

Guide to Strengths Based Conversations and Reflective Huddles

Valuing SEND Toolkit:
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IMPOWER

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COUNTY COUNCIL
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What do we mean by the ‘strength based approach’?

- Strength based approaches is a theory developed initially in social work and has since been **applied in a variety of contexts** including **schools**, agencies, and private practice and with a wide range of clients including **children**, adolescents, adults, and **families**.
- It is a perspective that **focuses on strengths of an individual** and how they can be utilised to support development rather than the deficits and ‘problems’.
- Strengths Based Practice is founded on the idea that everyone possesses skills, interests, abilities, networks, passions, ambitions and characteristics which can be **used to overcome challenges** they might face.
- It recognises that we can help children, young people and their families **overcome challenges** through helping them to **identify**, discover, nurture and apply **these strengths instead of focussing** directly on **the problems** they present with.

“Focusing on the strengths in people is the foundation towards positive change.”

What do we mean by the ‘strength based approach’?

‘It is about **enabling people to find the best solutions for themselves**, to support them in making independent decisions about how they live.’

Lyn Romeo, Chief Social Worker for England (2019) Strengths-based approach practice handbook

‘It cannot be prescriptive and there is **no one-size fits-all model**’

Strengths-based social work practice with adults Roundtable report (2017)

‘Strengths-based practice is a **collaborative process** between the person supported by services and those supporting them, allowing them to work together to **determine an outcome that draws on the person’s strengths and assets...**’

(SCIE, 2014) Care Act 2014: Strengths-based approaches. SCIE, 2015 <http://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/assessment-and-eligibility/strengths-basedapproach/>

What do we mean by strengths?

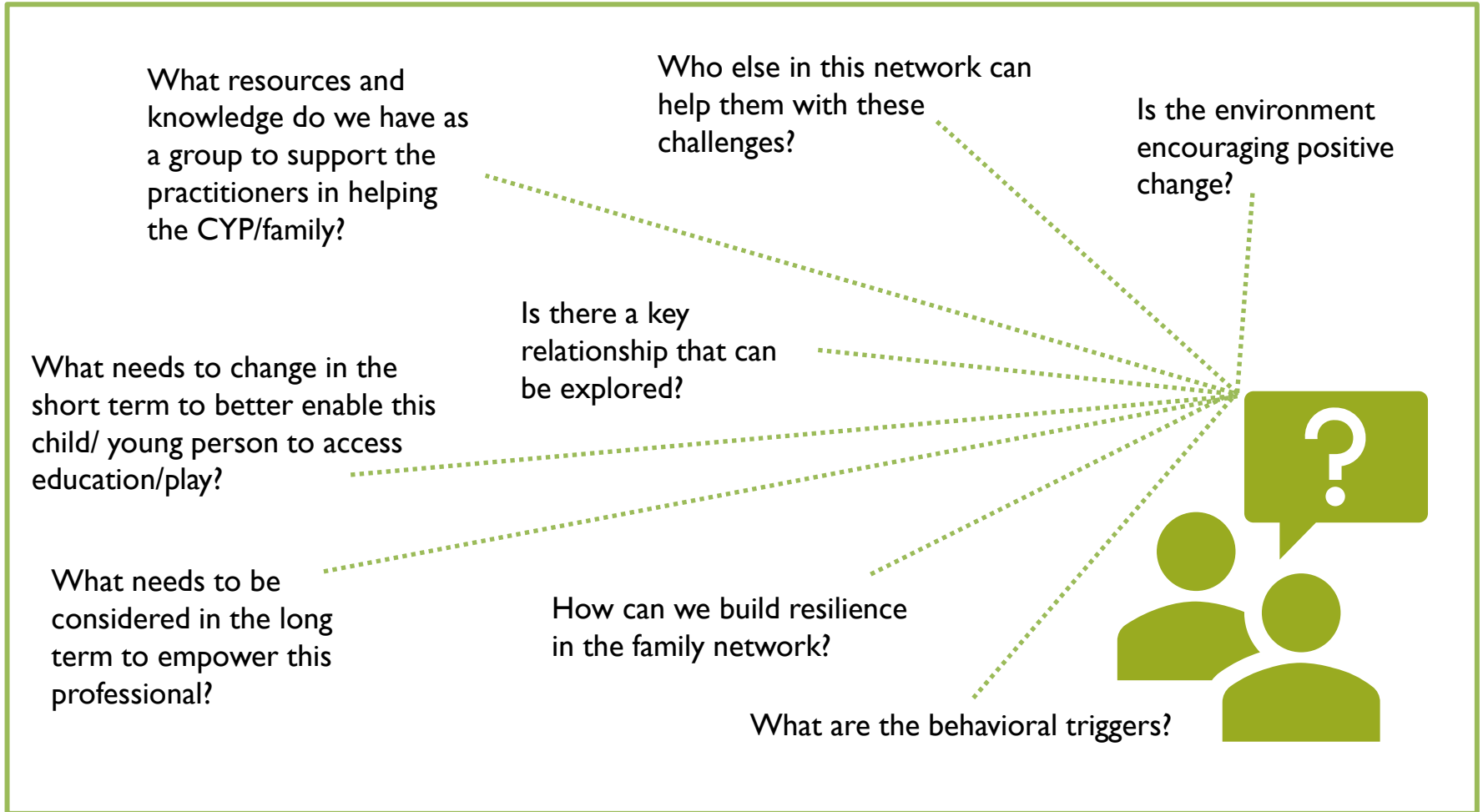
Engaging in a strength based conversation means considering all of the **following elements and strengths in the child's or young person's life**, and using elements of each as a building block to give them the best possible chance of inclusion and **achieving independence**:

