

Personal Strengths and Virtues

“You already have what you need, and together we will find it.”

Miller & Rollnick, 2013

Embedded with the spirit of Motivational Interviewing is the belief that people already possess a wellspring of hopes, knowledge, wisdom, strengths, virtues, and abilities that reside within them. It is the task of the health coach to help clients discover and tap into these intrinsic qualities—in other words, to shine a light on each person’s “healthy self” that seeks to live a life of health, well-being, connection, and meaning. Below are examples of common characteristics that people possess in varying degrees.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE: Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge

- Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things.
- Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; exploring and discovering.
- Open-mindedness [judgment, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; weighing all evidence fairly.
- Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally.
- Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.

COURAGE: Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, both external and internal

- Bravery [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular.
- Persistence [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles.
- Integrity [authenticity, honesty]: Presenting oneself in a genuine way; taking responsibility for one’s feeling and actions.
- Vitality [zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated.

HUMANITY: Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others

- Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated.

- Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others.
- Social intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself.

JUSTICE: Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

- Citizenship [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group.
- Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others.
- Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group.

TEMPERANCE: Strengths that protect against excess

- Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.
- Humility / Modesty: Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.
- Prudence: Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.
- Self-regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions.

TRANSCENDENCE: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life.
- Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful of the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.
- Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it.
- Humor [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side.
- Spirituality [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose, the meaning of life, and the meaning of the universe.

<http://www.meaningandhappiness.com/psychology-research/list-of-personal-strengths.html>