

What is a Strengths Narrative Approach?

In order to stay current in the field of early intervention for psychosis, and the continued development of research supported meaningful interventions, the Center for Excellence team has created an alternative strengths exploration tool. This tool offers an opportunity for individuals to identify their strengths by contextualizing them in the stories they tell and have been told about themselves. A narrative format will be used to expand the vision of what's important to them, where these strengths remain present now, and where they may be utilized moving forward in the various domains of their lives. The hope is that by identifying strengths in their existing life experiences, our EASA participants will walk away from the strengths exploration with evidence from their own lives that supports the strengths they've identified, and that by situating those strengths within previous experiences, they'll be moved to call upon them again when they find themselves in similar situations.

When exploring where a narrative approach within a strengths assessment has value, it's also important to discuss the possible limitations of methodologies around strengths, such as a problem solving or fill in the blank approach. If young people are approached in naming their strengths in an assessment format, participants may feel "put on the spot," and may be discouraged if they are unable to think of any "strengths" off the top of their head. Particularly for those struggling with self-confidence, shifting pressure off of the participant and treating the generation of strengths as a more collaborative process will help quell the feeling that they are "failing" the conversation. If an individual does answer, but feels there is a constraint within the question or they feel pushed into committing to something, they may be choosing language that doesn't have meaning to them or that doesn't resonate with them personally. By allowing strengths to become part of their own storyline, the process itself becomes an opportunity. The interweave of the young person's life history, gender, culture, societal, economic and social influences that are all a part of who we have become and enhance the possibilities of who they will evolve to be. The unique ability of every single one of us to reassemble our memories or how we express our experiences, allows the dialogue to evolve, our thoughts to move, and the stories to help us explain to both ourselves and others who we are. The hope is with this process there will be new insights into the possibilities of the future. As said by the sociologist Norbert Elias when defining process "what is reassembled is never exactly what is was, but always a slightly changed version" (Frank, A.W., pg. 83).

With this model, the format of the questions will lend themselves toward a different dialogue around the highlighted strengths. By opening the door to story, in which all information is valid and equal, a possibility of looking at things in a new perspective and will hopefully support a shift in perception of the strengths importance and potential. Rather than a comparison of past, present, to future that might highlight discrepancies or loss over time, this is a dialogue that keeps the strength as central and explores the resiliency of this strength from its origin to cross time. With youth in an early intervention for psychosis program, they are experiencing a whole new system of care that feels foreign, unique and most likely full of assessments. The EASA program is an evidenced-based program that is supportive, hopeful, educational, and experienced in helping those who are experiencing psychosis for the first time. EASA Center for Excellence is a part of developing this tool in hopes of creating an intervention that feels less like an assessment and more like a meaningful conversation. If we do not explore the story around the strengths and the process of their development throughout an individual's life history, we take the risk of not seeing their strengths full prospective or worth in the recovery process, both during and after EASA. How has this strength already touched their relationships, work, school, extra-curricular activities and pathways of personal choice. The young people we work with may have new symptoms and experiences, but their strengths are their strengths. This guide is to help our young people in understanding more clearly how to draw on the richness of their current strengths for future ambitions or priorities focused on their personal growth. They will continue to grow and utilize these and new strengths while in the creation of the story of life to be told.

Instructions

Materials:

The Center for Excellence has created an alternative, research supported Strengths Narrative tool to help young people contextualize their strengths and to aid in expanding the vision of what is important to them. Included in this strengths narrative tool is a master copy of the strengths cards from Center for Excellence, created by using StrengthsFinder's 34 strengths. The language was modified and then condensed to 24 strengths, to support this being a youth informed intervention. These cards are available to be copied for additional sets and include blank cards so other strengths may be added to the deck. When laminated, feel free to use a dry erase pen to modify any cards the young person feels alternative language best describes the strength for them. Also, feel free to use any strengths cards of your own that you feel fit your style of inquiry or are a better fit for the young person you are working with.

