

Short-term Solution-focused Group Intervention for Syrian Refugee Torture Survivors

Dragana Knezic

Rehabilitation Centre for Stress & Trauma

Zagreb, Croatia

Stephen M. Langer

Northwest Brief Therapy Training Center

Olympia, WA USA

SF World Conference 2017

Bad Soden

Context for STSF Group Intervention

- * EU funded project “Rehabilitation, empowerment and integration of asylum-seeking torture survivors”: March 2016 - February 2018
- * Project partnership: RCT, Croatia, OMEGA, Austria and EXILIO, Germany (members of IRCT network)
- * Objectives:
 - ✓ enhancing multidisciplinary rehabilitation and empowerment services provided by 3 rehabilitation centers for the benefit of 220 asylum seeking torture survivors
 - ✓ supporting better integration of about 150 torture survivors in Croatia, Austria and Germany
 - ✓ improving dissemination of good practices in rehabilitation and socio-economic integration of torture survivors across EU
- * Innovative feature: Short-Term Solution-Focused Group intervention
 - ✓ Rationale:
 - Increase of persons in need of treatment requires time/cost effective approach
 - Consequences of trauma complicated with current uncertainties
 - Need to strengthen resilience to consequences of past trauma while enhancing integration capacities

SFBT Trauma Treatment Workshop

- * **Day 1**
- * **Introductions, What Participants want out of workshop**
- * **Overview of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy:**
 - * 1) Tenets of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy
 - * 2) Types of Solution-Focused interventions
 - * 3) What to do and not to do as a SF therapist
 - * 4) Types of Client-Therapist Relationships
 - * 5) First session tasks
 - * 6) Principles of intervention design



SFBT Trauma Treatment Workshop

- * **Day 2**

- * **Trauma Response:**

- 1) Elements: Re-experiencing traumatic event, avoidance and numbing, increased arousal-DSM IV vs. DSM V
- 2) Time dimension: Immediate response, later response, delayed response, “old trauma”, childhood trauma as adult

- * **Adaptive aspects of the trauma response:**

- * Survival value: Prevention of overreaction, alerting response, allows ongoing functioning, realistic view of danger

- * **Principles of trauma recovery**

- 1) Why do something different? Survival response no longer useful, emergency mode no longer working, shift in assumptions about how the world works
- 2) Make the present as vivid as the past, imagine positive future, orient towards the present, identify with other experiences, assess relationships with past, present, future in mind

- * **Interviewing pointers:**

- 1) Go slow, find out what needs to happen first, include positives/strengths, use hope-eliciting questions

- * **Trauma Treatment tools:**

- 1) Imaginal exposure
- 2) In vivo exposure
- 3) Focus on survival moment vs. catastrophic moment (Solomon)



SFBT Trauma Treatment Workshop

* Day 3

- 4) Defining new goals for self (Dolan)
- 5) History of resistance to mistreatment (Wade)
- 6) Rebuilding assumptions about how the world works (Janoff-Bulman)
- 7) Self-calming/soothing techniques (Autogenics, Open Focus, abdominal breathing)
- 8) Write, read, burn
- 9) Exercise
- 10) Debriefing (sharing with other affected parties)
- 11) Support from others (family, authorities, support people)
- 12) Dreamwork: rescripting nightmares, message in dream, doing something different

* **Dealing with “complex trauma”:**

- * What is most significant?(look for commonality), what person needs to do differently, start with smallest/easiest to deal with or most important, dealing with more recent trauma first, scaling effects of trauma

* **Working with children**

* **Specific interventions: second and subsequent sessions:**

- * Positive changes between sessions
- * Progress scaling
- * Ask for differences if no progress
- * What learned from setbacks
- * Gently check homework
- * Connect changes/improvements to client goals

Participant Statistics

- * 174 participants in 3 countries (105 males), 71 in Croatia (55 males), have completed the intervention (so far).
- * Intervention is carried out with interpretation in Arabic and Farsi.
- * Working with different cultural groups—Syrians, Iraqis, Afghanis, Iranians in Iraq.



SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 1

Group introduction: “Success Interviews”:

- * Ask group members to “interview” one another. Proposed topics for “interview” are recent successes of the interviewee.
- * Ask a volunteer to introduce his or her partner

Process Questions:

- * What was it like doing this activity?
- * What you have in common? With your partner in this exercise? As a group?
- * How do you feel now, after completing this activity?

Expectations / goals:

- * Question: What do you hope to achieve as a result of your coming to this group in next four weeks? How does this relate to the past experiences that brought you into this group?
- * Question: What do you want to deal with FIRST in order to feel better around the past experiences that brought you to this group?
- * Question: What is each one of you already doing that helps you feel better? Even a little bit?
- * Question: Is there anything you see on this list that could be helpful to you to? What would be different if you applied what you learned from other group members?

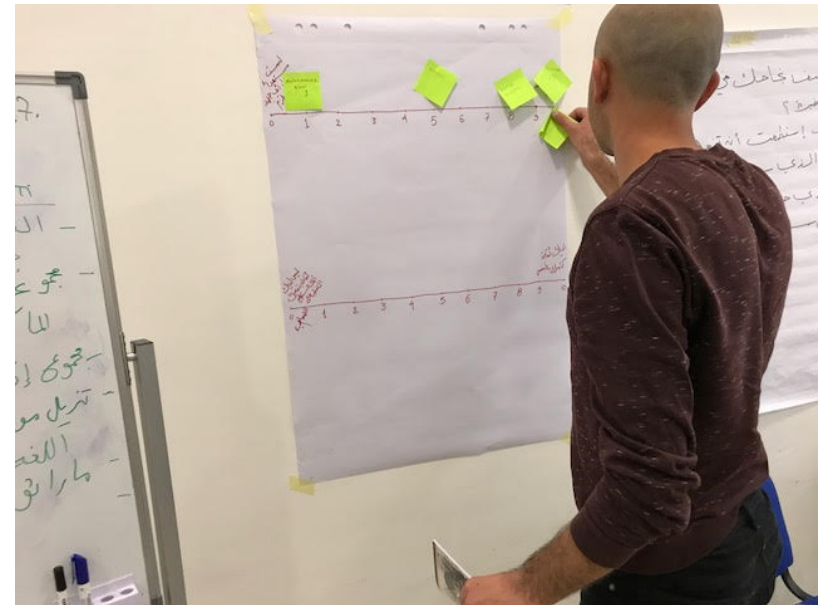
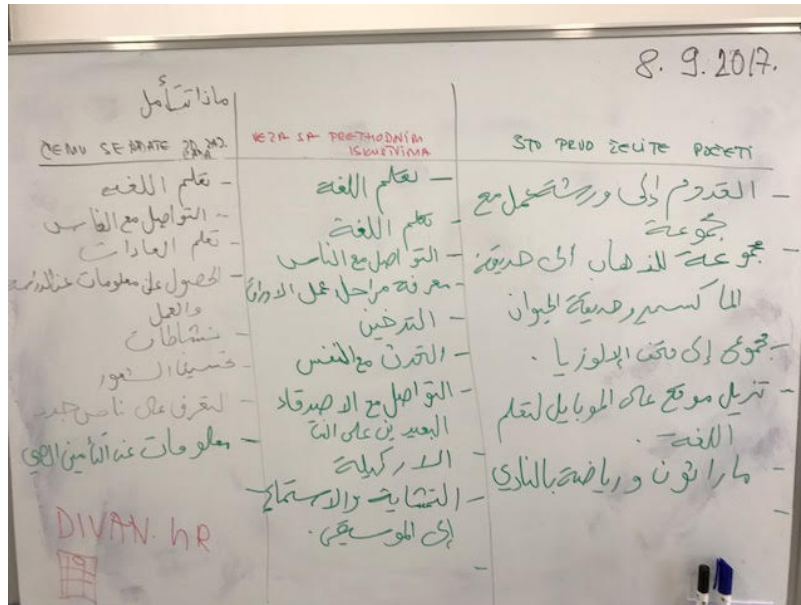
Scaling:

- * Question: On the scale of 0 – 10, where 10 is you would be willing to do whatever it took to get to your hopes and 0 is the opposite of that, what number would you give it today? What do you know about yourself that you give it this high a number?
- * Question: On a scale of 0-10, where 10 is you have every confidence you will be successful in achieving your best hopes, and 0 is the opposite of that, what number would you give it? What would raise your confidence by one point? What would that look like??

