

Western Australian Solution Focused Interest Group (WASFIG) Meeting 22



WASFIG Best Hopes: Share, Connect, Grow, Learn, Develop

1. Share SF knowledge and update our SF knowledge since our original training;
2. Connect and network with like-minded SF practitioners to reduce isolation and enhance a community spirit;
3. Grow interest in the SFBT approach in WA and beyond and do our bit to change the world one SF step at a time;
4. Learn where and with whom SF might be best applied in our practices for greater focus;
5. Develop our clinical effectiveness and efficiency (we may only have a set number of sessions so how do we do the very best with each session as though it may be the only one or the last).

WASFIG Zoom Meeting 22 Review: Saturday 12 April 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA Time

When: Saturday 12 April 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD VIC/NSW = 11:30pm-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)

Where: Zoom

Attendees: Theresa Acutt, Michele Thomas, Nadia Truong, Samantha Smith, Tracy Shirvill, Ruth Leveson, Fiona Skahill, Sara Ristovska, Roger Lowe, Heather Bunting, Iris, Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond (Co-Coordinators).

Apologies: Shona Scallan, Michael Bazeley, John Teager, Kylie Johnson, Dion Sing, Emma Burns, and Rebecca Collins.

Group Facilitators: Steve Runciman and Kerry Drummond

Special Guest Presenter: Pene Turnell

Topic: Digging for Detail in the Space In Between - SFBT with Family and Domestic Violence and Child Protection.

We were delighted to have special guest speaker Pene Turnell join us for our April 2025 WASFIG meeting to share her extensive experience on working in child protection in an empowering and respectful way for clients that skilfully promotes safety for families at risk.

Steve opened the group by inviting attendees to introduce themselves and then, given that we were going to be talking about Family and Domestic Violence, to share what they find grounds them in their work with clients in the domestic violence space or in other at risk or challenging work with clients. Attendees shared a wonderful array of healthy ways they do this, including exercise, mindfulness and time with family and friends. This was a useful reminder to care for ourselves as practitioners to ensure we are able to empower clients while working in a protective way for our own wellbeing. As we previously discussed in [WASFIG April 2024](#) working in a Solution Focused way is good for our clients to build resilience in a respectful way; and having conversations around how clients' survived traumatic experiences is energising and inspiring for ourselves as practitioners. These experiences can counter balance the impact of burnout and vicarious trauma with vicarious resilience instead.

Kerry was proud to introduce Pene to the group and shared some reflections on how Pene had inspired her following the WASFIG preparation meeting with Pene and Steve: As the Company Director, Consultant, and Trainer at Turnell Plus Signs of Safety - and all round child protection super hero - Pene has been involved in many principal developments and innovations in the Signs of Safety approach since 2016, and has worked within Australia and internationally to implement this practice framework. For those who are interested in more information on the approach, there is the [Signs of Safety Comprehensive Briefing Paper](#) available to download on Pene's website.

Steve and I had enjoyed a preview for this WASFIG meeting with Pene and I left the meeting feeling inspired and in awe of the work Pene does and her respectful and empowering mindset she takes into her work. Pene spoke about the importance of focusing on 'the space in between' the violence, and digging for 'gold', such as safety and creative resources, within this space that might have not been noticed when solely focusing on the danger.

One thing I admire about Pene is her belief in her client's capacity to create safety for their children despite evidence to the contrary. Exploring with mum what she has done to keep her children safe, to see and talk to 'the good mum', even when returning to violent partners, and knowing she has a good reason for this as Evan George would say. Similarly, even when a father has been violent, to see and talk to 'the good dad' by taking time to look for any repair attempts he has made with his child, rather than assuming his identity as only a perpetrator of violence and no more.

I wondered about the difference this experience would make for clients to sit in session with a practitioner like Pene who believes that they are more than the violence. Where it is presumed that they are individuals who seek to provide a safe and nurturing home for their children—individuals who have not only demonstrated the capacity to create such an environment, but who have successfully done so in the past. The intention is to offer support and partnership as they continue their efforts to sustain that safety.