- ✓ Self (voice of the child or young person)
- ✓ Network(s) (e.g. *family, friends, staff & wider support network*)
- ✓ Community (e.g. *community resources, voluntary organisations, charities*)
- ✓ Equipment, Technology & Resources
- ✓ Short term support (e.g. *early intervention or preventative support*)
- ✓ Long term support (e.g. formal or informal)

Every conversation we have is an **opportunity to recognise strengths** in the child or young person to enable them to make a choice that **improves outcomes**.

Strength based approaches acknowledge that services can be intrusive and disruptive

Equipping the child for the future, not just the crisis



Importance of Language



- **Framing of language** is a key principle of strength based approaches.

- **Highlighting achievements** can play a part in increasing in development, inclusion and wellbeing.

- **Use of positive language** to reinforce assets and benefits, avoidance of deficit language e.g. need, struggle



- The **impact of negative language** about a situation has been shown to affect behaviour.



- **Start with strengths** and **what's important**, use active words to promote action. Use of positive language to reinforce a child's assets and focus on benefits, avoiding the use of negative language e.g. need, struggle
- **Open questions** - enable people to tell their stories, feelings and concerns in their own words. "I want you to tell me what happened - in your own words"

Using Strengths-Based language

Avoid dependency generating words:

- ✗ Need
- ✗ Help
- ✗ Care
- ✗ Assessment
- ✗ Limitation
- ✗ Struggle
- ✗ Services
- ✗ Have to...

Example:

Using 'Transition' opposed to 'Step down' will promote more strengths based framing of support

Using independence focused language:

- ✓ Independent / secure / well / safe
- ✓ Community / neighbourhood / local
- ✓ Support / assist / enable
- ✓ Network / social network / family and friends
- ✓ Reinforce / maintain / sustain
- ✓ Develop / establish / progress / promote / expand
- ✓ Achieve / Reach / realise / follow through / attain
- ✓ Goal / intent / benefit / thrive / easier / simpler
- ✓ Ability / capability / strength / skill
- ✓ Able / ready / capable (help / aid)
- ✓ Know / understand / recognise
- ✓ Confident / sure / positive / self-sufficient / trust (entrust) / expect / assured

✓ What's important to you?
What do you think will help you achieve that? What will help you be able to continue to help yourself?

