

Research in Brief

Strength Based Practices

Vol 4 of 4

Source Document: Strength-Based Practice: The ABC's of Working with Adolescents Who Don't Want to Work with You, Michael D. Clark, 1999

Key Words: strengths, solution-focus, juveniles, case plans, case management, behavior change

Summary/Conclusions

Most practitioners were trained in problem solving methods. This has led them to an over-emphasis on what is wrong, not working and negative. The result is often resistance in clients and discouraging results. In 1989 a "strengths perspective" was introduced. This model is a "mindset to approach clients with a greater concern for their strengths and competencies and to mutually discover how these personal resources can be applied to their concerns...combined with the techniques of the solution-focused therapy model." This approach consists of six principles labeled the ABC's: Accountability-Action, Believing-Brief, and Cooperation-Competency.

Limitations of Information

The focus of this article and the work of the author, Michael Clark, is limited to adolescents. Nonetheless, application to an adult population is possible and Mr. Clark is an experienced juvenile probation officer and clinical social worker. His work provides one perspective of strength-based case management. Other valuable perspectives exist and should be considered.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Cooperation-Competence

The third set of the six principles of a strength-based approach for working with clients is **Cooperation-Competence**.

Cooperation: "Cooperation is not a characteristic of the client. It is a condition that emanates from the interaction and exchange between the [probation officer and client.]"

√ Cooperation is not appropriate in all situations. There are times when control is necessary. Common sense should guide officers' decisions to foster cooperation or garner control.

√ Officers have a responsibility to foster cooperation.

√ Cooperation is improved by highlighting the clients' strengths (e.g. competencies, aspirations, and resources) and by discovering the clients' answers to the problem.

√ Rather than lecture or prescribe the answers to identified problems, facilitate discussion that will foster the client's ability to create answers.

√ Use motivational interviewing techniques (e.g. open-ended questions) and questions described in the "Strength-Based Practices: Accountability-Action" Research in Brief to assist the client in generating answers.

√ Assist the client in identifying strengths by working through the case

plan worksheet with individual probationers or a group of clients.

√ Assign portions of the worksheet as homework to be reviewed at the next visit.

Competence: Besides believing that clients have strengths officers must also believe that clients possess what they need to reach solutions.

√ Probation officers do not have to work so hard at selling solutions if they allow the client to have more input into them.

√ Genuinely ask strength-based questions such as "How did you avoid a fight the last time you were with Joe?" "What was going on when you were passing your classes?" "How did you do that?" "What accomplishments are you most proud of? Why?"

√ Validate the client's competence by:

1. viewing the client as healthy, capable, and able;

2. recognizing our dependence on their resources (what they bring to the table) for successful outcomes; and

3. making the client and family's participation central to all efforts to change.

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