With that attitude toward and belief in clients, I wondered about what impact this would have on Pene's clients' perception of themselves and their capacity to be the kind of mother and father they want to be. What would this do for their hope and perceived possibility within themselves to tap into these best versions of themselves to bring about more safety and the kind of home they want for their children in future.

I wondered about how having this significant kind of conversation with Pene could invite her clients to change their future path and the life of their children and their future paths as well.

On the other hand, I wondered how this might look instead if the clients sat with a practitioner who did not share the mindset that Pene modelled.

Our conversation reminded me of something Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs from South Africa said: '*SFBT looks to fill the gaps in the client's conversation with hope.*' SFBT is all about 'minding the gap' that the client did not notice when focusing on the problem. In this way, Pene shows us how to 'see the possibility, not just the problem', even in the darkest of times.

Hanging Out in the Space in Between – Pene Turnell

"My experience of child protection agencies is that the focus is always on the harm and danger and then the action. And there is space between those two extremes and that the ways the family keep the children safe now, nurture them, help the repair after the violence / within the pattern of the abusive behaviours and provide emotional and physical safety alongside deep connection - is overlooked completely or at least 'rushed through' and this is the 'gold' within the family we need to know about to create future safety. Using questions to do this is hard and I think it is because it is scary. When we are scared we stop asking and we start telling." – Pene Turnell (personal communication, 2025)

Pene evidenced her expertise in working with clients affected by domestic abuse and highlighted the significance of noticing “the space in between” when supporting children and families impacted by this. She showed us how in exploring details in this space, can reveal both the protective actions already taken by parents or carers—despite challenges like gaslighting and coercive control—and any efforts made by the perpetrator to repair their relationship with their child. Guided by the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework*, Pene provided valuable insights into assessing safety using constructive, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive questions grounded in our understanding of domestic violence.

Signs of Safety® Assessment and Planning Framework

What are we worried about?	What's working well?	What needs to happen?
<p>On a scale of 0–10 where ten means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children that they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? <i>Locate different people's judgements spatially on the two-way arrow.</i></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> 0  10 </div> <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 5px;">© 2013 Resolutions Consultancy</p>		

Here are some key points to remember:

- Take time to hang out in the middle column of the *Signs of Safety Assessment and Planning Framework* where we explore ‘what is working?’, ‘when safety is happening and how?’.
- Always stay curious for domestic abuse and look to screen abuse out of the assessment with clients rather screening abuse into the assessment.
- Search for regular patterns of DV when assessing risk and understand what is needed for safety.
- Ensure a deep exploration of “worries” (danger) column and “working” column (safety) prior to moving into the third column of actions steps – explore the parallel story of strength and safety alongside danger to get the full picture – notice incidents and the pattern in between incidents.
- When there is danger slow down to think clearly instead of speeding forward in panic – think slow when you are scared.
- Shaming and blaming the perpetrator for their violence increases the risk of violence for his partner and family. Adopting a punitive approach with the perpetrator and telling him what he did wrong creates shame

and blame and increases the risk of danger for the family. When the perpetrator denies abuse we need to hold them accountable without adding to blame and shame by maintaining a respectful relationship with them and working in a way that is 'shame healing'.

- Ask questions in the middle column of safety with great compassion and curiosity to explore how the victim/survivor kept herself and children safe, and what she is pleased or proud to see herself do as a parent. Also know these are very hard questions for a person to answer after having their self-esteem stripped by the perpetrator, so while gentle digging for detail, use great compassion and empathy to ease into the questions with respect and kindness.
- Child safety is always the agenda, 'safe mum = safe kids', and work to empower victim/survivors by eliciting strengths and protective behaviours of parents. Explore what mum did to keep her children safe to rebuild her self esteem. Explore too how networks create safety. Amplify the child's voice by exploring what would the child say they are most afraid of and what is happening when they are feeling most loved – *What does Dad do that lets you know he loves you?*
- Look for evidence of change over time not just self-report from mum and dad.
- Exploring how the client kept safe in the past can be used to build safety in the future – *when did you feel most safe or most connected to your partner?*
- Remember how easy it is for us as the practitioner to be groomed by the perpetrator who can be charming – seek supervision and stay curious as things may not be as they seem.
- The more risk there is the more important it is to work alongside the client and go slow.
- Do not start with a plan to leave, begin with honouring what mum is doing first to keep herself and her children safe and connecting to networks for support. Then work to empower her to decide whether to, and if so how, to leave safely as she is the expert on this.

