

A focus on strengths



Strengths are what makes each person unique, think of them like your DNA, no two people have the same combinations and level of strengths.

Character Strengths are the positive parts of your personality that impact how you think, feel and behave and are the keys to you being your best self. ⁱ

The **VIA classification of Character** strengths and virtues was developed by Peterson and Seligman in 2004. It identifies twenty-four character strengths that are consistent across culture, gender, race and religion. These strengths are linked to pre-existing qualities; they arise naturally and therefore feel authentic and are intrinsically motivating.

For example, if a person's dominant strength is creativity, it is more than just being good at drawing or other artistic pursuits. Creativity is a person's dominant style and how they approach everything, they may solve come up with novel solutions to a range of problems or have a natural flair to do things creatively. Strengths are much more than what activities we are good at, e.g. our skills. Strength Heroes aim is to get children, parents and teachers to identify their strengths as more than just maths, art, drawing, building. We want them to be able to identify those character strengths that make them unique. As put succinctly by the **Huffington Post**:

"Strengths are the positive feelings that children have when they perform different actions. Interests are the areas where they apply their strengths. For example, a child may be drawn to animals and therefore it can be said they have an interest in animals. However, one child may like to care for animals while another may enjoy training them. The strength for one child is caring and for the other it is teaching. The strength is what someone likes to do, while the interest is where they like to apply it. The strength can be transferred to other interests. For example, the child who likes to train animals may also like to teach children. When you help children discover both their strengths and their interests, they have a good chance to develop a true passion."

Why focus on strengths?

When we can identify and utilise our strengths we are more motivated, engaged and resilient. Focusing on strengths ensures a child's academic abilities are developed in unison with their character.

Health and happiness

There is a tonne of evidence to suggest that focusing on a child's strengths is important for improving mental and physical health, happiness and self-worth. That certainly does not mean we ignore the things a child is not good at. However, it does mean a balance of strengths spotting. From a very early

age we are taught to be problem solvers and focus on what needs to be fixed and ignore the stuff that is going well. So, the challenge as parents is to balance our focus and challenge ourselves to focus on our child's strengths as well. This was summed up by an organisation called Hands On Scotland

"Focusing on trying to fix problems and weaknesses is fairly common in schools and homes. Looking for people's strengths is less common. But research has shown that finding and using our strengths is important for improving health, happiness and our own sense of self-worth. As adults working or living with children, you have a powerful tool to help children lead happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives. You can help children notice and value the strengths and you can help them use their strengths more in their daily lives. Talking to children about their strengths will help to build their confidence. You will help them flourish"

There is no one definition of success

Each person has different strengths that they bring to situations in life.

Can you imagine if we all had the same strengths? Imagine if everyone in a sports team was good at scoring goals. Obviously, the team would not have much depth and probably could not get the ball to the goal scorer. Too often we define the success in terms of academic or sporting achievement. We need to recognise that everyone has something unique to contribute.

How can I be a Strengths Hero?

So how can you do you focus on strengths as well as everything else you are supposed to do?

1. **Complete** the VIA Character Strengths survey to identify your strengths www.viacharacter.org Kids over 10 can also complete. It takes about 10 minutes.
2. **Role model** and be aware of your own strengths. This will help you focus on the strengths of your children.
3. **Learn** to be a strengths spotter and assist your children to spot their strengths. This can be as easy as asking your children "How did they use their strengths today?"
4. **Notice** how your children use their strengths and talk to them about it or even thank them.
5. **Focus** on your child's strengths instead of achievement.
6. When your child has a challenge **ask** them, "How could you use your strengths to help you?"
7. Attend one of our **workshops** or talk to us to learn more ways to become your child's Strength Hero.

ⁱ <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths>