

11-2021

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Recommended Citation

Selman, Matthew (2021) "Solution Focused Therapy with Children and Adolescents: Creative and Play-Based Approaches -Written by Elizabeth R. Taylor," *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 17.

Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol5/iss2/17>

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BOOK REVIEW**Solution Focused Therapy with Children and Adolescents: Creative and Play-Based Approaches**

Elizabeth R. Taylor

Routledge, 2019, 194 pages, ISBN: 978-1-138-05454-7 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-05455-4 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-315-16667-4 (ebk). Price £120 (hbk) £32.99 (pbk) £32.99 (ebk)

Review by Matt Selman

 Northumbria University at Newcastle (UK)

Inspired by this book to engage with creativity, my first draft of this review was written in the form of a poem – admittedly not one that was going to get me in the running for international fame or even a silver star from a primary school teacher. Rhyming and conveying a depth of critique was a bit of an ask so I offer here a more conventional review.

The title of the book helpfully directs us to the contents – it introduces solution focused therapy for children and adolescents with creative and play based approaches. The focus is on individual work and examples are from an educational setting so for those more family-oriented practitioners adjustment in practice will be needed - something acknowledged by the author.

From the start I really enjoyed and learned from this book. The author's writing style is great – accessible to read while still well referenced with supporting research and theory.

The opening introduces broader strengths-based approaches and mentions positive psychology but this never features again. A bit like getting a mini magnifying glass in Xmas cracker - I can see why it is there but is it needed or useful? In this section, solution focused brief therapy and narrative therapy are introduced as strength-based therapies and given an equal billing. Practically this seems to be around the later use of externalising from narrative therapy into the practice. A lot of the creative and play in the original arts therapy context enable projection and exploration of problems. Here by using externalising the interpretive psychodynamic aspect is left behind and the solution focused approach is possible. The use of externalising a problem as an integral part of practice – drawing the problem then drawing life without the problem - may step aside from a purely solution focused approach by incorporating a brief problem focus from which things will change.

The rationale for using creative and play based methods with children is well set out with play being a primary form of communication over verbal language. Additionally, there are benefits for work with children and adolescents who have developmental disabilities or trauma experiences where purely verbal interaction can be challenging or disadvantaging. My own practice fully supports the use of the arts in work with intellectual disabilities.

A chapter introduces various creative and play based methods including sandbox, puppets, and role-play, drawing, painting and phototherapy. The latter was completely new to me and I'm keen to take the idea into practice particularly as cameras on smart phones are so ubiquitous. As noted there is not the space for great depth into the practices and – returning to the well referenced aspect – I have acquired a number of cited articles adding to my knowledge.

The following chapters set out stages of Solution Focused Brief Therapy which serves as an introduction to the approach setting this out over the course of therapy. Each of these areas are then followed by how the creative methods might be utilised in relation to it. A final chapter on group-based solution focused practice is included. Coming from a place of familiarity with SFBT I would have liked more exploration of the creative and play methods and techniques. I did wonder how many would come to the book without any prior SFBT. That said, for someone wanting an introduction to SFBT and a creative aspect the book is spot on.

In conclusion I could not resist a bit of versifying...

I really enjoyed this book

I'd highly recommend you take a look

For me the ideas shared inside

Should be shared far and wide.

Apologies for putting you through that! I do genuinely recommend this text for solution focused practitioners for opening up possibilities for engagement with children and young people that fits easily with solution focused practice.

The reviewer

Dr. Matt Selman is a senior lecturer and programme lead for Evidence Based Psychological Practice (Systemic Family Practice) at Northumbria University at Newcastle, UK. He is not considering giving this up for a career as a poet. A silver star would be nice though.

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