



# Creating a Company-wide Solution-Focused Culture: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

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SFiO Webinar  
16 January 2024



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Breakout rooms – assign a spokesperson from your group to synthesize and present the hopes you share with each other.



**Let's start in smaller breakout groups.**

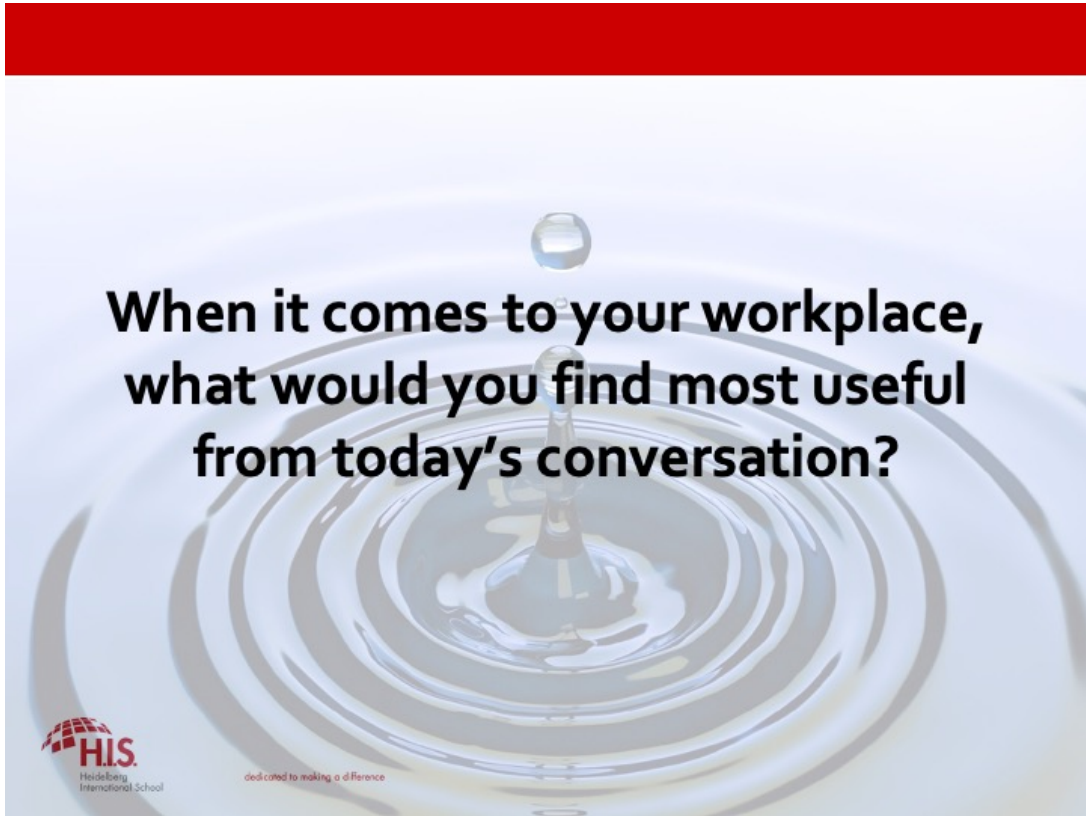


***Appoint a spokesperson to synthesize your answers to this question:***

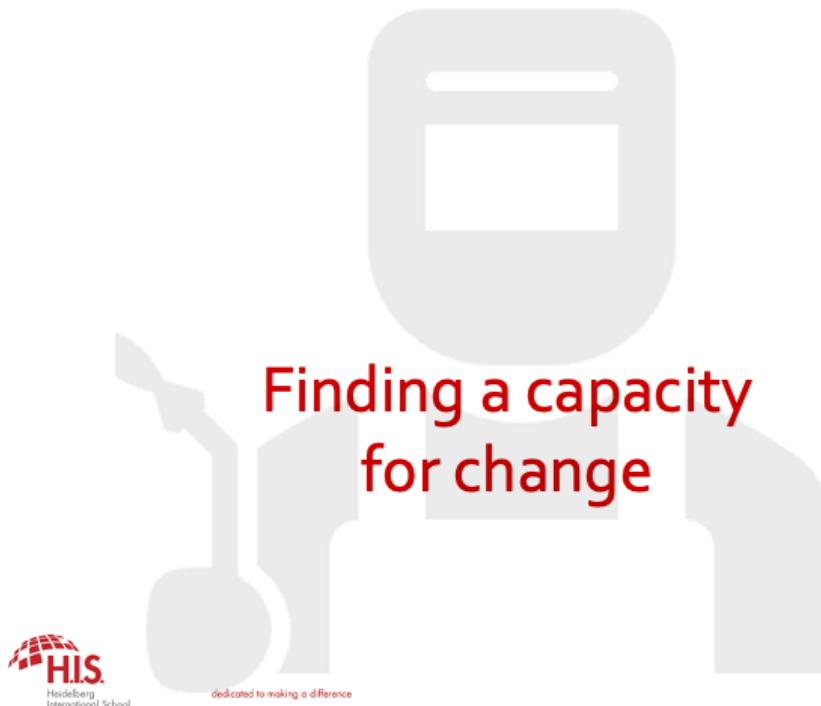


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Breakout rooms – assign a spokesperson from your group to synthesize and present the hopes you share with each other.



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Story of TA – roles, behavior plans, educational deficiencies, test scores, incident reports

15 year old child, dad incarcerated, stepfather placed on house arrest for possession,

Highly oppositional, 3 credits to graduation and he needed at least 18 to get his GED

Looking out window, fittling with leather jacket

Sitting next to his mom – teachers, administrators, social worker, psychologist, juvenile detention worker

Behavior File – stacks of reports sitting in front of the coordinator’s seat

John and I invited to introduce anything that would work

Listened to everyone speak and watched the mom roll her eyes as they read through various incidents prior to T’s expulsion from school the month before, Everyone that spoke, including the educational psychologist seemed to sound desperate, remarking that plans were not working, and T needed to cooperate in order to be taught at school. He remarked, “we have exhausted our resources and

no one trusts that this boy is able to attend to his learning, let alone graduate.

T kept looking out the window and I saw him slightly wave to someone outside, he smiled for a second and then turned his gaze back towards the back of the room, seemingly at no one.

My colleague John slipped me a note (John started the non-profit that I was now helping him run), the note said, “when it’s our turn, ask him whom he trusts.

Finally, the coordinator turned to John and I and I turned to T and his mom, “I realize you do not know of the two of us perhaps like you do the rest of the people in this room. People in this room are wondering if they can trust you. You know, I’m curious, who is a person that you trust?”

T looked at his mom and then at his jacket and then out the window. I follow up his silence with, “besides your mom who has told us that she wants to find what works for you, is there someone else you trust?”

T looked out the window and without turning his head said, “I trust Jim.” Then he looked at his mom, at first she tried to redirect him and before she could say anything, John asked, “How do you know you trust Jim.”

