

Seeing the Strengths & Resources in Families

Your ability to identify strengths in families depends partially on which lens—the resource lens or the deficit lens—you use in your work with families. The lens you choose will also influence your work with others involved in the case. Using a strengths-based approach means acknowledging the resources that exist within a family (including extended family) and tapping into them. For instance, you may identify a relative who can provide a temporary or permanent home for a child, you may help a parent reconnect with a past support system, or you may identify healthy adults who in the past were important to a child or family. Using a resource lens creates more options for resolution, and it empowers and supports children and families.

Following are a few questions you can ask when using the resource lens to assess a family:

- How has this family solved problems in the past?
- What court-ordered activities have family members completed?
- How are family members coping with their present circumstances?

Parent-Child Relationship

These items focus on the parent's relationship with the child. To accurately assess the parent-child bond, it is important to know the attachment behaviors of the parent's culture. How does this culture display empathy?

What are appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues? For example, language is highly valued in some groups, and not in others. Eye contact between parent and child is expected by some but considered disrespectful by others.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 1. The parent shows empathy for the child.
 - ___ 2. The parent responds appropriately to the child's verbal and nonverbal signals.
 - ___ 3. The parent is able to put the child's needs ahead of his/her own.
 - ___ 4. When they are together, the child shows comfort in the parent.
 - ___ 5. The parent has raised the child for a significant period of time.
 - ___ 6. In the past, the parent has met the child's basic physical and emotional needs.
 - ___ 7. The parent accepts some responsibility for the problems that brought the child into care or to the attention of the authorities.
 - ___ 8. The parent uses positive, nonviolent discipline.
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Parental Support System

These items reflect the quality of the parent's relationships with his/her current support system. The ways in which support systems function vary depending on culture. Because of the value European American culture places on self-sufficiency and independence, parents are expected to make their own decisions, live independently, and use the family for emotional support. Other cultures, most notably Native American cultures, expect the total group, biologically related or not, to function collectively to resolve problems. Resolution of problems may lie in the hands of the elders in other ethnic groups.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 9. The parent has positive, significant relationships with other healthy adults (e.g., spouse, parents, friends, relatives).
 - ___ 10. The parent has a meaningful support system that can help him/her (e.g., church, job, counselor).
 - ___ 11. Extended family is nearby and capable of providing support.
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Past Support System

The next five items look at extended family and friendships that have been helpful in the past and can be tapped again. If the family system has demonstrated healthy coping abilities in the past consistent with their cultural norms, this may be a resource for the family in the present as well.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 12. Extended family history shows family members able to help appropriately when one member is not functioning well.
 - ___ 13. Relatives came forward to offer help when the child needed placement.
 - ___ 14. Relatives have followed through on commitments in the past.
 - ___ 15. There are significant other adults, not blood relatives, who have helped in the past.
 - ___ 16. Significant other adults (who are not blood relatives) have followed through on commitments in the past.
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Family History

These items look at the parent's history and cultural heritage. To answer the first item in this section, it is important to know to what extent the family has identified with and participated in its ethnic community.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 17. The family's ethnic, cultural, or religious heritage includes an emphasis on mutual caretaking and shared parenting in times of crisis.
 - ___ 18. The parent's childhood history shows consistency of parental caretaker.
 - ___ 19. The parent's history shows evidence of his/her childhood needs being met adequately.
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Parent's Self-Care

The items in this category highlight the parent's ability to function in an adult mode, according to the expectations of his/her culture. Values regarding health, hygiene, housing, education, and employment differ from culture to culture, so knowledge about the parent's culture is vital to identifying strengths.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 20. The parent's general health is good.
 - ___ 21. The parent uses medical care for self appropriately.
 - ___ 22. The parent's hygiene and grooming are consistently adequate.
 - ___ 23. The parent has a history of stability in housing.
 - ___ 24. The parent has a solid employment history.
 - ___ 25. The parent has graduated from high school or possesses a GED.
 - ___ 26. The parent has skills that contribute to employability.
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Child's Development

Finally, these last five items focus on the functioning of the child. Again, appropriate behavior and social skills vary between cultures, so cultural knowledge is necessary.

Yes No Unknown

- ___ 27. The child shows age-appropriate cognitive abilities.
- ___ 28. The child demonstrates an age-appropriate attention span.
- ___ 29. The child shows evidence of conscience development.
- ___ 30. The child has appropriate social skills.
- ___ 31. Major behavioral problems are absent.

Adapted from *Concurrent Planning: From Permanency Planning to Permanency Action*, Linda Katz, Norma Spoonemore, and Chris Robinson, Seattle: Lutheran Social Services of Washington and Idaho, 1994.

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