Feedback and assignment:

- * Question (to each of the participants, if they are willing): What did you do or hear today in this group that is helpful to you?
- * Assignment (formula first session task): Between now and next time we meet, we would like you to observe what happens in your everyday life, around what we are working on, that you want to continue to have happen, so you can describe it to us next time.

Session 1



SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 2

- * Question: What did you observe that was better in your everyday life from the last time you were here? What did you do? How did you do that?
- * Co-leader records on the flip-chart; finding similarities, common themes and coping strategies.

Introduction to concepts of trauma and trauma response:

1. Re-experiencing
2. Hyperarousal
3. Avoidance
4. Numbing

Discussion:

- * Participants are given trauma response check list-worksheet; they are instructed to indicate for each of the signs of traumatic response if it: doesn't apply to them, is already taken care of, or needs to work on.
- * Question: Look at those trauma responses that you said are already taken care of. How did you manage to do that? What was helpful?
- * Participants are instructed to keep the check list as a reminder of what is left to work on. Also as a reminder for individual work within the program.

SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 2

continued

Future oriented question:

- * Imagine that we all, as a group, are about to have a reunion 2 years from now. During that time YOU MANAGED TO OVERCOME THE DIFFICULT FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS we discussed earlier and the TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH ARE A PART OF AN OLDER AND WISER VERSION OF YOURSELF. When you wake up that day, what would YOU NOTICE that is different? What would the rest of us notice at the meeting that will let us know you succeeded? Think about it during the break.
- * Question: What would be different in the desired future? What would be the noticeable signs that you are doing better? What would you be doing?

Scaling: On the scale of 0 – 10 (where 10 is that you feel, think and do as the older/wiser version you described and 0 is the opposite) where would you put yourself today? What will be the first signs that you are higher on this scale? Write down in your notebook WHAT CAN YOU DO, until we meet next time, to be at least a little bit higher on your scale. Who can help you? What might they do?

- * Participants are instructed to think what they heard from others that impressed them (about how they cope with difficulties) or could be useful to them personally. One of the co-leaders starts with positive feed-back and group members are encouraged to follow. Co-leader writes down the feedback on separate sheets of paper for each of the participants.
- * Before group breaks: Ask the participants how do they feel after receiving feedback. Remind them of the homework they assigned themselves.
- * Each of the participants is given a sheet with received feedback; they are asked to read it silently, and then to sign it, as an acknowledgment.

SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 3

- * Checking assignments: What is better? How did you do that or how you managed to cope (if there is a setback)?

Strengths

- * Reminder of the last meeting, the future oriented question and scaling.
- * Question: Looking at where you have put yourself on the scale, what are your strengths (traits, knowledge, experience you have...) that will help you move up the scale?
- * Question: What are the strengths the people who know you best (your family members, your best friends, etc.) will tell us they see in you that will help you move forward?
- * Question: What are your strengths that no one knows about?
- * Strengths worksheet (Appendix 2.)
- * Leader invites participants to share their strengths and asks further questions: How did you learn that? How has that strength been useful to you so far?

Process question: What does it feel like to speak about your qualities out loud?

- * Question: What strengths – skills, knowledge, experience, do YOU WANT to develop or improve to achieve your goals? Think about it during the break.

Support system and resources:

- * Leader invites participants to share what they want to improve.
- * Question (to each participant in turn): What tells you that this is possible?

SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 3

continued

Map exercise:

- * 1) Think about who can help you in gaining the improvements you want?
- * 2) List all the people and organizations that come to your mind as possibly helpful and write each on a post-it (each on a separate post-it)
- * 3) Create a post-it that represents you
- * 4) Arrange other notes on the flip chart paper, the people or organizations you most frequently interact with.
- * 5) Draw lines from you to other notes (people/organizations) with whom you interact regularly, spend time with, ask for assistance, volunteer with...
- * 6) Draw lines from other notes to you, indicating people/organizations who spend time with you, provide you with information, support, assistance, knowledge ...
- * 7) Draw dashed lines from you to other notes, indicating people/organizations with whom you do not interact but think can help with the improvements you want. How can they help? How can you get their help?
- * Discuss what they find useful in the support system? When the support system is needed most? How to widen support system in current situation?
- *

Community resources:

- * Question: What or who helped you so far in overcoming difficulties as a refugee and a trauma survivor? How was that helpful? What else you know that is available (even if you didn't use it/get in contact)? What would you recommend to others in your situation?

Scaling

- * Question: On the scale of 1 – 10 (where 10 is you handle the difficult feelings, thoughts and experiences that you brought to this group just as you want and 1 is your symptoms resulting from traumatic experience are worse as they have ever been) where would you put yourself today?
- * Question: How confident you are that you will move up the scale when you improve the skills and knowledge we discussed here today – 10 completely confident, and 1 not confident at all.

Introduction to individual planning:

- * Explain criteria for goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) and ask participants to develop their plans between sessions).

Wrap-up activity:

- * Ask participants to write their own name on the bottom of the paper LEGIBLY.
- * Pass the paper to the person on the left.
- * That person writes a phrase or two or a few words, at the top of the page, to describe what she or he values the most about the person whose name is on the bottom of the sheet.
- * Everyone reads their own comments quietly.
- * Ask each person to mark the one he or she likes the best.
- * Ask each person in the group to stand up in the circle, and ask that person to say the strength (s)he liked the best using positive words like "I am..." or "I have..."
- * Ask participants to sign the paper with their name. Explain that by signing they are acknowledging what others value about them.

Session 3



SF Group Intervention Protocol

Session 4

Checking up on homework assignment:

- * Question: How was it for you developing your Plan of Action? How did you feel?
- * Question: What steps have you already taken from your plan? How was that helpful?
- * What support do you need to realize your plan? From this group? Our organization? Other service providers?
- * Scaling: On a scale of 0 – 10, where 10 is you have complete confidence you will achieve your desired outcome, given that you have a plan, and 0 is that you don't have any confidence at all, what number are you now on that scale?
- * Question: What will need to happen for you to be confident for one number more? What you need to do? What kind of support do you need?

Producing brochure with useful tips

- * Participants are instructed to review all the flip-charts and everything they produced/talked about over the last four weeks and develop a list of tips to other persons in similar situations. They are informed that the tips and advice they provide will be included in a booklet which will be published.

Feedback and final evaluation

- * What was helpful during the last four weeks? What was not helpful?
- * What have participants learned from other group members?
- * Where will they go from here?
- * Scaling Question
- * On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being where you were at the beginning of this group and 10 is where you have achieved mastery over your problems, where are you now?
- * How could you continue to make improvement?
- * Feedback: Co-leaders provide each of the participants with specific positive feedback about their achievements.

Wrap-up activity:

- * Give each participant an envelope and ask him/her to put their name on it and place it on the table.
- * Each of the participants is given as many sheets of paper as the number of group members. They are asked to write few words or a sentence for each group member describing what they find most impressive about that participant. Notes should be anonymous, and strictly positive and encouraging.
- * Participants put their messages in envelopes on the table. When all notes are placed, each of the participants silently examines the content of their envelope. They are instructed to take the envelopes with them and return to the notes inside when facing setbacks and obstacles.