“Because Jim gives a shit about me.” He’s my neighbor, he got laid off at the steelworks, and he is teaching me how to weld.” Mom said, “T has already made some nice sculptures in the back yard with Jim.”

”Jim drove us here today ‘cause our car broke down.” He’s outside waiting to take us home.”

I smiled at John and saw the power of this solution focused question, so simple, yet it changed the direction of the conversation.

Me -“Would you say that you learn a lot from Jim?”

T - He shows me how the whole process with the Tig and if I get it wrong, he talks me through it and lets me try again. He says that I’m getting pretty good.

Me - “I’m wondering why Jim isn’t in this room?” Could you send him a text and ask him if he could come inside for a few minutes and speak with us?”

The administrators were all looking at each other and then their watches. John and I assured them that this was time well spent.

As Jim walked in, T’s demeanor lightened. He was a burly man with a beard and a flannel shirt and baseball cap.

“Thank you Jim for joining us. I know you weren’t expecting this, but T shared that you

have been teaching him – and we were wondering if you could share with us the skills that he has been able to learn with you? And what skills do you think he has potential to learn?

Jim proceeded to explain to a room full of educators how he teaches T. T was much more present and mom was smiling as he talked.

Jim finished by saying that T mentioned that he wanted to be an underwater welder someday. Jim knew some guys who weld bridges and turbines but they all need to be certified how to dive.

I asked T, Underwater welding, that sounds dangerous. T remarked, yes that is why I picked it – I have spent the last two years of school not really wanting to live passed 30 and it seems that is the life expectancy of most underwater welders. (The administrators at the table could not believe their ears.)

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Introduce self



## Innovative Inspiration

- Ben Furman – *Helsinki Brief Therapy Institute, Kids' Skills*
- Denise Yusuf – *Coaching 4 You, The SF Approach with Children and Young People*
- Linda Metcalf – *Solution Focused Schools Unlimited*
- Evan George, Chris Iveson and Harvey Ratner –  
*BRIEF Centre for Solution Focused Practice, London*



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Ben Furman has developed over the years together with Tapani Ahola several applications of solution-focused therapy and coaching. These include the 12-step solution-focused coaching and team-building method [reteaming](#); a solution-focused approach to helping children overcome challenges and difficulties called [Kids' Skills](#), and [Cooperation](#), a training program for teaching solution-focused communication skills to managers, teams and staff of organizations.