During our preparation meeting with Pene, she also emphasised the importance of caring for our own wellbeing as practitioners and shared her strategies to stay safe in our own practice when working with at-risk clients and navigating difficult situations:

1. Accept uncertainty and anxiety as a given when working in this space.
2. Do what you can to make it as safe as you can – create a detailed safety plan with lots of examples.
3. Be ok with all I can do is the work in the session and I am not responsible for the outcome – this is the family's responsibility to create a safe home for their children.
4. Document what you did in your notes in detail.

Thank you Pene!

Thank you Pene Turnell for sharing how a Signs of Safety risk assessment for domestic and family violence can be done in a respectful and empowering way, working to protect clients from further shame and blame which reduces the risk of future violence. Pene reminded us of the importance of choosing questions that co-create a detailed description of both the violence and the safety that already exists, and asking these questions in a respectful, empathic and compassionate way that presupposes capacity and a history of safety for clients and their families.

To continue to be inspired by Pene, she is available for training and consultation and would be happy to hear from you at pene@turnellplus.com

Reflections on Pene's Presentation:

The Power of Using SF Questions to Explore Protective Capacity and Existing Safety in Families Experiencing FDV:

If clients talk about the kind of relationship they want this would decrease the likelihood of abuse when they feel happy, peaceful and satisfied within themselves. Problem questions could inadvertently do harm. We need to listen through the client's answers in conversation when we ask for difference – 'I would feel safe, things would be peaceful at home' – know there is potentially DV to be mindful of. Developing peace and safety in session leads to language creating reality. Engage in a description of home life from a peaceful place and we are more likely to be in this place. SFBT is change focused, listening through stories and amplifying details of safety and agency. – Adam Froerer from the [Solution Focused Universe](#)

Using SF questions when exploring the space in between – the middle column of what is working – can highlight the safety that is already there. Identifying the 'history of safety' can reduce the shame and blame for both the victim/survivor and perpetrator and thus the risk of future violence. Using respectful SF questions that presuppose capacity and success in clients can serve as a protective approach for the clients' wellbeing. Maintaining a respectful relationship with the perpetrator can build more rapport and cooperation. The perpetrator might be more open to change if they can see that they are actually capable of being a better version of themselves at times, and that this has already started to happen and can be built upon more intentionally for future safety.

"The world is indeed full of peril and in it there are many dark places.

But still there is much that is fair. And though in all lands, love is now mingled with grief, it still grows, perhaps, the greater."

J.R.R. Tolkien

The significance of the questions we choose to ask clients can lean towards increasing shame, blame and risk or towards building respect, rapport and empowerment. In light of this, highlighting existing capacity to create safety is an important consideration for ourselves as practitioners. Inviting clients living with violence to share how they have been getting through so far, what they have done to protect their children, the kind of mother and father they want to be, and the kind of home they want to create can encourage clients to walk down the path of possibility. Clients can share insightful and inspiring reflections that might just be the thing they needed to hear themselves say to make a difference in their lives and to move in the direction of a better future.

Not only can SF questions create more safety for our clients, but listening to inspiring stories of strength amidst adversity can build vicarious resilience for ourselves as practitioners. Hearing the creative ideas mum has used to carve out safety within a violent home life, knowing what she is holding onto to give her the strength to do this when others may have given up, and inviting her to view herself from a kinder and more compassionate perspective (that is more in line with the mother she wants to be) can be inspiring, energising and protective of our own wellbeing as practitioners. Listening in this solution focused way helps us to 'look to fill the gaps in the client's conversations with hope' as Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs has suggested.

