


STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE

Bouncing back from setbacks

“The development of human resiliency is none other than the process of healthy human development.”

(Benard, B. 2004, *Resiliency: What we have learned.* p. 9)



“What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in the families and relationships, and in their communities.”

(Masten, 2001, as quoted in Benard, B. p 10)

Strengths Perspective

- focus is on the strengths and capacities of people, rather than the problems of people
- emphasizes origins of strength and resilience
- argues against the dominance of a pathogenic or problem-focused perspective

Strengths - description

- The capacity to cope with difficulties, to maintain functioning in the face of stress, to bounce back in the face of significant trauma, to use external challenges as a stimulus for growth, and to use social supports as a source of resilience

The Problem with Problems

- **“The person is the problem or pathology named”**
Once a person has been given a label, the person becomes defined by that label and all that person’s experiences, feelings, desires, etc become defined in terms of that label
- **“The focus on what is wrong often reveals a cynicism about the ability of individuals to cope with life or to rehabilitate themselves”** The preoccupation with pathology leads to a sense of hopelessness and a belief that individuals are unable to truly change

Principles of the Strengths Perspective

- **Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths**
- **Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity**
- **By placing an emphasis on the already realized positive capacities of an individual, the individual will be more likely to continue development along the lines of those strengths**

Principles, cont.

- **Every environment is full of resources**
- **People have the capacity to determine what is best for them**
- **People do the best they can**

Assessment of Strengths

- Instead of asking, “What’s wrong with this family?” the question becomes, “What are the strengths in this family that will help them grow and change?”
- Instead of asking, “Why is this person mentally ill or delinquent or abusive?” the question can be, “What do they need to develop into more creative and loving adults?”

Assessing strengths

- UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACTS AND PERCEPTION OF SITUATION IS MOST IMPORTANT
- BE HONEST AND TRUSTWORTHY IN REPRESENTATIONS
- DETERMINE WHAT IS TO BE ACHIEVED WHEN ASSESSING SITUATION
- LOOK AT PROBLEM(S), BUT MOVE TOWARDS PERSONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STRENGTHS
- MAKE ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS MULTIDIMENSIONAL, INCLUDING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, MOTIVATION AND EMOTIONAL STRENGTHS, NETWORKS, ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITY GROUPS, ETC.
- LOOK FOR UNIQUENESS, RATHER THAN DISCOVERING SOME GENERIC CATEGORY FIT

(Cowger, 1997, pp. 63-66)

Quadrant 1:

**Environmental
Strengths**

Quadrant 2:

Personal Strengths

Quadrant 3:

**Environmental
Obstacles**

Quadrant 4:

Personal Obstacles

Survival questions

- How have you managed to survive (or thrive) thus far, given all the challenges you have had to contend with?
- How have you been able to rise to the challenges put before you?
- What was your mind-set as you faced these difficulties?
- What have you learned about yourself and your world during your struggles?
- Which of these difficulties have given you special strength, insight, or skill?
- What are the special qualities on which you can rely?

(Saleebey, 1997, *The strengths approach to practice*, pp. 53-54)

Support questions

- What people have given you special understanding, support, and guidance?
- Who are the special people on whom you can depend?
- What is it that these people give you that is exceptional?
- How did you find them or how did they come to you?
- What did they respond to in you?
- What associations, organizations, or groups have been especially helpful to you in the past?

(Saleebey, 1997, *The strengths approach to practice*, pp. 53-54)

Exception questions

- When things are going well in life, what is different?
- In the past, when you felt that your life was better, more interesting, or more stable, what about your world, your relationships, your thinking was special or different?
- What parts of your world and your being would you like to recapture, reinvent, or relive?
- What moments or incidents in your life have given you special understanding, resilience, and guidance?

(Saleebey, 1997, *The strengths approach to practice*, pp. 53-54)

Possibility questions

- What do you want out of life?
- What are your hopes, visions, and aspirations?
- How far along are you toward achieving these?
- What people or personal qualities are helping you move in these directions?
- What do you like to do?
- What are your special talents and abilities?
- What fantasies and dreams have given you special hope and guidance?

(Saleebey, 1997, *The strengths approach to practice*, pp. 53-54)

Esteem questions

- When people say good things about you, what are they likely to say?
- What is it about your life, yourself, and your accomplishments that give you real pride?
- How will you know when things are going well in your life – what will you be doing, who will you be with, how will you be feeling, thinking, and acting?
- What gives you genuine pleasure in life?
- When was it that you began to believe that you might achieve some of the things you wanted in life?
- What people, events, ideas were involved?

(Saleebey, 1997, *The strengths approach to practice*, pp. 53-54)

Personal Strengths ...aka Protective Traits ...aka Resilience Strengths

- Personality characteristics that mitigate effects of stress and strain and promote adaptation
- These strengths are dynamic, contextual, and culturally expressed

Benard's four personal strengths

- **Social Competence**

- an individual's ability to meet major societal expectations according to his or her age and stage of development

- **Problem Solving**

- encompasses many different skills such as planning, flexibility of thought, decision-making, critical thinking, and insight

Benard's four personal strengths, cont.