Denise Yusuf has been coaching for a number of years both independently, and in education and charitable settings. She has a background in social work and family work and uses solution focused and CBT approaches, and draw on positive psychology. She offers a holistic service to help clients young and old to develop confidence and focus, to meet challenges, and to find their direction.

Linda Metcalf PhD is a former middle school teacher, all-level school counselor, licensed professional counselor supervisor, and licensed marriage and family therapist supervisor in the State of Texas. She is a Professor at Texas Wesleyan University and Chair of the Graduate Counseling Programs. (Systems) – Mindset)

Evan George, Chris Iveson and Harvey Ratner –

*BRIEF Centre for Solution Focused Practice,  
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## Pathway to useful meetings

- Taking Action
- Mirroring our clients
- The mindset of skill-building
- Training for key roles
- Clients celebrating skill successes



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**Taking Action** – How do we promote better conversations that overcome problems and engage needs in our company culture?, where we see what works for those we serve and those that carry out the work, creating greater, lasting connection?

**Mirroring our clients** – what is useful to caregivers on our teams, those in key roles, support staff, and you? How do we bring more purpose to meetings that are called?

**The mindset of skill-building** – shifting towards an atmosphere that generates partnerships – how do we get everyone looking out for our staff, clients, our community

**Training for key roles** - those fostering support, seeking out exceptions and celebrating successes

**Clients celebrating skill successes**- with trusted people who believe in them

## Case study

- ❑ A teacher comes to you and is very concerned about a **ten-year old student** in their class. The parents are both busy executives.
- ❑ Observations:
  - ❑ often spaces out in class
  - ❑ daydreaming
  - ❑ cannot stay on task late in the day
  - ❑ energy drinks between classes - negatively affecting mood, academic performance, attendance and overall engagement
- ❑ Exceptional moments:
  - ❑ Loves scientific research and presenting to class



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## The road to partnership

- ❑ The teachers feel they need to **call in the parents** to address the observed behaviours and their concerns.
- ❑ **Key consideration:** *what are the risks of a conversation where the teacher calls a meeting focused solely on the problems in the classroom?*
- ❑ Both **teachers come to you first** and you respond by asking questions that lead to exercising a different approach.
- ❑ Today, we will dive deeper into the important work **before** entering into meetings responding to a problem and calling in key parties to address it.



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1. When it comes to meetings in your setting, who would you imagine calling in?
1. What is your key consideration of risks coming from a problem focused meeting with that person(s)?
1. You have key staff coming to you needing guidance – what questions would you feel would exercise a different approach?

## The road to partnership

- ❑ When it comes to meetings in your setting, who would you imagine having to call in?
- ❑ What are your key considerations of risk stemming from a problem focused meeting with that (those) person(s)?
- ❑ You have key staff coming to you needing guidance – what questions would you feel would exercise a different approach?



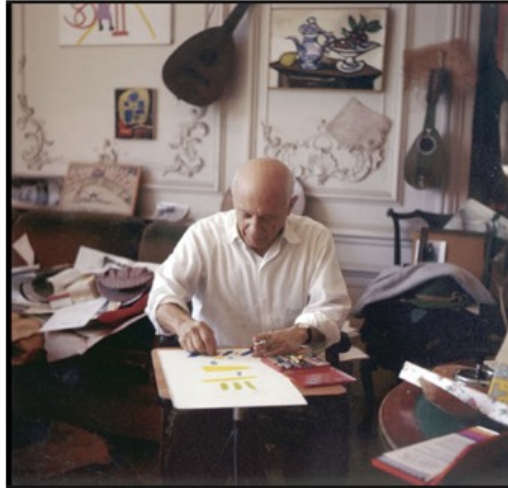
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❑ When it comes to meetings in your setting, who would you imagine calling in?  
A team, a department lead, a provider?

1. What is your key consideration of risk stemming from a problem focused meeting with that person(s)?
1. You have key staff coming to you needing guidance – what questions would you feel would exercise a different approach?



## The means to paint



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A prominent German sociologist, Harmut Rosa, of Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena. He talks of Maslow's hierarchy in terms of a painter

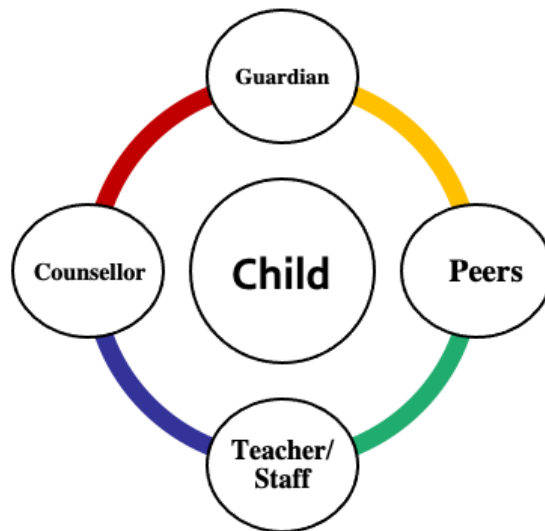
Analogy of a painter – if the means to paint is making money, to gain the studio that is just right, finding the best light, acquiring the finest paints and brushes, comparing my work to others, dressing and talking like an artist. We never actually truly paint. If we only focus on the intervention that dictates the means to control behavior or intervene or contain it, then the means become the goal.

Instead, what sort of difference would it make if teachers, parents and counsellors alike partner together on a beautiful artifice of social connection for our children and parents, where shared actualization is the image we paint – the goal or preferred future of painting an environment where kids develop and grow in skills that help them overcome difficult behaviors and problems. The skills become the means to confidence, resilience, growth, maturity, strength and functional conversation and meetings with parents.

Skills in any setting, when becoming the focus have much more potential in creating a beautiful work of art than if you approach the problem first.

The missing step: taking a minute to consider the capacities that exist or could exist that would address what is not working. If it is not working, do something differently.

## Conversation around key roles



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Defining our role – based on the needs of the child – the potential of the child – partnership – shared interest

partner<sup>1</sup>

*noun*

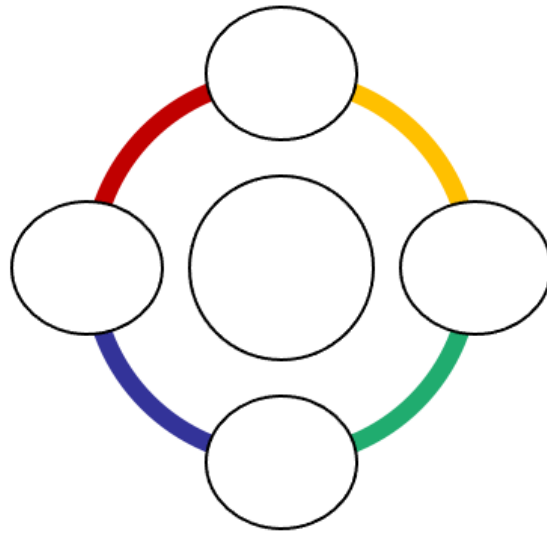
1.1.

2.either of a pair of people engaged together in the same activity.

3."arrange the children in pairs so that each person has a partner"

1.Tao de Ching. - "We join spokes together in a wheel, but it is the center hole that makes the wagon move." Lao Tzu (*Dao de Jing*) (*Lao Zi*)

## Conversation around key roles



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Now it is time to define your roles in your setting and the potential center hub that is the focus of your meeting.

What are the exceptional strengths of the hub? What do they do really well?  
What skill-building could potentially be prioritized?

Defining our role – based on the needs of the client/ colleague/ team member –  
the potential of the person – partnership – shared interest

