

## BOOK REVIEWS

# The Solution Focused Brief Therapy Diamond: A New Approach to SFBT That Will Empower Both Practitioner and Client to Achieve the Best Outcomes by Elliott E Connie and Adam S Froerer

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## **The Solution Focused Brief Therapy Diamond: A new approach to SFBT that will empower both practitioner and client to achieve the best outcomes by Elliott E Connie and Adam S Froerer**

Hay House, 2023, 330 pp, ISBN 978-1788178495, £15.99 paperback (e-book and audio book available)

This book is an introduction to Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) for both beginners and seasoned professionals. Previous knowledge of the approach is not necessary, and - according to the authors - should even be forgotten; indeed, any previous therapeutic knowledge should ideally be set aside (p. 1f). The authors draw a detailed picture of their work, with clear and simple guiding principles such as 'love' and 'autonomy of the client'. It has an encouraging 'can-do' effect and a motivating 'want to do' impact on the reader.

The book claims to deliver a new approach to SFBT. The authors refer to SFBT as an evolutionary approach (p.4), and see their own steps within this evolution, which they call "straightening the line" (p. 3) in the history they relate from the Mental Research Institute through to Steve and Insoo, and then to BRIEF in London. The authors present us with an introduction (containing also a 'history'), the stance, the diamond and some further points called 'beyond basics'. The style of the narrative, the personal and client stories, the memorable visualisation of the work in the form of a diamond, all make the book unique.

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Talking about the therapeutic stance as a key element of the Diamond model (p.40ff), seems to be new in the range of Solution Focused introductory books (I checked arbitrarily five books from my shelves). The Acronym ADOPT summarizes the message nicely: Autonomy, Difference, Outcome, Presuppose, Trust (p.49). The authors use this chapter to give enthusiastic advice on how to behave as a therapist: seeking differences towards 'better', presupposing the best in clients, trusting clients' capabilities, etc. While the construct of 'stance' might appear to be something mental, it turns out to be a bunch of practical hints backed with stories.

The Diamond itself is a visualization for learning and, memorising the suggested Solution Focused process. In the series of metaphors of its kind (such as the SolutionCircle (Daniel Meier) or Art Gallery (Chris Iveson)), it allows and suggests flexibility in the personal style of the practitioner (p.101). From negotiating the desired outcome to a consciously slim closing, it identifies three "description pathways", related to the desired outcome: history of, resources for and future of the outcome. While these three pathways are broadly in line with what we know from SFBT work in general, the authors deliver engaging examples and practical advice. I particularly liked the stories about 'making "impossible" outcomes (a non-verbal son saying something to his mother) linguistically possible (feeling a normal mum)' by respecting the "impossible" outcome and continuing the conversation (p.115f). Also remarkable is the suggestion to see what used to be called 'exceptions or instances' as part of a detailed history of the outcome ("When your best hope was present in the past, what did you first notice?" p. 104f). The authors also emphasise connecting the client with others through legacy questions ("Where did you learn to be brave?" p.221f).

One special aspect of the book is that it talks with two voices; recurring sections are called "Diving Deep with Elliott" and "A Closer Look with Adam". This feature allows us to see whatever is told from slightly different angles. I appreciate this transparency in the narrative. It reminds me of Chris Iveson asking me around the publication of the BRIEF book *Brief Coaching* in Hungarian and German, whether I recognised who wrote which chapter. Well, Elliott and Adam saved us from the guessing. I also recommend the audio book, recorded by the authors! I would like to see this move, offering the book also for listeners (as did Haesun Moon earlier with her *Coaching A-Z*) become standard.

There are two narratives mixed together in this book. One is the story of the two authors coming to SF and each other through the field of therapy. The other is how to practice SFBT in an effective and loving way. This professional narrative declares love as the most important principle for doing solution focused therapeutic work, which might be new in this clarity and volume. For the first, scenes from the lives of the authors generate a strong dynamic for the reader; sympathy and appreciation can grow and make the reader even

more open for the messages. It's hard and confusing the same time to read the episodes around racism. They are a vital part of the personal narrative, but perhaps less helpful about how to do therapy.

As the short list of References on page 313 makes clear, this is a book mostly written from personal experience (of a clinician and of a researcher) and told in a "knowing" teaching voice alongside several impressive case examples. The work of others in the field (Iveson, Ratner, George, de Shazer and Berg, Szabó, McKergow) is quoted through the authors' experience (p. 103, 124) and not referred to as written, scholarly material (although there is a short list of wider references). This fits well within the tradition of non-fiction books written for a wider audience: transporting the ideas through stories and dramatic successes giving prominence to the authors' work. Consequently, the SFBT resources (p. 312) just refers to the authors' published work.

The list of 101 Solution Focused questions corresponding with and adding on to the diamond elements (p. 270ff) is very practical. This feature fits well with the stated fact SFBT is a question-based model and with the Elliott Connie's catchphrase "you are always just one question away from making a difference" (p. 256). While the book indicates some of the discussions in the field about how it is developing (p.77) the authors don't explicitly refer to the evolving understanding of SFBT as an interactional approach (such as the microanalysis studies of Janet Bavelas and others). I think I learned the most about SFBT in books by reading conversation transcripts - you really can look forward to the whole session transcript with Elliott (p.275ff).

The method of teaching in this book "forgetting everything one has heard about SFBT or therapy in general so far, first", promises a comprehensive introduction and delivers it. It has a refreshing effect for our own thinking and does not leave you untouched. I recommend it to everyone in the SFBT field and would like to see a discussion of its contents.

Read this review in German on the NLA-Schweiz website at <https://www.nla-schweiz.ch/buchbesprechung-der-loesungsfokussierte-therapie-diamant/>

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## Supplementary Materials

### **DE Buchrezension 'The Solution Focused Brief Therapy Diamond' by Elliott Connie und Adam Froerer**

Download: <https://journalsfp.org/article/91211-the-solution-focused-brief-therapy-diamond-a-new-approach-to-sfbt-that-will-empower-both-practitioner-and-client-to-achieve-the-best-outcomes-by-elli/attachment/189743.pdf>

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