

research
in practice

A brief guide to...
*strengths-based
practice*

Dartington

What is...*strengths-based practice*?

Strengths-based practice builds on the positive qualities in people's lives. It is a way of working that focuses on the things that are important to you, that *you* are good at and the things in your life that are going well. This guide is to help the people working with you explain this approach, what it might look and feel like, and how it can help you get the support you want and need.

Things may feel difficult for you at times, you may have a range of different needs and lots of people working with you. Strengths-based practice can be used with people of any age or background, within any situation and by all people working to support you. This can help families, groups, individuals and communities understand and communicate, so that you are offered support in the best way possible.

There are many definitions of strengths-based practice, but all recognise that everyone and every situation is different and unique. It is a way of working that thinks about you as a whole person and that involves getting to know you and the area where you live.

Most people can make decisions on their own but other people might need help to make important decisions, for example if a person has advanced dementia. When a person is unable to make important decisions for themselves a strengths-based approach is used to help understand what they would like to happen and *how*, as well as the best people to be involved.

How does...*strengths-based practice* work?



The Care Act 2014 guides what people working in adult social care do. The Act says that people working in adult social care must promote the wellbeing of all people in communities. Their main aim is to help you achieve the things that matter to you, by finding out about you and taking your views, wishes, feelings and beliefs into account. This means recognising that people are the experts in their own lives.

Strengths-based practice involves thinking about what you and your community can do for yourselves, with the right support from the right people working alongside you. This moves away from just thinking about problems and things you can't do, though these are important too.

You will be asked questions to help you to think about:

- > what you want to achieve
- > what is important to you
- > what things have worked for you in the past
- > what things are working now.

Professionals will be interested in your life and will spend time getting to know you, your home, your community, and any other organisations that are working with you.

There may be times when you would like to do something new or try something different. People in your personal or professional support network might want to talk to you about how to do this safely. If this happens you, and the people close to you, will be asked about how you can be best supported to reduce any risks.

How do...*I know if things are working well?*

You will:

- > be asked questions that make you feel involved and be able to talk about what is important to you
- > feel like you are supported to make choices that work for you, including trying different things and being able to change plans
- > be as involved as you want to be in any conversations that are had about planning your support
- > know who you are working with, who is supporting you, who to contact and how to contact them
- > be asked who else you would like to be involved in supporting you, and those people will be asked for their views if you want this to happen.
- > be supported to contribute to writing your records and plans, if you would like to do this.



Practical advice

Think about what is most important to you in your life, what is good and what works at the moment. Then think about what might help to make things better.

Ask questions if you don't understand things. Ask for information to be presented in different ways if that would help.

Think about who you would like to support you to make decisions about your care and support. How would you like them to be involved? If you can't think of anyone, ask for an advocate. Advocates are independent from the local authority and the NHS. They are trained to help you understand your rights and support you to express your views, wishes and feelings. They can also support you to provide feedback on services you receive, and help ensure your voice is heard.

Take your time to make decisions and speak to as many people as you need to in order to help you make them. Stay focused on the things that matter to you.

Ask for copies of the records kept by professionals about your support, if you would like to see them.

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This guide has been produced by Research in Practice. We are a charity that uses evidence from research and people's experience to help understand social care and to improve how it works.

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