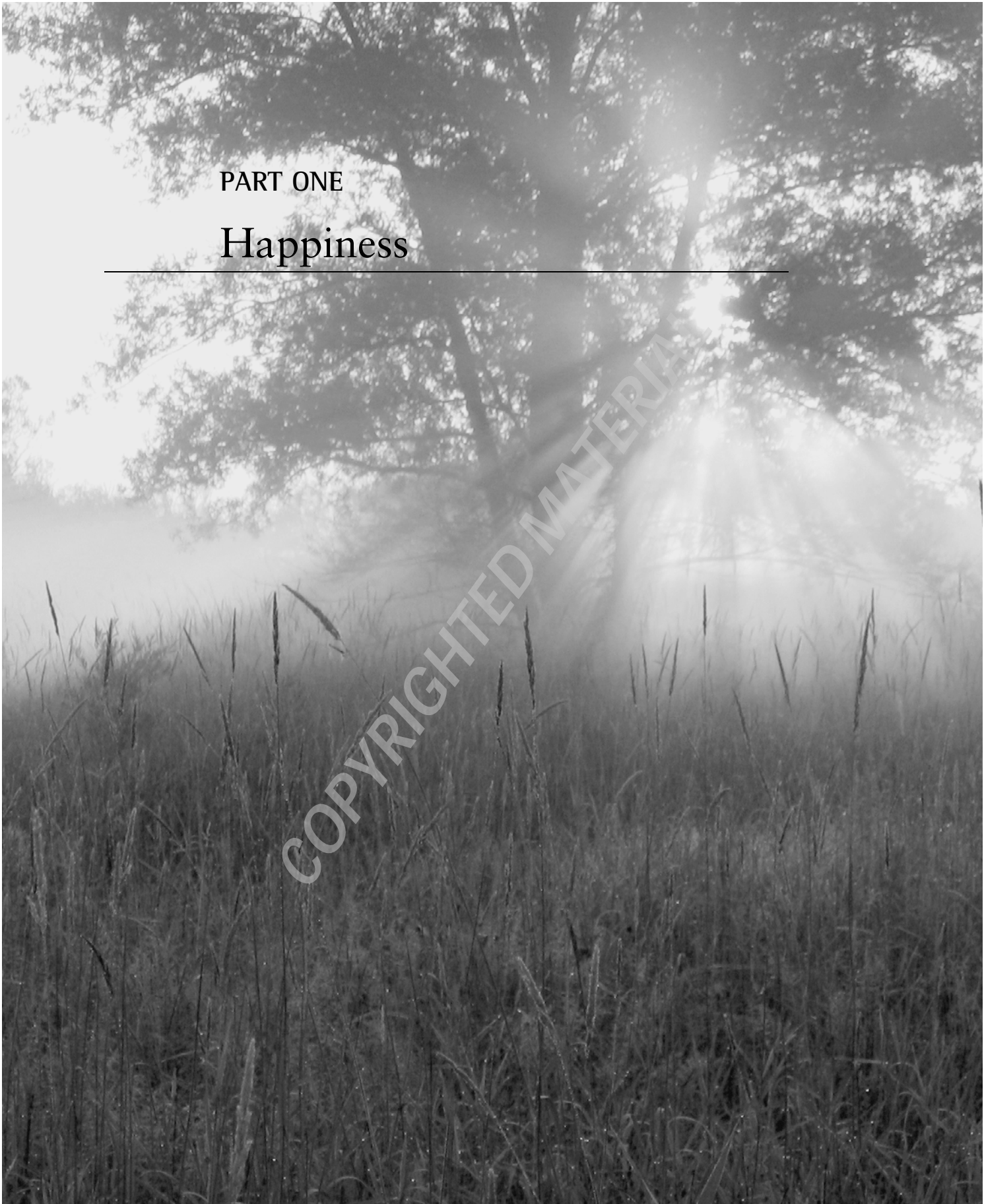


PART ONE

Happiness

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CHAPTER 1

Strengthspotting

Finding and Developing Client Resources in the Management of Intense Anger

P. Alex Linley and George W. Burns

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

P. Alex Linley is the founding director of the United Kingdom-based Centre of Applied Positive Psychology (www.cappeu.com), focused on the applications of strengths in organizations and schools as well as to individual and community development projects in the United Kingdom and Kolkata, India, through the charity The Strengths Project, of which Alex is a founding trustee. Alex holds the position of visiting professor in psychology at the University of Leicester and is an international speaker on strengths and positive psychology, having delivered keynote presentations throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, the Caribbean, the United States, and India. He has written, cowritten, and/or edited more than ninety research papers and book chapters and five books, including *Positive Psychology in Practice* (Wiley, 2004) and *Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others*

(CAPP Press, 2008). His time outside work is spent with his wife and four children, listening to The Cure, and supporting the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

George W. Burns is an Australian clinical psychologist whose innovative work as a practitioner, teacher, and writer is recognized nationally and internationally. The author of numerous articles and book chapters, he has authored or edited seven books that have been widely translated, including *Nature-Guided Therapy*, *101 Healing Stories*, and *Healing with Stories*. He is director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of Western Australia and the Hypnotherapy Centre of Western Australia, is an adjunct senior lecturer at Edith Cowan University, and has a busy private practice with a brief, solution-focused, positive psychology orientation. He has served on the Practitioners Advisory Board of the
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first and second Australian Positive Psychology and Well-Being Conferences and was a presenter at the First World Congress on Positive Psychology. As a keen traveler, George enjoys combining his

passions for nature, cultural tales, and psychotherapy into workshop/study tours for colleagues that venture into remote areas, such as the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Is psychotherapy a place where clients would consider going to talk about their strengths? Is psychotherapy a place where therapists would routinely inquire about a client's strengths as a part of their initial assessment and ongoing therapy? It is unlikely this is what Emma was expecting when she presented to therapy with a slight weight problem, saying "I eat when I am bored, frustrated, anxious and angry—for psychological reasons. It makes me happy." However, it was not until the second session that she revealed the real, embarrassing, and distressing reason for attending.