The power of questions has been highlighted by Heather Fiske (2008, p. 37) in her book *Hope in Action: Solution Focused Conversations About Suicide*: The Nobel physicist Isaac Isador Rabi said, "There are questions which illuminate, and there are those that destroy. [We should] ask the first kind." Therapists who have cultivated an appreciation of the efficacy of questions understand that to question is to wield a powerful linguistic blade. It is necessary to ensure that the blade is used to reveal strength and beauty rather than to carve away these same qualities. (McGee, DelVento, & Bavelas, 2005, p.381)

Resources:

Pene Turnell's website with information on Signs of Safety Approach: <https://www.turnellplus.com/peneturnell>

Fiske, H. (2008), *Hope In Action: Solution-Focused Conversations About Suicide*, Routledge: USA

Froerer, A. S., von Cziffra-Bergs, J., Kim, J. S. and Connie, E. E. (2018), *Solution-Focused Brief Therapy with Clients Managing Trauma*, Oxford University Press: New York

Milner, J. and Myers, S. (2017), *Working with Violence and Confrontation Using Solution Focused Approaches: Creative practice with children, young people and adults*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers: UK

Thank you for recommending these links Theresa Acutt:

[DV-alert Homepage](#)

[Engaging with victims and people who use violence | Child Safety Practice Manual](#)

[How can we hear and facilitate the voice of the child? Practice points | NSPCC Learning](#)[VoiceoftheChild.pdf](#)

Information for our Upcoming WASFIG Zoom Gathering 23 in June 2025

When: Saturday 28 June 2025 9:30am-11:30am WA Time (QLD VIC/NSW = 11:30pm-1:30pm; SA/NT = 11am-1pm; New Zealand = 1:30pm-3:30pm)

Topic: Embracing a SFBT Approach to Neurodiversity: Discovering Unique Strengths and Possibilities Amidst Needs and Challenges to Empower Neurodivergent Clients

Exploring how SFBT serves as a 'neurodiversity-affirming approach' and is a good fit for working with neurodivergent clients.

Join us for an inspiring group reflection on how Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) offers a deeply affirming approach for working with neurodivergent children, adults, couples, and families. Building on your rich experience in this space, we'll explore how the SF mindset—the belief that every client has the capacity to create their own positive life changes—can lead us to ask questions that highlight the unique, useful strategies our clients are already using to navigate their lives. By truly valuing each client as the expert in their own life, SFBT offers a respectful, empowering, and affirming framework. Together, we'll consider how this approach can support neurodivergent individuals to:

- discover and transform into their best version of themselves in both personal and professional life,
- enhance self-perception to build hope and momentum for future change, and
- develop self-care strategies uniquely tailored to their own needs.

In preparing for our June 2025 WASFIG meeting:

- Bring along any good resources, books or articles you have for working with neurodivergent clients you would like to share with the group;
- It is always inspiring to hear of 'sparkling moments' you might have had when working with a neurodivergent client and we would be honoured to hear these examples from you;
- Or just join us on the day to learn how SFBT is a good fit for working with neurodivergent clients to be re-energised and inspired!

We hope you'll join us for this thoughtful and hopeful conversation.

WASFIG News:

Join Steve Runciman and Tracy Shirvill for their new WASFIG initiative for 2025 *Creative Silence Australasia!*

Next Meeting: Wednesday 7 May | 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM (AWST)

Then ongoing: First Wednesdays of the month till September 2025

Upcoming dates:

June 4 | July 2 | August 6 | September 3

A quiet space for creative focus, shared presence, and Solution Focused inspiration.

In silence, we make room for what is not yet spoken, for what is waiting to be born.

Join us for *Creative Silence Australasia*—a monthly Zoom session where we come together in silence to work on whatever inspires us through a Solution Focused lens. Whether you're writing, planning, reflecting, creating, or dreaming, this space offers a gentle nudge and the comfort of shared intention.

The format is simple:

11:30AM – 11:45 AM – Arrive, say hello, and share your focus for the next 90 minutes

11:45 AM – 1.15 PM – Silent work time (cameras on, mics off)

1.15PM – 1:30 PM – Music and reflections on what the time brought you

No fee. No registration. Just come.