Also included is a research based exploration of moving away from a problem-solving tool toward a narrative inquiry around strengths. This model is selected to support how "placing strengths into storylines might contribute to new insights and possibilities for student's identities and actions moving forward" (Epston & Ingamells, pg. 51). The science and literature behind this approach helped to modify and create the Narrative Questions suggested for use with this tool.

As this is an interactive tool to explore, animate, contextualize, and inform an individual's personal strengths, please modify the questions as necessary. Base any modifications on your analysis of what is most useful for the conversation and in response to your responsibility toward the young person in supporting them being understood.

The Strengths Exploration Form is included and setup to allow movement of thought as the story evolves. The practiced intention of the form is to inform the practice, rather than a form to be looked upon at face value or followed systematically. This means trusting in the story, placing key words, and discoveries into the different areas that "fit", while allowing the story to breathe with a hope of perspective and improved insight while helping the strengths become more identifiable. An additional form has been included with the domains of life section kept blank, if the individual would like to create their own preferred categories of context of where they feel their strengths have expanded into in their life, during this process of discussing their strengths story.

Instructions:

Hand the young person the cards and ask them to sort them into three piles of "most important," "very important," and "not important" to me. Suggest their top 5 or so strengths for the "most important to me" category. Remember if the young person wants to make changes to the language on the cards this may be done at this time or feels they have strengths that aren't on the cards, go ahead and write those on the blank cards included with the cards.

Once the individual has sorted the cards, explore the Narrative Questions connected with the Strengths Narrative Form. Include on the form values or desired strengths identified during this process, as well as any priorities or goals for the next 6 months that came from insights and discussion during the Strengths Narrative intervention.

Strengths Exploration

Name: _____

MY STRENGTHS	<input type="text" value="Social Skills/Supports"/>	<input type="text" value="Education/Vocation/Work"/>
	<input type="text" value="Talents/Skills"/>	<input type="text" value="Health"/>
	<input type="text" value="Hobbies/Fun"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Values/Strengths I'd like to Develop:

Goals/Priorities:

Strengths Exploration

Daily Living Situation/Activities

Social Supports/Spirituality

My Strengths

Education/Vocation

Health/Leisure

My Priorities moving forward:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Music/Hobbies that interest me:

<p>Strengths Narrative Cards</p>	<p>Very Important to Me</p>
<p>Important to Me</p>	<p>Not Important to Me</p>
<p>Historical contextualizes experiences in the past, understands the present by researching the past</p>	<p>Idealist sees a positive possible future and works to achieve that</p>
<p>Intellectualism introspective, thoughtful</p>	<p>Learner motivated by the process of learning new things in and of itself</p>

Strategist

identifies patterns, analyzes all possible outcomes and attempts to remain objective.

Achiever

likes to be busy and productive, finds satisfaction in hard work.

Arranger

strong organizational skills, arranges resources and talents for best results

Belief

driven by purpose found in personal values.

Deliberate

detail oriented, careful, thorough and meticulous.

Problem Solver

loves the challenge of solving a problem.

Activator

turn thoughts into actions, motivated to start now.

Leadership

ability to take control of a situation and remain cool-headed in a difficult situation.

Communication

able to put thoughts into words easily and skilled at public speaking.

Competition

motivated by differing partnerships and able to rally a team.

Self-Assurance

creates confidence in others through belief in oneself and one's instincts.

Impactful

motivated by a desire to make a difference in people's lives.

Connection

finds common ground to develop understanding with others.

Adaptability

flexible and quick thinking, able to "go with the flow" and remain in one's element.

Connectedness

able to find connections and significance in everyday things and life events.

Mentor

sees the brightest potential in people and enjoys fostering that potential in others.

Empathy

can sense other people's feelings and needs, easily able to "put themselves in someone else's shoes".

Peacekeeper

breaks down conflicts, helps others find unity and common ground.

Positivity

contains contagious enthusiasm that motivates others.

Community

values their relationships with other people and enjoys working with their friends, family, or community to achieve common goals.

