

## “What’s Right With Me? The Virtues of Positive Psychology”

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Have you ever noticed that we often highlight our own negative qualities and minimize our positive traits? Sometimes as teachers we may focus on the shortcomings of our students, as parents we notice what our child didn't do, and as counselors we ask “what is wrong that brought you here?” We could have an awesome report card at school or a great performance evaluation at work, but we will focus on the one thing that wasn't perfect! Many believe that this is just “human nature”. One theory suggests that we are likely to attribute positive events to luck or chance (“ I guess I was just at the right place at the right time”) and alternately, take full blame for negative outcomes (“See, I told you I wasn't good at math”)!

It is important to find a balance when looking at ourselves and one another – we need to take responsibility for our own behavior, but also to be kind to ourselves (self compassion) and each other by recognizing other contributing factors.

Let's consider another way to look at things using components of Positive Psychology – a relatively new and robust field of Psychology that focuses on strengths as well as weaknesses, building on the best things in our lives not just repairing the worst, and the virtues that enable people to thrive and improve well-being. Using this lens to look at ourselves and others, we can broaden our perspective and not only see “what's wrong with me”, but also “what's RIGHT with me.” What are my (your child's, your student's, your client's) strengths? Perseverance? Kindness? Sense of humor? Bravery? Honesty? Curiosity? Gratitude? Fairness? It is important to recognize and identify strengths in ourselves and others (“strength spotting”) and capitalize on them. Actually, you can go to the VIA (Values in Action) website ([www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)) and take your character strength inventory for free and your 24 strengths will be ranked. There is an adolescent version as well and it is not unusual to have the entire family complete their inventories, make your predictions beforehand and compare results later! This may be helpful in shifting attention from a negative focus and the issues creating stress in our households. Challenge yourself and/or one another to find new ways to use your top five strengths and ways to shore up those that are ranked a little lower on the list.

Positive Psychology is a well researched field of study and practice. It is not simply the latest in the self help field. Part of the focus is on resiliency, grit, and using our strengths to not only manage a crisis or deal with our depression and anxiety, but to move beyond “just getting by” or “getting through it”. In fact, thriving is a major part of this philosophy and practice. It is important that we and our children are not protected from failure or making mistakes. Resiliency – how we handle difficulties – is critical to our development so we are better prepared for the normal ups and downs of life – school stress, social pressures, breakups,



college application and moving away, job difficulties, financial responsibilities, etc. Grit – our determination in overcoming obstacles – is a primary characteristic that we can develop and strengthen as we face the challenges of life.

It is important to recognize that a strength is not skill or a talent, but rather a trait that can be worked on and improved. It is equally important to avoid the “it’s just the way I am” thinking, which suggests that we have to accept that this is the way it is and will always be! We can improve and put forth effort to reinforce our top strengths as well as shoring up those that are lower on the list.

Check out Positive Psychology online, take the VIA, and challenge yourself to view yourself and others in a more positive fashion.

**Editor’s Note:** Four Winds Saratoga has worked over the past two years to implement Positive Psychology into our Child and Adolescent Inpatient treatment programs. For more information about our services, please visit our webpage or call our Clinical Evaluation Services at 1-800-959-1287.

## **To Learn More**

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### **Books to Read:**

“Choose The Life You Want” by Tal Ben-Shahar

“Mindset” by Carol Dweck

“Love 2.0” by Barbara Fredrickson

“The How of Happiness” by Sonja Lyubomirsky

“Character Strengths Matter” edited by Shannon Polly and Kathryn Britton

“You are Not Your Brain” by Jeffrey M Schwartz MD

“Flourish” by Martin Seligman

### **Explore Online:**

- Strengths at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)

- Online classes and more information on Positive Psychology at [www.wholebeinginstitute.com](http://www.wholebeinginstitute.com)

- International Positive Psychology Association at <http://www.ippanetwork.org>