✗ What do you need? What services do you think you want?

✓ Tell me what's happening?
...what's important at the moment?

✗ Tell me what's wrong?

✓ What will help you continue to do _____ for yourself?

✗ What help do you need to do _____?

Embedding Strengths-Based Practice

- Lincolnshire has been implementing strengths-based approaches for some time now, and we will continue to embed this within our practice to improve the quality of outcomes for children and families.
- It is important to remember that Strengths-Based practice is not a 'tick-box' exercise; it is a continuous development journey.
- Professional reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection underpin good strengths-based practice when working with children and families.
- One mechanism by which you can embed strengths based practice in through reflective practice sessions, sometimes known as reflective 'huddles'.



The additional information provides a suggested model for reflective huddles to embed strengths-based conversations which can be adapted or developed to best support practitioners, teams and services.

Team Huddle

“A huddle is a **safe place** for practitioners to discuss and reflect on cases and share ideas, experiences, and knowledge to improve the outcomes for children they work with ... key to sustaining person centred, strengths-based, community connected, and outcome focused practice.”

Huddles may also be referred to as **Reflective Case Conversations**

What | When | How

- Bring cases of children with SEND or emerging needs to discuss where you have completed the Valuing SEND tool, or intend to
- Leave out any identifiable features such as name or date of birth. If cases are discussed anonymously the group can be open and creative.
- Tell us as much information as possible about them and their experience

Key questions to consider:

- What strength based tools and techniques have you used so far...how did it go?
- What has worked well?
- What's been difficult and why?
- What can we learn from this?
- What are the key priorities for this week?

Reflective Model

Reflective huddles will follow a conversation structure in which each person has a role to play:

| Timing | Presenter | Team |
|-----------|--|----------------------|
| 5 minutes | Introduce the case | Actively listen |
| 3 minutes | Listen and then respond | Clarifying questions |
| 5 minutes | Discussion and suggestions | |
| 2 minutes | Summing up and confirm actions and decisions | |

Role of Presenter:

Be open and honest about what you've explored and any difficulties you faced



Prompts for presenting:

- What questions did you explore?
- What do you wish you had explored earlier in the conversation?
 - What prompted this thought?

Role of Team:

Actively listen and respond constructively without blame or judgement



Prompts for questioning:

- Can you elaborate on where you explained...?
- What has worked well?
- What has been difficult and why?
- What can we learn from this?

Introduce your case template

Background and context

- Brief background about the child including their progress to date and the strengths in their lives
- Context to the child's needs
- Any other relevant information to support the conversation

Support

- Details of the conversations to date including what has worked and what might not have
- Where needs are currently being met?
- Where needs are not being met?

Next steps

- Where is there potential to support the child to achieve better outcomes?
- What are your next steps?
- Are there any questions to the group that might guide your thinking?

Huddle Culture

In reflective huddles we ask practitioners to look at cases in a different way. The group is guided to use a creative lens that removes any 'language of blame' from the situation.

The group should use their wide experience, both as a practitioner and in life, to first probe and then help to plot the next steps for the case. As the presenter it is really important to remember that the group have been asked to challenge you, and any suggestions are not a criticism of your practice but an opportunity to explore a different way of working.

To promote the culture of creativity some suggestions for how to challenge and probe are below:

Phrases to avoid

- ✗ Why didn't you...?
- ✗ You should have...
- ✗ I always make sure that I....
- ✗ Didn't you know about...?
- ✗ I wouldn't have done....
- ✗ I've had a case exactly like this...

Phrases that might help

- ✓ I wonder if...?
- ✓ Have you considered...?
- ✓ Can you tell me more about...?
- ✓ I'm interested in what you said about...
- ✓ It sounds like...