of violence. Not entirely confident in how to approach the situation, I sought Ben Furman’s support. His message came brief and clear, grounded in principles and experience, new and sharply to the point. This new book has all these qualities, and much more. It is easy to read, and moves through a great range of stories, case examples, coaching keys, instructions, and the author’s own crisp insights.

Visually, the book is an embodiment of the author’s main idea – i.e., that children don’t have problems, they just haven’t yet learned certain skills yet. The images on the first cover of the book are delightful, and something every parent would love to see their kid doing. In addition, every chapter is preceded by wisely chosen black-and-white photos featuring a scene from the life of children and parents.

Ben Furman’s book is not only a vital and creative child rearing guide. It is an enjoyable read that celebrates collaboration with children, hope, and useful change.

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