Group evaluation: Appendix IV – evaluation form

Outcomes in Numbers

- * 19 of the Croatian sample (71) required additional individual counseling/treatment
- * 20 started a language course, 35 started other integration activities
- * 16 obtained employment out of 20 with a legal right to work

Outcomes – Participant Feedback

Best hopes (common themes):

- * Understanding – what's happening to me, others hear me without prejudices and with understanding
- * Support – from the group, from professionals and the community; make friendships
- * Perspective – to set goals for the future, to regain optimism
- * Self-help – skills to help myself and be independent
- * Health – to improve mental and physical health
- * Integration – taking steps towards becoming a part of the community

Outcomes – Participant Feedback

continued

What was helpful (common themes):

- * Focusing on successes instead of difficulties
- * Listening to others and learning from them
- * Recalling skills and strengths; connecting them with the current situation and future plans
- * Focusing on the future, setting goals and making activity plans
- * Being listened to and understood
- * Connecting with others in the group and helpers
- * Being accepted and recognized

Outcomes – Practitioner Perspective

How it is different for the practitioner:

- * SF methods bring optimism to trauma work
- * Non-intrusive and without unnecessary re-traumatizing of the client
- * Follows client goals, which are often unrelated to their traumatic experience and/or trauma response
- * Asks about exceptions, successes, strengths vs. “digging” through traumatic events and symptoms which empowers both client and practitioner
- * Gives specific positive feedback on successes, strengths and resources vs. reflecting and dealing with disturbing thoughts and feelings
- * Creates positive and relaxing atmosphere in a group setting with severely traumatized persons
- * Opens different and unexpected perspectives in supporting client’s recovery
- * Results in self-efficacy and a feeling of accomplishment on practitioner’s side

Discussion and feedback

Question:

- * What are the active ingredients you see that make this intervention work?

Contacts:

Stephen M. Langer

email: nwbtsml@ix.netcom.com

nwbttc.com

Dragana Knezic

email: dragana@rctzg.hr

Resources:

<http://www.nwbttc.com/>

<http://rctzg.hr/-/en/> (here the report will be published)

Trauma response check list - worksheet

	not applies to me	already taken care off	need to work on
1. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of the past experience?			
2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of the past experience?			
3. Suddenly acting or feeling as if the past experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?			
4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of the past experience?			
5. Having physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating) when something reminded you of the past experience?			
6. Avoiding thinking about or talking about the past experience?			
7. Avoiding activities or situations because they reminded you of the past experience?			
8. Trouble remembering important parts of the past experience?			
9. Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy?			
10. Feeling distant or cut off from other people?			
11. Feeling as if you are being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?			
12. Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?			
13. Trouble falling or staying asleep?			
14. Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts?			
15. Having difficulty concentrating?			
16. Being watchful or on guard?			
17. Feeling jumpy or easily startled?			

Questions from the PTSD CheckList – Civilian Version (PCL-C)

Strengths worksheet

PART I My strengths are,

My character traits: _____

Skills I acquired in job/education: _____

Skills in my daily life: _____

How I am in relations to other people: _____

My life experience: _____

My beliefs: _____

Anything else: _____

PART II What other (who know me well) see as my strengths

My character traits: _____

Skills I acquired in job/education: _____

Skills in my daily life: _____

How I am in relations to other people: _____

My life experience: _____

My beliefs: _____

Anything else: _____

Part III

My strengths that no one knows about:

1. My goal is (be as specific as possible)

3. What other steps will I need to take to make my goal a reality? (Try to include an estimate of the time required to complete each step)



Hilfe für Migranten,
Flüchtlinge und
Polizeiangehörige e. V.

We hope that you have found this group experience beneficial and worthwhile. It is important for us to know your thoughts regarding your experience so that we can continue to assist you and others who are working on overcoming a traumatic experience.

Thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the helpfulness of this program where 1 is not helpful at all and 10 is very helpful.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not helpful									Very helpful

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate where you were at the beginning of the group regarding how you deal with difficult experiences you have been through

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overwhelmed me									Mastery

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate where you are now regarding how you deal with difficult experiences you have been through

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overwhelm me									Mastery

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the relevance of the material to your situation

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not relevant									Very relevant

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the group leaders ability to facilitate the group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Poor facilitation skills									Great facilitation

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your feelings of preparedness for continuing to deal with the difficulties coming from your past experiences on your own.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not prepared									Very Prepared

We welcome any additional comments you would like to share: