

Strength-Based Approach

What is a Strength-Based Approach?

The strength-based approach has its foundation in social work and builds upon the client's strengths, specifically seeing the client as resourceful and resilient when they are in adverse conditions (Strengths-Based Models in Social Work; McCashen, Wayne [2005]). A unique characteristic of this approach is that it is client led and is centered on outcomes using an individual's future set of strengths.

The approach has been adapted for use with correctional populations and is a foundational element of Motivational Interviewing. Michael D. Clark, MSW, the Director of the Center for Strengths-Based Strategies, has applied Motivational Interviewing and strength-based strategies for hard-to-serve, court-mandated populations. With a background as a probation officer and court magistrate and having served in roles in mental health and addiction services, he has delivered training across the country on this approach with justice-involved populations.

An interesting aspect of the strength-based approach is that it is about getting people to affect change within themselves. Positivity influences change, affecting each person's handling of their:

- Attitudes about their dignity
- Capacities
- Rights
- Quirks
- Similarities

The strength-based approach allows for people to see themselves at their best in order to see their own value. It then allows a person to move that value forward and capitalize on their strengths rather than focus on their negative characteristics.

The strength-based approach not only examines the individual but also the individual's environment. In addition, this approach identifies any constraints that might be limiting an individual's growth. These constraints are present when the individual has to deal with social, personal, and/or cultural issues in organizations that cannot be balanced fairly (Georgena).

Rapp, Saleebey, and Sullivan (2008) suggest six standards for determining a strength-based approach. If in agreement, practitioners can use the list when considering what method they will use when practicing the strength-based approach:

1. Goal orientation: It is crucial and vital for the client to set goals.
2. Strengths assessment: The client finds and assesses their own strengths and inherent resources.

3. Resources from the environment: Connect resources in the person's environment who can be useful or enable the person to create links to these resources. The resources could be individuals, associations, institutions, or groups.
4. Different methods are used first for different situations: In solution-focused therapy, clients determine goals first and then identify strengths. In strength-based case management, individuals first determine their strengths using an assessment.
5. The relationship is hope inducing: By finding strengths and linking to connections (with other people, communities, or culture), the client gains hope.
6. Meaningful choice: Each person is an expert on their strengths, resources, and hopes. It is the practitioner's duty to improve upon choices the person makes and encourage making informed decisions.

Principles of the Strength-Based Approach

There are nine guiding principles that serve as the foundation of the strength-based approach. They are:

1. Everyone possesses a uniqueness that helps them evolve and move along their journey. These unique characteristics can be:
 - a. Potential
 - b. Strengths
 - c. Capabilities
2. What receives attention or focus becomes what the client strives for and eventually becomes a reality.
3. Be careful with your words and language. Our language creates our reality.
4. Accept change: Our lives and our world are ever evolving. Don't resist.
5. Support others as authentically as you can. You will see that your relationships are deeper and more meaningful.
6. The client is the storyteller of their own life.
7. Build upon what you know and experience to dream about the future.
8. Capacity building has multiple facets and organization. Be flexible.
9. Be collaborative. Be adaptive and value differences (Hammond, 2010).

50 Strength-Based Example Questions

1. What is working well?
2. Can you think of things you have done to help things going well?
3. What have you tried? And what has been helpful?
4. Tell me about what other people are contributing to things going well for you?
5. What could be going better?
6. What stops things working better for you?
7. What would be happening if things were working better for you?
8. What small thing could you do that would make a difference?

9. Tell me about what a good day looks like for you? What makes it a good day?
10. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you say X is? What might make that score a little better?
11. What are you most proud of in your life?
12. What achievements have you made? How did you make them happen?
13. What inspires you?
14. What do you like doing? What makes this enjoyable?
15. What do you find comes easily to you?
16. What do you find you learn most easily?
17. What do you want to achieve in your life?
18. When things are going well in your life, tell me: What is happening?
19. What are the things in your life that help you keep strong?
20. What do you value about yourself?
21. What would other people who know you say you were good at doing?
22. What would your family and friends say you were good at?
23. You are resilient. What do you think helps you bounce back?
24. What is one thing you could do to have better health and a feeling of wellbeing?
25. How have you faced/overcome the challenges you have had?
26. How have people around you helped you overcome challenges?
27. What are three things that have helped you overcome obstacles?
28. If you had the opportunity, what would you like to teach others?
29. Without being modest, what do you value about yourself? What are your greatest strengths?
30. How could/do your strengths help you to be a part of your community?
31. Who is in your life?
32. Who is important in your life?
33. How would you describe the strengths, skills, and resources you have in your life?
34. What could you ask others to do, that would help create a better picture for you?
35. What are the positive factors in your life at present?
36. What are three (or five or 10) things that are going well in your life right now?
37. What gives you energy?
38. What is the most rewarding part of your life?
39. When, now or in the past, have you felt like you are making a difference/contributing? How did you make this happen?
40. What would make you feel you are contributing?
41. Tell me one, (or five or 10 or more) things that you can do?
42. What makes you feel excited OR useful OR satisfied? Tell me about a time when you felt these feelings?
43. Tell me about a time when you responded to a challenge in a way that made you feel really on top of things?
44. How have you been able to develop your skills?
45. How have you been able to meet your needs?

46. What kind of supports have you used that have been helpful to you? How did the supports improve things for you?
47. Tell me about any creative, different solutions you have tried. How did this work out?
48. When you think about X (whatever it is that is stopping things from going well), is there anything you can think of that could help in any way?
49. Can you think of one small manageable step that would improve X for you?
50. What resources such as community, people, aids, and equipment do you have now? Do you know of other resources that might be helpful for you?

References

Erika Stoerkel, M, Sc. "What is a strength-based approach?" (Incl. Activities and Examples), *Positive Psychology* [[website](#)]: 2020

Melanie Atkins. "50 First Strength Based Questions", *Changed Lives New Journeys* [[website](#)] : 2013