This space is an **Australasian expression** of the inspiring *Creative Silence* sessions created by **Anton Stellamans and Jonas Wells** in Europe. With gratitude, we draw on their creativity and generosity to host this peaceful, productive pause each month.

[Zoom](#) link: Wed 7 May, 2025 11:30 AM Perth AWST

Enquiries:

Tracy Shirvill – hello@findingfelicitycounselling.com.au

Steve Runciman – srunciman@iinet.net.au

Come as you are—and enjoy the quiet company of others doing the same.

- **May 2025 SFBT Skills Practice and Supervision Groups with Kerry via Zoom** – Saturday 17 May 2025 9:30am-11:30am. SF group supervision is an opportunity to share in the same inspiring and hopeful conversations that we have with our clients with each other as practitioners. This is an open group with 3 or 4 SF practitioners who meet to encourage each other with client cases and to practice SF skills in a supportive environment. Fees are \$80 with a 10% discount for your first group if you have attended a WASFIG meeting or training. Please email Kerry (Clinical Counsellor and Registered Supervisor with the ACA, Level 4) on invictuscounsellingservice@gmail.com for more information and experience the Solution Focused 'difference that makes a difference' and leave group supervision feeling energised with a sense of renewed confidence as we build fluency in language as a SF practitioner.
- **Australasian Solution Focused Association (ASFA)** - To connect with SF practitioners across Australasia, please join [ASFA](#) (\$110 annual fee) and have access to monthly members meetings held on the third Wednesday of the month, monthly online peer group supervision on the first Monday of the month, discounts for SF training and the ASFA Conference, and access to the private Facebook group.

- **More Than Just a Book Club** meetings (Wednesdays) and **SF in Organisations (SFiO) Downunder - SF Conversations** (Mondays) to find out more please contact **John Teager** john.teager@outlook.com.
- **ASFA Conference 2025: November in Dunedin, New Zealand 14-16 November 2025.** See the [ASFA website](#) to get your Early Bird tickets.
- **Consulting Rooms to Rent in Stirling Business Centre (SBC)** – There are several rooms to rent where Steve is based at Stirling Business Centre. It would be great to build up a SF hub at SBC.

ASFA Conference 2026 in Perth?!

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered to support us to make ASFA Perth 2026 a reality! Next step in our viability of a Perth conference is to explore what you are passionate about:

Suppose there was a ASFA Perth conference in 2026, what workshop would you be most excited to attend, so excited in fact that it would even cause you to take leave from work or get on a plane to Perth?? That's if you are not lucky enough to live here already of course!!

If anyone else would like to put their hand up for a support role we would be very happy to hear from you – whether you can help on the day or even from a distance online! We are still looking for some people who are confident in wrangling the beast that is IT! We are hoping to have a few people to help with setting up laptops and projectors or with any Zoom issues that might arise if we go ahead with some hybrid workshops. We would like to have a few people for each role in case the nominated person cannot make it on the day due to illness or life.

Tap into inspiring conversations between WASFIG meetings by joining our [WASFIG Facebook Group](#)! Keep connecting and building our network between meetings, see up to date news and information for our group, share great SFBT resources and link in with Solution Focused peer support while working with your clients.

Thank you all again for attending our April 2025 WASFIG meeting where we learnt the importance of how our SF questions can be used to respectfully empower and build the possibility for future safety for clients experiencing domestic abuse.

We look forward to seeing all who can attend our June 2025 WASFIG meeting where we'll dive into key considerations when working with neurodivergent individuals, uncovering how SF questions can illuminate clients' existing strengths, coping strategies, and unique ways of overcoming obstacles. By recognising their own abilities, clients can develop a stronger self-perception, boost their self-esteem, and build the self-trust that can cultivate hope and momentum for ongoing positive change.

Warmly,

Kerry and Steve

WA SFBT Interest Group Co-Coordinators

April 2025

*We live in worlds our questions create. – Fredrike Bannink
(2014, p. 52 in Wulf & von Cziffra-Bergs, 2025, p. 10)*