- **Autonomy**

- generally defined as a sense of independence and self-control

- **Sense of Purpose**

- Sense of belonging.
- Setting goals provides a sense of purpose and orients individuals toward achievement

Personal Strengths: What Resilience Looks Like

- **SOCIAL COMPETENCE**

- Responsiveness
- Communication
- Empathy & Caring
- Compassion
- Altruism
- Forgiveness

- **PROBLEM SOLVING**

- Planning
- Flexibility
- Resourcefulness
- Critical Thinking
- Insight

Personal Strengths: What Resilience Looks Like, cont.

● **AUTONOMY**

- Positive Identity
- Internal locus of control
- Initiative
- Self-efficacy
- Mastery
- Adaptive distancing
- Resistance
- Self-Awareness
- Mindfulness
- Humor

● **SENSE OF PURPOSE**

- Goal Direction
- Achievement Motivation
- Educational Aspirations
- Special Interest
- Creativity
- Imagination
- Optimism
- Hope
- Faith
- Spirituality
- Sense of Meaning

Bouncing back from setbacks

- What do you do when you feel as though your life is falling down around you?
- Who/What is responsible for how well your life goes?
 - Locus of Control “quiz”

Locus of Control - scoring

Internal Locus of Control: Total your responses for 1, 4, 5, 9, 18, 19, 21, and 23; then add +24

Score: _____

Powerful Others: Total your responses for 3, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 20, and 22; then add +24

Score: _____

Chance: Total your responses for 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 24; then add +24

Score: _____

Locus of control

Locus of control describes the degree to which individuals perceive that outcomes result from their own behaviors, or from forces that are external to themselves. This produces a continuum with external control at one end and internal control at the other:



People who develop an internal locus of control believe that they are responsible for their own success. Those with an external locus of control believe that external forces, like luck, determine their outcomes.

Barriers to Resilience

- Being raised to be a “good” boy or girl
- Are overly socialized to conform and believe that external forces control your life

Resilience

- Resilience is the capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances, as well as the ability to develop competence under conditions of severe and pervasive adversity
- Resilient people are able to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behavior in socially acceptable ways, even when they encounter difficult or challenging situations
- Resilience changes over the developmental lifespan

Four fundamental uses for resilience

1. **OVERCOMING** obstacles of childhood
2. **STEER THROUGH** everyday adversities
3. **BOUNCE BACK** from major setbacks, life-altering events
4. **REACH OUT** to find renewed meaning and purpose in life



Resilience quiz

The Seven Abilities of Resilience

- Emotion Regulation
- Impulse Control
- Empathy
- Optimism
- Causal Analysis
- Self-efficacy
- Reaching Out

Emotion Regulation and Resilience

- Ability to stay calm under pressure
- Self-regulation - control emotions, attention, and behavior
- Expression of emotions, negative and positive, is healthy and constructive
- However, it is NOT good to get stuck in anger, sadness, or anxiety

Impulse Control and Resilience

- Marshmallow experiment
- Impulse control and emotion regulation are closely related
 - tap into similar belief systems

Optimism and Resilience

- Believe things can change for the better
- Hope for the future, and believe they control the direction of their lives
- See futures as relatively bright
- Believe in the ability to handle inevitable adversities and solve own problems - REALISTICALLY
- Optimists are physically healthier than pessimists, are less likely to suffer depression, do better in school, are more productive at work, and win more in sports

Causal Analysis and Resilience

- People's ability to accurately identify causes of their problems
 - If unable to assess accurately, doomed to make same mistakes
- Explanatory style: how you explain the good and bad things that happen to you
 - Personal (me – not me)
 - Permanent (always – not always)
 - Pervasive (everything – not everything)

Empathy and Resilience

- Ability to read other people's cues to their psychological and emotional states
 - Nonverbals such as facial expression, tone of voice, body language
- Inability to read cues can be costly in business and in personal relationships

Self-efficacy and Resilience

- Sense that we are effective in the world
- Represents beliefs that problems can be solved and success is possible
 - Confidence in abilities vs self-doubt

Reaching Out and Resilience

- Belief that it is better to act and fail than not to act at all
- Good at assessing risks (sound judgment, realistically optimistic)
- Keen sense of self and comfortable expressing thoughts and feelings (authenticity)
- Have found meaning and purpose in endeavors and are appreciative of what they have and experience (ability to see big picture)

Thought/Reflection/Reaction Papers

- Papers should follow the following format:
- Each paper should be 1-2 pages in length, typed, double-spaced.
- Headings must include your name, the date and the topic of the class attended. Also indicate the Reaction Paper #____.
- Clearly state (number, bold, or bullet) one-three specific topics/thoughts/ideas you are reacting to. Agree or disagree and/or point out concepts that were important, using quotes or concepts from readings, the speaker, and/or class discussions; add any past experiences and feelings that validate your reaction/reflection.

Reaction Papers will be graded based on the following criteria:

- heading (see below)
- formatting (length, typed, double-spaced)
- one-three specific topics/thoughts/ideas, clearly listed
- quality of thoughts/response/reaction
- spelling, punctuation, grammar

Example of heading:

Tawna Skousen

Class Date: February 1, 2010

Topic: Strengths Perspective

Reaction #1

Reaction paper ideas

- How it felt to do the “resilience lifeline”
- Thoughts about the locus of control or resilience quiz
- Beliefs about risk and protective factors and connection to resilience
- The assignments (movie and lifeline): have they been helpful? If so, why? If not, suggest alternate ideas
- Thoughts about strengths perspective and (specific) traits discussed