Strength

Strength

Strength

Strength

Strengths Card Sort Activity

- a) When looking at the names of the strengths you chose as “very important to me”, do you have another name or description you’d like to use for any of them, or stay with the current description?
- b) I’m wondering if you’d be open to talking a little more about these strengths and where they have shown up in your life? Are there any you chose that you prefer to start with?

Write Chosen Strengths Onto the Form

Questions specific to each strength highlighted:

1. Could you tell me a story about (name of strength) that stands out in your early memories as an important moment or significant in realizing this may be a strength of yours? This can either be a story of your own or told by someone close to you.
2. As you grew older did you find yourself becoming more skillful at (name of strength) or has it remained under wraps? Would you tell me more about that?
3. Of all the people who have known you over the course of your life, who would not have been surprised at all that you would develop (name of the strength) into a ‘strength’? Did this person or someone else foster any roots of your talent for (name of strength)?
4. When you think about it now, is there anything or anyone else we haven’t mentioned that supported you along the way in the development of this strength?

Questions to ask with general reference to strengths list and domain areas:

1. How do these strengths we’ve discussed support or show up in these areas of your life? (list life domains on sheet)
2. Where do you think these strengths might show up in the future? Is there an aspect or area of your future you could see the knowledge of this talent being useful or important? Are there any other strengths you’d like to explore or develop that weren’t highlighted today?
3. From this conversation, can you see different ways you might incorporate these talents or aspects of these talents in your relationships, studies, work, or future work that might be helpful to you? Other thoughts or questions?

Explore Goals/Priorities for the next 6 months from the above narrative discussion

Strengths Definitions

Adapted from: CliftonStrengths™ 34 Strengths and StrengthFinder™

STRATEGIC THINKING: How do you understand and solve problems?

1. **Historical:** contextualizes experiences in the past, understands the present by researching the past.
2. **Idealist:** sees a positive possible future and works to achieve that.
3. **Intellectualism:** introspective, thoughtful.
4. **Learner:** motivated by the process of learning new things in and of itself.
5. **Strategist:** identifies patterns, analyzes all possible outcomes and attempts to remain objective.

ACTION: How do you get things done? What drives you to act?

6. **Achiever:** likes to be busy and productive, finds satisfaction in hard work.
7. **Arranger:** strong organizational skills, arranges resources and talents for best results.
8. **Belief:** driven by purpose found in personal values.
9. **Deliberate:** detail oriented, careful, thorough and meticulous.
10. **Problem Solver:** loves the challenge of solving a problem.

INFLUENCING: How do you influence other people?

11. **Activator:** turn thoughts into actions, motivated to start now.
12. **Leadership:** ability to take control of a situation and remain cool-headed in a difficult situation.
13. **Communication:** able to put thoughts into words easily and skilled at public speaking.
14. **Competition:** motivated by differing partnerships and able to rally a team.
15. **Self-Assurance:** creates confidence in others through belief in oneself and one's instincts.
16. **Impactful:** motivated by a desire to make a difference in people's lives.
17. **Connection:** finds common ground to develop understanding with others.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: How do you build and maintain strong relationships?

18. **Adaptability:** flexible and quick thinking, able to “go with the flow” and remain in one's element.
19. **Connectedness:** able to find connections and significance in everyday things and life events.
20. **Mentor:** sees the brightest potential in people and enjoys fostering that potential in others.
21. **Empathy:** can sense other people's feelings and needs, is easily able to “put—themselves in someone else's shoes”.
22. **Peacekeeper:** breaks down conflicts and helps others find unity and common ground.
23. **Positivity:** contains contagious enthusiasm that motivates others.
24. **Community:** values their relationships with other people and enjoys working with their friends, family, or community to achieve common goals.

Strengths Card Deck Alternatives

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/shl0b0vel0kf0hf/Ciarrochi%20%26%20Hayes%20%282016%29%20strength%20cards%20FINAL.PDF?dl=0>

<http://ibr.tcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TW-Scards.pdf>

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Animal-Strength-cards-3709044>

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<https://www.strengthsquest.com/193541/themes-full-description.aspx>.

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