

# STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACHES



In this tool, you will find:

- » A description of strengths-based approaches
- » Principles of strengths-based approaches
- » Key considerations for CaFIS providers working from a strengths-based approach
- » Links to additional resources

## KEY GUIDANCE

### What is meant by strengths-based approaches?

A strengths-based approach to working with children and families is about 'how' we work, not 'what' work we do.

A strength-based approach is a way of working that focuses on abilities, knowledge and capacities rather than deficits, or things that are lacking.

The approach recognises that children and families are resilient and are capable of growth, learning and change.

The intention of this approach is not to avoid or minimise problems, challenges or risks within the family, but to identify the assets or strengths that can be built upon and used to support the family to manage risks.

### Standards for a Strengths-Based Approach

#### Focus on strengths

The primary focus is not on problems or deficits. By helping to identify their strengths, desires, interests, aspirations, experience, knowledge and resiliency, a shared understanding of the child, young person or family's resources can develop (and what may need to be added) to address any problems or difficulties.

#### Client led goals

The service approach is to empower the child, young person or family to take the lead in setting their own goals and working towards reaching these goals, rather than adopting the problem or needs as perceived or identified by someone else.

#### Facilitating not fixing

When the child, young person or family are seen as experts in their own lives, the helping relationship becomes about mutuality, that is, partnering and facilitating rather than solving or fixing. A mutual, trusting relationship is a mechanism through which the child, young person or family can accept support to develop and grow.

#### Value difference and collaborate

When individual differences are valued, the need to collaborate to achieve change becomes easy to understand. In every environment there are individuals, groups, services and associations who have something to offer that others may find useful. In a facilitating role, we might encourage and enable links to these resources.

#### Hope and motivation

When strengths are acknowledged and supported, and relationships with family, community and culture strengthened, children, young people and families are more likely to feel hopeful and motivated to change.

#### Sustainable change

The purpose of a strengths-based approach is to achieve sustainable change, where children, young people and families are more resourceful and can meet future challenges. By building on strengths, this change is created through learning and experiential growth.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR CaFIS PROVIDERS

#### Your role

When working with a family remember that they are the experts and are driving the decision-making process. You are empowering them to identify the solutions that are right for them.

#### Focus

Be goal oriented and avoid making assumptions. Focus on understanding challenges in the context of each family's unique set of strengths, capabilities, resilience and resources.

### Key questions

Key questions help keep focus on the current situation and how to move forward. Some examples include:

- » “What is happening now?”
- » “What do you think is working and not working?”
- » “How can we build on existing strengths to move forward?”

### Language

Remember that language is important. Avoiding jargon and using the family’s language will support collaboration. Keep language positive wherever possible, and try to steer clear of words used in deficit approaches (like “What’s wrong?”, “What’s the problem?”, “What’s missing?”).

### Purpose

The purpose of your intervention should not be to reduce negative factors or mitigate risks. Your purpose is to help families identify and build on strengths and motivations and to achieve the outcomes they have chosen for themselves.

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#### Where to go for more information on this topic

##### SNAICC Resources:

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/02762.pdf>

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Growing-Up-Our-Way.pdf>

<https://innovativeresources.org> St Luke’s Innovative Resources has strengths-based, conversation-building resources.

McCashen, Wayne (2005) *The Strengths approach: a strength-based resource for sharing power and creating change*.