partner<sup>1</sup>

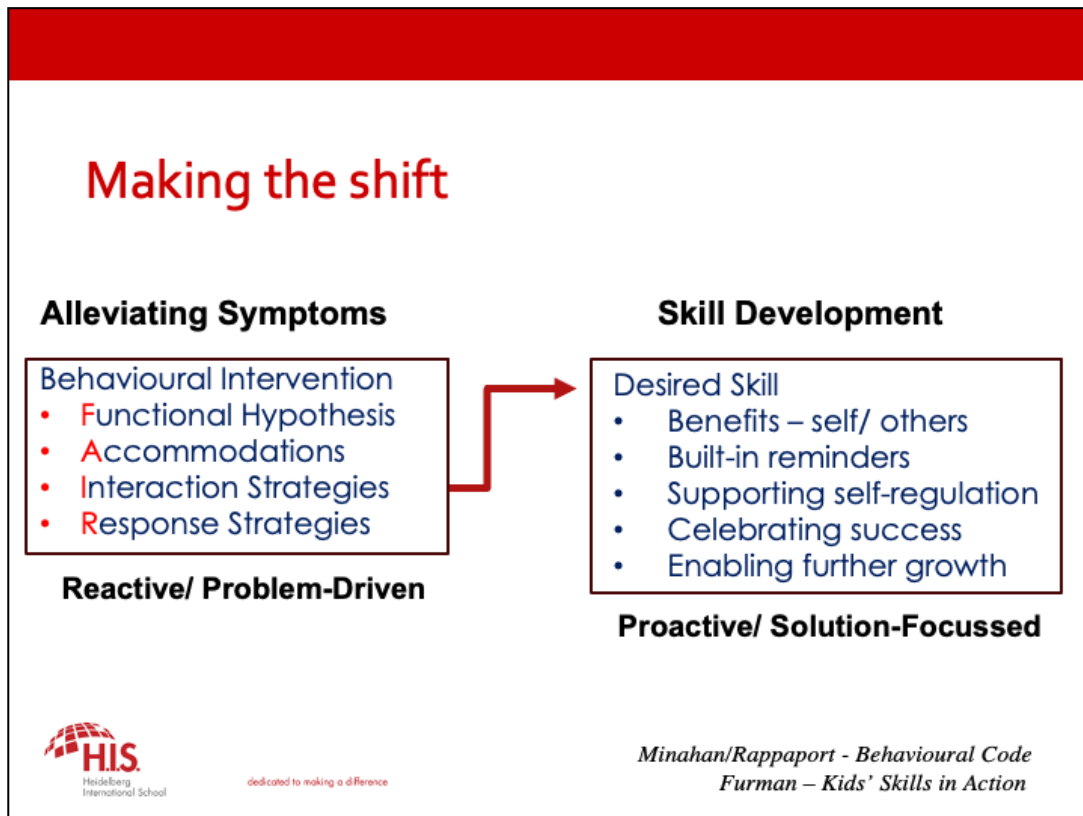
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*Minahan/Rappaport - Behavioural Code*  
*Furman – Kids' Skills in Action*

Nancy Rappaport, professor of clinical child psychology at Harvard, calls misbehaviour a symptom. You may see misbehaviour in a different form in your setting. Is it insubordination, or apathy, poor performance or attendance. Lack of initiative?

There are so many opportunities that revolve around these symptom meetings with anyone.

Behavioural Intervention plan followed by teachers (those in key roles) to work often to alleviate the symptoms

FAIR stands for functional hypothesis, accommodations, interaction strategies, and response strategies.

Professionals aiming to start meetings with problem free talk can speak to student's strengths, capacities, success working on a particular skill, exceptions when certain needs are met (preferred environment, support), benefits to self and others, all supporting student in the building and voicing how we will know that things are working. Correlation of middle management – empowering them to work with teams and individual workers in this way – and presenting their successes to important parts of the company.

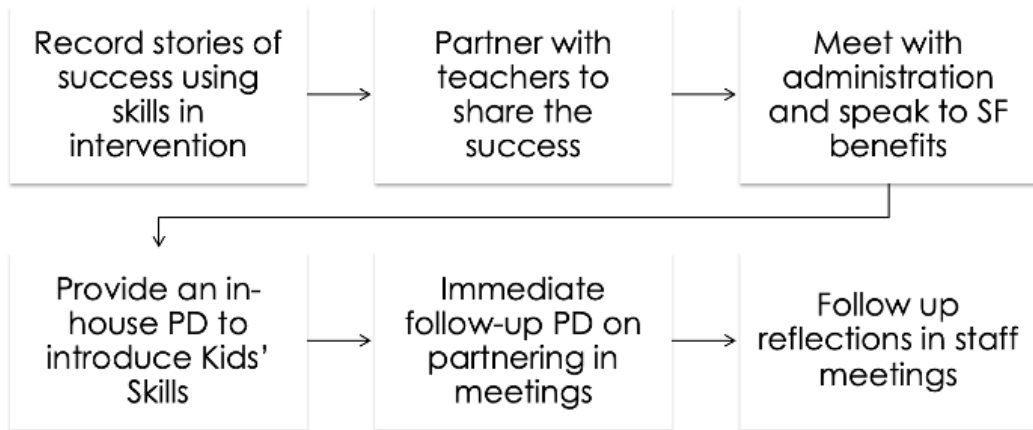
There are so many missed opportunities that revolve around symptom meetings. What if you fostered investment in the individual working to make things better rather than control, scrutinize, potential demoralize or demean the worker in need of skill-building?

