

# Spring NewsLetter No 13

*‘Those of us who don’t fit are given back to ourselves as work. We learn early that we are problematic social objects, and we need to manage the difficult thoughts, feelings and interactions that come with that.*

*Vincent Dreary. The psychologist April 2024 p 55.*

**Q. I wonder how many SEMH and Neurodivergent learners feel like this?**

## Long term impact of COVID 19

Dr Emily Tanner, Programme Head at the Nuffield Foundation said: “The mounting evidence on the long-term impact of learning loss on young people’s development shows how important it is for students to develop socio-emotional skills alongside academic learning. Work by Exeter, Strathclyde and London School of Economics. Study funded by Nuffield Foundation. (<https://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/news/2024/impactofcovid-19willaffectexamresultswellint>)

## Emotional & Behaviour

### Difficulties Journal

Vol 28 Vol 4 Dec, 2023

<https://sebda.org/ebd-journal/>

School staff often feel that academic journals are not for them. Think again. This journal is full of articles about daily life in schools. This volume considers the SEMH needs of the bully – a group of young people whose SEMH needs are often overlooked in schools – anxiety in pre-school children and how to break the culture of suspensions and exclusions. There is an article that considers the usefulness of diagnosis for SEMH and neuro-diverse young people.

The articles are short enough to read during your lunch break or on the bus ride home. There is access to back volumes on the SEBDA website that are free to access for SEBDA members. <https://sebda.org/join-sebda/>

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# SEBDA

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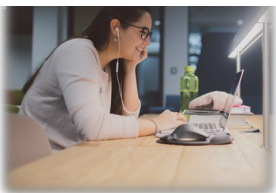
## ONLINE POSTGRADUATE STUDY IN SEMH

SEBDA, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties.

This two year, part time online Diploma generates 120 masters level credits towards a full masters degree.

Our team includes specialist teachers, authors, psychologists, behaviour support professionals and SEN advisers – all with expertise in supporting children and young people with mental health needs.

The Diploma will enhance your understanding, skills and expertise to support children and young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.



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## **The Best Outcomes for Young People; Lessons from a PRU Cahill, J. (2024)**

Headteacher: St Albans: Critical Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-915713-60-5. Pages

I think it is safe to say that those working with children and young people, be they parents, carers, social worker, teachers and, even those in administration and government, aim for the 'best outcomes' for all. This book tells the story about a pupil referral unit (PRU) whose headteacher aimed to do just that. It is the story of a dedicated professional who wanted all the young people and families who came through the school gate to achieve the best possible outcome.

My reading of this book followed hard on the heels of several articles in one of the Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Journals which explored the role of PRU and Alternative Provision (AP) in education and conversations with schools and authorities seeking and sadly, too often failing, to provide the 'best outcomes' for the young people in their care.

The colourful cover of this book, with its emoji and the layout of each chapter encourages the reader to read on. There are 8 chapters entitled 1- Social, Emotional and Mental Health is not Rocket Science, 2 - What is SEMH? 3 - Good communication with parents and carers; 4 - Inclusion; 5 - Relationships within the PRU/AP and school partnerships; 6 - Reintegration with meaning 7 - multi-agency working and the importance of positive mental health provision for all and the final chapter 8 - Along came Alice, which records some of the outcomes for the young people.

This book should become essential reading for anyone working in this field of education and care.

in her time as the headteacher of the PRU, the author developed successful continuing professional development (CPD) for the staff and the other agencies involved. This is evidenced in the way each chapter is constructed, leading the reader through to suggesting time for 'Reflective Tasks' and further reading at the end of each chapter.

I suggest this book should become an important text for not only those working in PRU/AP provision and the mainstream of education and care but also to those providing CPD. **Joan Pritchard (Sebda)**

## Solution Focused Coaching and SEMH

by Steve Russell

Think of the last conversation you had with a pupil about their behaviour. What was the focus of your questions? If you're anything like many hard-pressed, time-poor, staff, the chances are they centred around what the youngster did wrong, exploring why, and getting them to take responsibility for their actions and to then make good. And, in all honesty, how confident are you that the impact of that conversation had a sustainable, meaningful difference?

The solution-focused approach was developed by Steve de Shazar and Kim Insoo de Berg, rooted in research that has shown that significant and sustainable change can be created by shifting the emphasis away from 'what's gone wrong', 'why' and 'who's to blame'. It's based upon the following core principles, which I've adapted specifically with pupils in mind:

- However 'badly' a pupil's behaviour is, there will always be exceptions. There WILL be times when the pupil seen to be 'always attention-seeking/needing' won't be engaging in such behaviours.
- These exceptions offer valuable opportunities to shift the focus to explore the skills and qualities the pupil has.
- The pupil, not the adult, is the expert in creating solutions to the challenge they are facing.
- In partnership, the pupil and adult co-create the preferred future – how they pupil wants things to be.

So, how do you go about having a solution focused conversation? The main SF technique is scaling and below is a worked example of this.

Please note: As with all strategies, it's for professionals to decide whether SF is appropriate for the young person they have in mind. It's also important to stress that below is just one example of SF questioning – feel free to be creative and adapt them as long as the key principles outlined above are maintained.

## Scaling

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 10

Parameter setting – getting the pupil’s perspective:

Firstly, have the pupil set their parameters: eg “If 10 is that this is the best school you could possibly attend, and ‘1’ is that it’s so bad you don’t ever attend” – what would ‘10’ be like? Go with their responses without judgement – no matter how far fetched they are. The very experience of being listened to effectively can itself be a significant step forward.

Current reality: Next – “And where on the scale is school at the moment?” Note: Given that they are in school, it can’t be a ‘1’ – so this will give you something to work with later!

Ensure you offer some understanding and empathy before moving onto the next stages. Remember – relationship is at the centre of effective change eg ‘So school is for you at a 2. That sounds tough. Really tough. How on earth did you get into school today, feeling it’s a 2?’

Next – Treasure hunting – “And what’s happening that tells you things are at ‘x’ and not ‘1’? Go with their shrugs and ‘don’t know’s’. Ask them to put a mark on the scale. The number itself doesn’t matter. The number simply gives you a hook into exploring their perceptions and to then build on in positive, forward-moving ways.

You can also offer your own input eg ‘I’ve noticed that you arrive on time for your lessons with me. You also usually start lessons listening carefully.’ Alongside noting specific behaviours, link these with skills and qualities such behaviours display eg ‘I think that shows you persevere.’ Over time, this will help build their self-esteem.

Target-setting: “And where would you like to be in say 2 weeks time?” (the preferred future). The next question is crucial as it makes the target tangible?:

“And what will you be doing when you reach that point? Note the positive wording – the communicating of a belief that they will be successful.



Build on their strengths – ‘You said that things aren’t at 1 because of (x, y, z). Which of them could you do a bit more of to help you reach ‘x + 1?’ Remind them of some of the skills and qualities noted earlier and encourage them to consider which of them they can draw on.

Reinforce partnership working – Check in who else might help them to move to ‘x’ + 1.

Review: You’ve now got the foundations laid for follow up conversations. Set up a specific time to check in with them using the scale. Don’t focus too much on what number they are now at. Instead, concentrate on what they are doing that tells them they are at whatever point they identify.

### References:

de Shaza (1985) : Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy. New York: Norton.

### Further Resources:

NSPCC SF Kit : <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1073/solution-focused-practice-toolkit.pdf> - includes resources to use directly with pupils.

Ajmal, Y & Ratner, H (2020) : Solution Focused Practice in Schools :80 Ideas and Strategies : Routledge

Ajmal, Y (2001) : ‘Solutions in Schools: Creative Applications of Solution Focused Brief Thinking with Young People and Adults’ : Routledge