



# Solution- focused Scaling Questions and Safety Organized Practice

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Solution-focused questions are a key strategy of Safety Organized Practice. One specific solution-focused approach used in Safety Organized Practice is that of asking scaling questions. These questions often serve as an entry into Safety Organized Practice because they are relatively easy to learn and can yield significant results. Currently, many social workers, therapists, coaches and managers use scaling questions.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCALES

There are many ways of using scaling questions. The most frequent uses include:

- **The success scale:** On this scale, 10 is the desired situation and 0 is the situation in which nothing has been accomplished yet. The success to which this scale refers can be about anything you may find relevant in a particular situation.
- **The motivation scale:** On this scale, the 10 may be something like, "I am prepared to do a lot to achieve the goal," and 0 may be, "I am not willing to do anything for it." Going through the basic steps of the scaling question, clients often get more of a grip on their own motivation. They learn to regulate their own motivation and become capable of motivating themselves.
- **The confidence scale:** A 10 may be, "I have much confidence in being able to accomplish this," and a 0 may be, "I have no confidence whatsoever." Just like with the motivation scale, the client learns to regulate his/her own confidence. This can have a strong stimulating effect.
- **The independence scale:** A 10 may be, "I know how I can proceed with this, and I don't need help anymore," and a 0 may be, "I don't know how to proceed with this, and I need help." The advantage of this scale is that it helps to keep services such as therapy from taking longer than strictly necessary. While the problem may not be completely solved, this does not have to mean that the professional help has to continue.

### SCALING QUESTIONS 101

A scaling question is generally phrased like this:

*"On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being \_\_\_\_ and 10 being \_\_\_\_, where would you place yourself?"*

## WHAT TO DO WHEN A CLIENT IS AT A 0

When clients say they are now at 0, they often want you to understand how serious their situation is. The coping question can then be asked; for example, “How do you manage to go on in these tough circumstances?” The coping question often helps people to find new energy to cope with their difficult situation. For instance, when the client says, “I manage to go on because I don’t want to disappoint my children,” the social worker can build on that by asking, “How would you know your children would not be disappointed?”

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE SCALE ANCHORS

When using scales, it is important to define your anchors carefully. Scales usually work best when the 10-position is defined in not too idealistic terms but rather in more realistic terms. Being idealistic in your definition of the 10-position has two disadvantages: 1) You can be sure that an ideal situation will never be achieved; and 2) It will trigger the client to scale the current situation lower. A too-idealistic 10 can demotivate.

## PLAYING WITH SCALES

Whenever possible, be inventive and playful when using scales, if only because clients may do that, too. In a teambuilding session, a coach once used the scale walking technique. At a certain point, the coach invited the members to think about which steps forward they could take on the scale and then physically take a step when they knew what step it was. One after the other, the team members took a step forward. One person took a step backward. The participant explained, “I am very perfectionistic, and by taking a step backward, I want to symbolize that I am going to let things loose a bit more.” The coach responded, “Sounds good.”

## OTHER KEY SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS USED WITH FAMILIES AND THEIR NETWORK IN SAFETY ORGANIZED PRACTICE

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON SCALING QUESTIONS

**Blog:** *Doing What Works in Solution-Focused Change*

- <http://solutionfocusedchange.blogspot.com/2009/04/solutionfocused-scaling-questions.html>

**Video:** *Scaling questions with multiple goals*

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBIKzOYeG-o>

- **Past Success Question:** In attempting to respond to this question, the client may remember when he has already been able to cope with a problem or to solve it. Remembering one or more past successes is likely to increase the confidence and hopefulness of the client and usually helps the clients find ideas to take a step forward. Some examples of past success questions are:
  - “When have things already been a bit better?”
  - “Have you ever been able to solve such a problem before?”
  - “Have ever experienced a situation which is a bit like the situation you want to achieve?”
- **Preferred Future Question:** This is one of the most essential types of progress-focused questions. It is the question with which the social worker or coach invites the client to describe how he or she would like the situation to become. The social worker encourages the client patiently and curiously to vividly describe the preferred future (or the 'desired situation'). The preferred future gets described in terms of concrete, positive results. A few ways in which the question can be posed are:
  - “What does your preferred future look like?”
  - “What would you like instead of the problem?”
  - “How will you notice things will have become better?”

- **The Exception Seeking Question:** In progress-focused change, an assumption is that the intensity of problems fluctuates constantly. There will always have been situations in which the problem was less intense and when things were better. These situations are identified and analyzed because they will often help to find ideas to solve the problem. An example of how exception-seeking questions may be asked is:
  - *“Are there times when the problem does not happen? When was this? What was different? How did you make that happen?”*
  
- **The Miracle Question** is a sequence of questions which invite the client to vividly describe a day after which the problem has miraculously disappeared. It is in fact is a special case of the desired situation question. It often leads to hope, energy and ideas for steps forward. One possible phrasing for the question follows:
  - *“Suppose that in the middle of the night, when you are asleep, a miracle happens and all the problems that brought you here today are solved just like that. But since the miracle happened overnight nobody is telling you that the miracle happened. When you wake up the next morning, how are you going to start discovering that the miracle happened? What else are you going to notice?”*
  
- **The Coping Question:** This is a good question to try when normal strategies to solve problems don't seem to work anymore. An example of a situation in which you can use the coping question is when your client says he or she is now at a zero on the scale. The basic form of the question is: “How do you manage to keep going?” But there are many other ways of phrasing the question. Additional examples of coping questions include:
  - *How do you manage to deal with such difficult situations each day?*
  - *What helps you to keep going even though things are really hard?*
  - *It is admirable how you have been able to keep on going under such difficult circumstances. How did you do that?*
  - *How did you manage to cope before you gave up?*

- **To read more about solution-focused approaches and Safety Organized Practice, see the Winter 2015 issue of *Reaching Out* at <http://bit.ly/ReachingOutJournal>**

- **For additional resources on Safety Organized Practice, please visit our SOP Resources Page at <http://bit.ly/SafetyOrganizedPractice>**