Behavioural Intervention plan followed by teachers work often to alleviate the symptoms

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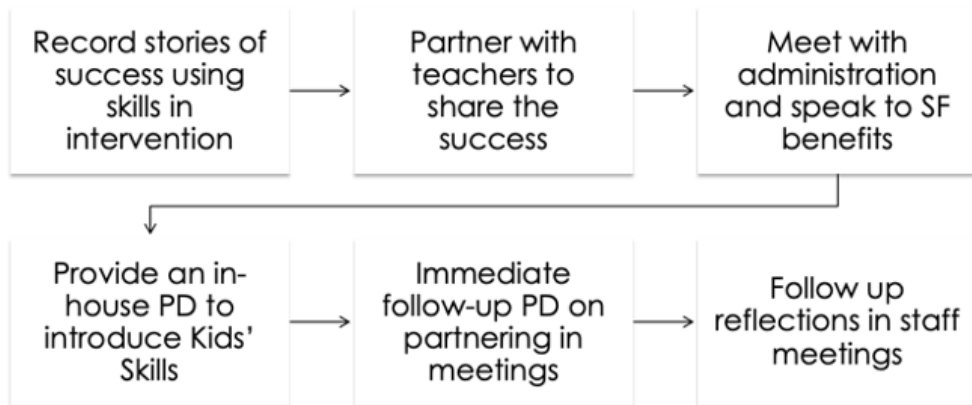
This teams up nicely with Marshall Roseberg's connection where every negative emotion is connected to an unmet need. Once recognizing the needs that can be met or guess between people in conflict deploys an empathy that brings those in conflict to have healthy, open discourse without judgement. In much the same way, if we see most problem behaviors directly connected to an underdeveloped skill – the sky is the limit.

## Finding a way that works



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## Finding a way that works



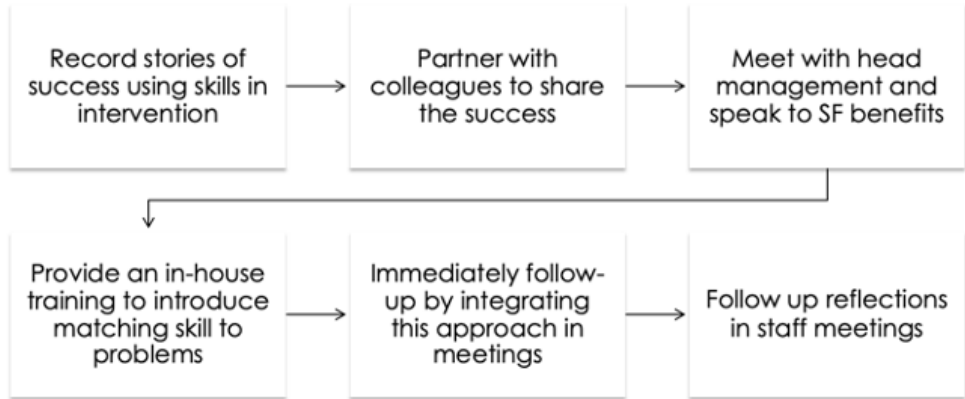
### Benefits:

- Empowered Teachers
- More connection
- Happier children
- Fewer disciplinary demands

