



Strengths Based Care Planning

CANS-NY User Tip Sheet

Building strengths is probably the most important work that a care manager can do. The presence of strengths predicts better outcomes for youth, and strengths-based care planning recognizes that the individuals and families we serve are much more than the needs and challenges with which they present.

Identifying Strengths

Strengths are assets that support an individual’s ability to build meaning in life and to sustain well-being. Strengths can promote growth and development or protect youth from risk. Strengths can be internal (a characteristic of the youth), or contextual (a characteristic of the youth’s environment).

Useful Strengths

A strength is useful when a youth can actively draw from that strength to support healthy development and enhance well-being. Useful strengths also can help resolve behavioral or functioning problems or help a youth better respond to challenges in life. An *identified* strength is not the same as a useful strength. Identified strengths require building to be useful. Remember that strengths can be internal (a characteristic of the youth), or contextual (a characteristic of the youth’s environment).

Rating Strengths

Care managers can focus strength-building efforts with youth and their families by using the action levels of the CANS-NY. On the Child Strengths domain, useful strengths to build upon in the plan of care are those rated “0” (centerpiece) or “1” (useful). Items rated “2” (identified but not useful now; buildable) or “3” (not identified) might be built through the plan of care.

Optimism*: 0

• Li Wei knows she can handle just about any challenge that comes her way. She reminds herself of this whenever she does not feel well.

Optimism: 1

• Li Wei says she feels that her life is likely to get better. She is able to keep this feeling alive most of the time, except when she is feeling quite ill.

Optimism: 2

• Li Wei says she occasionally remembers that she can overcome her physical challenges but that lately her physical symptoms have overwhelmed that belief.

Optimism: 3

• Li Wei cannot remember the last time she felt good about her future.

**Optimism: This CANS-NY item refers to the youth’s positive orientation toward self and the future.*

Remember: Absence of a Strength Does Not Equal a Need

Strengths and needs are different and should be assessed and addressed separately. For example: If a youth is suicidal, we want to understand it and work with it (the youth has a need in this area). However, if that youth is NOT suicidal, that does not represent a strength.

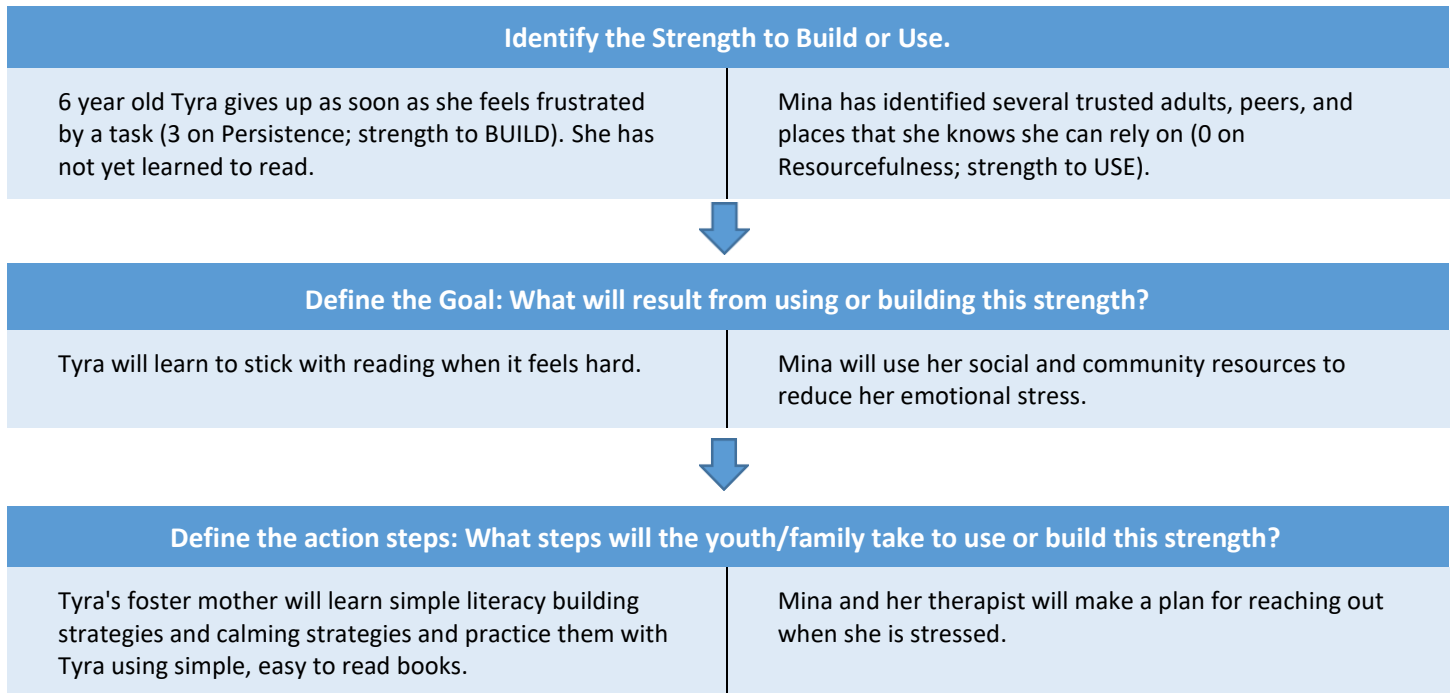
Turning Strengths into Action

Strengths-based care planning relies upon developing transformational goals with youth and their families. Be sure to educate caregivers and youth about the power of strengths. Help them build a vision for where they want to go, (e.g., “I want my son to be happy and to do well in school,”) and help them identify strengths that are present, and strengths that must be built, to support that goal. Offer strengths-building interventions as a “menu,” and let the youth and family choose the interventions that they have energy for.

Examples of Strengths Building Interventions

- Connect the youth/family to recreational programs
- Connect the youth/family to organizations that reflect and build cultural identity
- Connect the youth to resources that support friendships and social opportunities
- Construct opportunities for positive life experiences (camps, trips, cultural events)
- Connect the youth to members of his/her religious community through participation in church/community events

To use and build strengths in your care plan, follow these simple steps:



Remember: Never Interfere with a Strength to Address a Need

Example: Luciana has a learning disability and is struggling to pass her classes. Luciana and her family attend weekly church services, and Luciana volunteers with her church youth group regularly. Luciana says that her volunteer work deepens her commitment to God and her ability to rely on her faith. Luciana's parents want her to stop her volunteer work so that she can have more time to study. Luciana's care manager suggests that the team find other ways to carve out more academic support so that Luciana can continue to volunteer.