

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Relationspaces: A Solution-focused Handbook for Parents by Vicky Essebag

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The title of Vicky Essebag's new book grabbed my curiosity. *Relationspaces*: What are they? A description? A new concept? An approach? The process of actively seeking to understand the notion was already on its way. As soon as page 3 of the book, a core dimension of its meaning appeared: "*RS is a conceptual understanding that prioritizes productive relationships by creating a healthy space for them.*" "Relationships" and "spaces" – a hard bedrock foundation allowing the book to evolve smoothly afterwards. With each successive chapter, Vicky invites us – parents, solution focus practitioners, and also educators - to move forward and build understandings around the multiple elements of *Relationspaces*.

Grateful for the use of simple language, we are firstly guided through the six basic principles of *relationspaces*, the ones which support salient aspects of the parent-child relationship. As they form the core of the book, I think it is useful to list them below, together with the questions related to each of the principles:

1. Reflection: Welcoming and engaging with others' thoughts and ideas
  - Q: How am I being reflective with my child / family?
2. Strengths/Assets: Harnessing personal gifts
  - Q: How am I helping my child / family to discover and use their strengths and assets?
3. Success: We all have what it takes to be successful
  - Q: How am I helping my child / family focus on success?
4. Action: Shifting from problem to solution

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- Q: How am I supporting my child / family in taking action?
- 5. Noticing: Drawing out the best possible self
  - Q: How am I noticing my child / family?
- 6. Hope: A fresh start
  - Q: How am I supporting my child / family I being hopeful?

Secondly, the author offers just enough background for each principle to make sure our footing is secure. We can then delve into the treasure of resources arising from Vicky's solution focus counseling experience, evidence-based research, and parenting. We revel in the abundance of case studies, thought boxes, extension exercises, scenarios. Dozens of techniques and strategies meet our own ideas to give us the confidence to experiment (when we are ready) and make progress.

In the two final chapters of her book, the author offers two types of summary. In Chapter 11, she succinctly maps out the solution-focused philosophy of *Relationspaces* and takes us through different practices of implementing the six principles. In Chapter 12, we are encouraged to hold on to the practical thread of the previous chapter and go through the summary of questions and language prompts reinforcing solution-focused conversations.

A word about the structure of the book. I liken it to a light, albeit stable scaffolding, which Vicky Essebag has put up for us, her readers, to climb up and down in safety, take our time, choose spaces to settle in and reflect, expand or create new ones. On my bookshelf I will put this guide right next to Linda Metcalf's *Counseling toward Solutions*, (Metcalf, 2021), and Michael Ende's *Momo* (Ende, 1973/2009), ready to open all three when, in September, I prepare my next coaching sessions with the teachers and parents from a school in Sofia.

My favourite feature of Vicky Essebag's book are the vignettes preceding the Introduction and each of the ten chapters that follow. They shed their soft poetic light on the possibilities suggested in their respective chapters and, at the same time, provide us with a wide-angle lens to experience relationspaces from the position of our own aspirations. A brief look at the string of their titles (Parenthood, Making Space, A Relationspace, The Block Tower, Personal Gifts, Success Is Not Final, Undoing, Around the Corner, The Flower, The Hedge, and Hope, bears the promise of boundless possibilities.

I want to end this review with the one vignette which inspired me to go through *Relationspaces* over and over again.

### **Making Space**

*I will make an open space,  
For us,  
And shed light on it.  
I will welcome you to it,*

*And share it with you.  
It will be a traveling space,  
A changing space,  
As we create,  
New spaces together.*

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