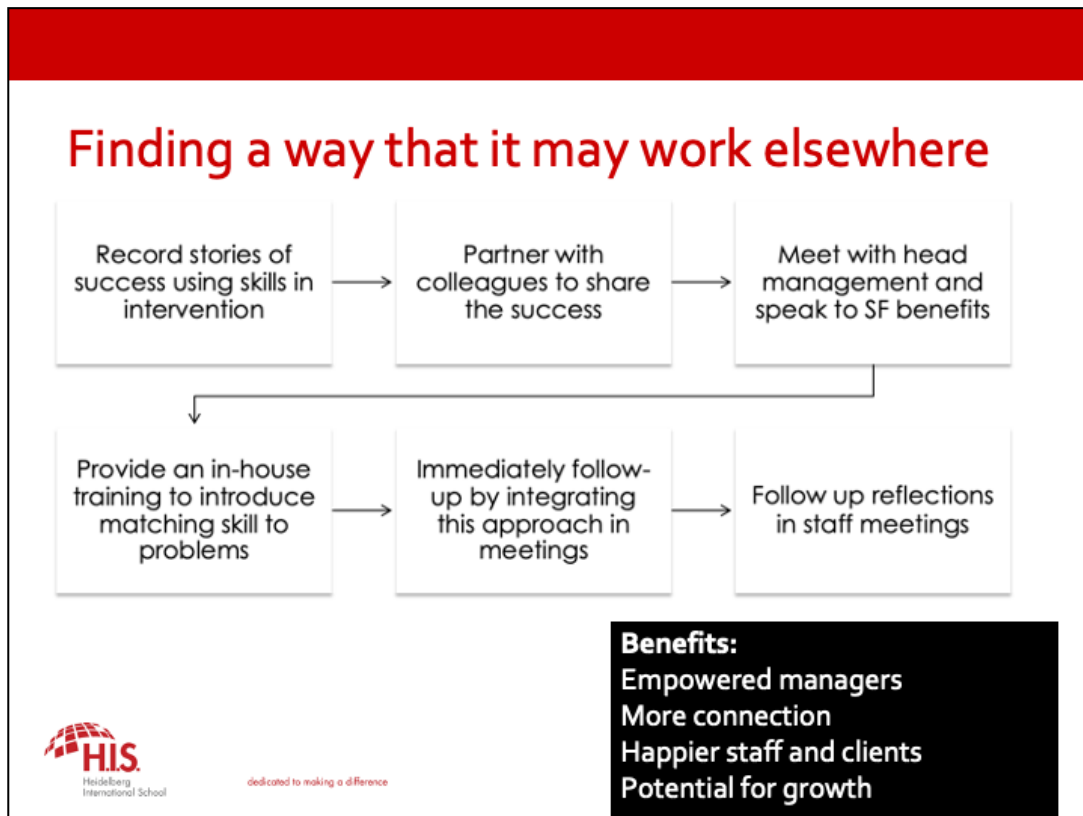


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## Finding a way that works







Everyone involved is asked to record improvement related to the intervention of introducing the skill to build – what is better?

Encourage those who are introducing these approaches to share them with a colleague who can try to replicate it in their area

When there is enough evidence, invite management to see what you have been up to and share the benefits of investing time and resource to help make this more common across the company. (I had a psychotherapist attend my talk in Oxford last summer and his remark when he saw this strategy was that it was efficiently subversive. In many ways, one cannot complain or reprimand subversion that aims to better and benefit everyone involved.

Reflections make it certain that the approach is not forgotten and pretty soon – those leading meetings will lead the questions that will identify the skill that will overcome the presenting problem.

## Training first responders



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in-house workshops give employees and managers a chance to praise the successes and the connections they are making in their work. Managers are learn to appreciate the capacities of everyone to see those first meetings as a means to paint a conversation around where the company is going, what skills are useful to train. The problem based thinking is not even thought about in these kinds of discussions.

Workshops with crew and those you serve also develop a trusting relationship with and connections in a community and help them also gain the skills and deeper understanding, an educational need, support around various approaches to learning and mostly, a belief that we are all in this together towards a desired successful future.

In other words, we create that feeling that Troy had with Jim. I can be an interdependent- contributing member of something, I can learn because someone sees beyond my present status and engages my capacity to grow.

Someone invests in me – and allows me and others like me to rise to the occasion

## Caring for the caregivers

- ❑ **Creating a environment of trust**
  - ❑ Acknowledge the difficulties
  - ❑ Inspiration and support around what works
  - ❑ Partners in child/ client development



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Who are the caregivers in your setting? Are they managers who want people to improve or contribute more and are frustrated and complaining to others. Are they veteran workers who complain about newbies doing the job differently and not gaining skills on the job? Periodic workshops to redirect this frustration can fundamentally change the conversation, gain perspective in the form of hope, forcing employees to recognize the capacities in each other and feel seen.

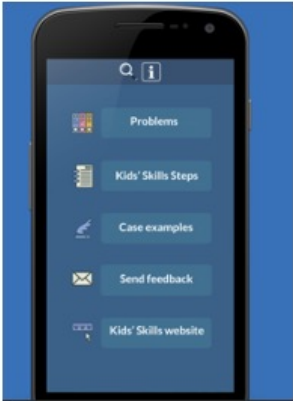
Parent Workshops are also held monthly to develop a trusting relationship with them and help them also gain the skills and deeper understanding of their child's developmental needs, support around various approaches to learning and mostly, a belief that we are all in this together for their child's success.

Facilitating workshops with these discussions also allow counsellors to: (what kind of skills could be targeted so that training leads to implementing results?)

- connect and reinforce trust in the methods used in the classroom
- how developmental milestones are supported
- feel supported
- Partnerships is based on mutual interest in seeing a child grow

- Teachers are also invited to take part in these talks – allowing for parents to interact with teachers, leveling the playing field and see teachers as a principle part of the learning community

# Ben Furman's Kids' Skills



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## How skill-building promotes growth

- ❑ *Kids' Skills App* – provides guidance and ideas
- ❑ Name *supporters* across roles and partner on solutions
- ❑ Agreed to *reminders with permission* rather than control
- ❑ Celebrate mastering a skill/ growth in confidence
- ❑ Possible outcome for in-house cross-training after skill is obtained



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Research to support the effectiveness of the approach (e.g., Hautakangas 2021, Perband 2019, Perband 2016 (review))

Perfectionism - Skill of rolling with mistakes, practice making mistakes and say no worries and trying again

Separation anxiety – Skill of teaching a cuddly toy how to say goodbye to cuddle toy parents

Interrupting others – Skill of requesting permission to talk, writing down what you want to say, waiting patiently for your turn

Low Self-Esteem – Skill of feeling proud of your accomplishments, the “Look what I have done” Skill

Completing Homework – treating the child as an expert in improving how they complete their homework, Skill of taking better care of my homework, skill of keeping a diary, etc.

Anger outbursts – Skill of spatial awareness and calming down

Focus and concentration skill – monitoring choices that promote better focus – noticing on days that water replaced energy drinks, experienced better sleep, better mood, longer periods of focus, completing tasks in full and on time, punctuality, etc.



### 10 year old

The teacher concerned about this student decided to challenge the boy to research the affects of caffeine on the adolescent brain and present in their science class. She mentioned to him that she was fascinated with the depth of research he had done so far this year and was eager to hear what he had to present to his class.

And he delivered. Over the course of the next months, she was able to point out little reminders of how the drinks may be negatively affecting him during school. What if you were able to do a little experiment and instead of going to your locker or bringing the drinks to school at all, you use this water bottle that I picked out for you. She bought a Nalgene bottle and stuck some of her sons skateboard stickers on it to make it look cool.

They worked out a lab chart for the next unit as he tracked his water intake, mood and scale his perceived concentration compared to his teachers observation.

By the end of term, he was also able to record the overall difference in academic performance and attendance from week to week.

Also for comedy sake, he also recorded his increased need to use the washroom.

Data showed that once this student employed the skill of researching and build his data collection skills to track benefits – he somehow dramatically reduced his energy drink consumption and started saving the money for a downhill mountain bike.

### 6 year old

The teacher asked the 6 year old if there was one thing that they would like to see different in school, what would it be?

“I would not lose control when I am mad.”

What would you do instead? – I would calm myself down.

Pointing to a cuddle toy monkey with an astronaut suit she was holding, ”how would your monkey calm down if they got mad at another astronaut in space?”

Can you show the monkey how you would do it? The student sat on the carpet and sat the monkey against a pillow and said, when you get mad in the spaceship, you have to stop and breathe – like this. She closed her eyes and took deep breaths.

When she opened her eyes, the teacher asked her if they could practice the breathing together.

Now, instead of the hallway, where could your monkey go that is away from the others so you can do your breathing?

She went over and placed the monkey on a beanbag in the meditation corner.

If the monkey needed a reminder to come to the beanbag and calm down, what could I do to remind her?

She saluted.

So if I salute, then that is the sign to come over here? Nodded yes.

When ever you use something that fixes things or make things easier, it is called a skill, like writing you abcs.

What could we call your skill? Mercury.

How would using Mercury help you in school? I would have more friends. I would talk



more with them when I am calm. You wouldn't have to take me away.

A week later, the teacher decided to bring in the parents and have the 6 year old show her parents the skill that she had learned. The teacher said that she wanted to partner with the parents and asked the student if she would like a Mercury corner at home. She nodded yes.

The teacher then teared up in my office and described how over the few days, they had printed pictures of mercury, space ships and astronauts doing spacewalks and tacked them to the wall around the bean bag. They also picked out some books from the library on the solar system.

The teacher then said, our student noticed one of her friends also getting mad and shouting at times. She asked the teacher if she would help her teach the friend how to use mercury and go breath and calm down.

### Troy

After that meeting, T was able to get mental health intervention for his ideation and spent the next 3 years finishing school credits, and some teachers eventually saw how he had the capacity to learn valuable skills that made a difference in how they interacted with him in class. All thanks to Jim.

T took diving courses and earned points towards his courses for his math and science teachers who were also keen about diving. He also got certified to weld by his last year in a joint vocational program with the school.

Last I heard, T has reached his early 30s, spends most days on land, and only occasionally welds bridges when needed. He is now a proud father and husband.

## Discussion

- ❑ What are a few aspects from today's talk that you would be pleased to notice more in your setting?
- ❑ Can you think of colleagues and staff for whom these approaches would make a difference in their work?
- ❑ What is the first thing you hope to change for the better when you return to your own work?



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