What she believed made her happy was quite specific: chocolate. With almost any emotional swing she would gorge on a family-size block of chocolate, a full package or two of chocolate cookies, or a container of chocolate milk. Trying to stop any long-established behavior can be difficult, especially if it is an approach behavior, meets a psychological need, and offers such strong rewards as the chocolate was doing for Emma. It provided instant pleasure when she was in distress, and she had empowered it with the ability to "make" her happy. To direct therapy toward stopping something that served as an effective, though maladaptive, coping strategy with such powerful rewards was obviously going to be an uphill battle.

With the exception of one or two therapeutic approaches, such as Ericksonian or solution-focused therapy, or with the occasional therapist, few therapies or therapists have oriented themselves toward spotting, enabling, and developing client strengths. Therapists and therapeutic models usually are very well versed in, and have good clinical strengths in, problem-spotting and weakness-spotting.

This being so, what might psychotherapists need to know about strengths, how might they go about spotting strengths in the therapeutic session, and what can they do with those strengths once they have been spotted? And, perhaps most important of all, is there any evidence that it is worthwhile for them to do this with clients like Emma in the first place?

In this chapter, we first offer some evidence to show why it is worthwhile spotting, enabling, and developing strengths in the context of therapy. Then we explore several questions relevant to this: How do you spot strengths in a client? How do you help a client spot strengths? How do you enable and develop strengths? Most of the discussion in answer to these questions is provided by Alex (PAL) while a therapeutic example (the evolving case of Emma) is presented by George (GWB).

When talking of strengths, we are using this definition: "a strength is a preexisting capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance" (Linley, 2008, p. 9). Simply put, strengths are natural propensities that each of us have—so natural, we argue, that they are evolved adaptations. When we are using our strengths, we are feeling in touch with our "true selves," are doing the things that are right for us to do, and

from them we derive a sense of energy as a result. When these factors coincide, as they do in strengths use, optimal functioning is enabled. Given that psychotherapy often is focused on undoing dysfunction and enabling more optimal functioning, helping clients to identify and use their strengths more would seem to be indicated.

WHY IS STRENGTHSPOTTING WORTHWHILE?

In a study with 214 university students, Reena Govindji and I (PAL) were interested in the question of whether using strengths was associated with greater levels of well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. We found that it was: People who used their strengths more reported higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and vitality (Govindj & Linley, 2007). Further, they reported higher levels of organismic valuing, the Rogerian concept of being in touch with one's inner nature and organismic valuing process (Joseph & Linley, 2006).

When we statistically controlled for self-esteem and self-efficacy, the use of strengths was still a significant predictor of psychological well-being and subjective well-being, indicating that the effect of using one's strengths on well-being went over and above existing levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. This is good news for psychotherapists, since it suggests that whatever a client's current level of self-esteem and self-efficacy, using strengths is likely to lead to increased levels of well-being.

Further, in a study of positive psychotherapy with a clinically depressed population, Seligman, Rashid, and Parks (2007) found that identifying one's signature strengths and finding ways to use them more led to clinically significant and sustained decreases in depression. And in my own (as yet unpublished) research, I (PAL) have been able to demonstrate that people achieve their goals more effectively when they are using their strengths. While, of course, it is still in the early days, the emerging evidence suggests that strengths may well have a place to take in the therapy room.

Given this evidence, mobilizing Emma's strengths toward more desirable behaviors for managing her emotions and eating patterns seemed an appropriate therapeutic direction. To this end, I (GWB) first needed to spot what strengths she had. In the process, I learned that after graduating college, she committed herself to developing an academic career before having children. She had been married for 12 years and was in her late 30s when she had her first child. She was now a full-time mother of a 4-year-old-daughter, Samantha, and 1-year-old son, Jason.

HOW DO YOU SPOT STRENGTHS IN A CLIENT?

Listen for Strengths

Hearing the passion and energy that strengthspotting ignites in people, I (PAL) began to wonder what strengths "sound like." Are there identifiable differences that we can listen for when people are talking about strengths, compared to other topics or other types of conversation? To explore this, I developed an exercise for a class that I used to teach by telephone to members from half a dozen countries around the world. First, I asked someone to speak for five minutes about a weakness or about something with which they were struggling. Then I asked them to spend the same time talking about a strength or about when

they are at their best. As the exercise was by telephone, there were no additional physical cues, such as body language or facial expressions (Linley, 2008).

Other listeners in the telephone class were asked to describe their observations of what characterized the answers. In sum, they noticed that when people are talking about weaknesses, they are more negative, hesitant, and disengaged. Their energy levels drop and they sound more withdrawn. If we have access to body language, we might also notice they are more closed and defensive, and their attentional focus is narrowed.

When asked what she was good at, Emma replied in the negative. “Not much. All I seem to do is change poeey diapers and think about what to feed the kids next.” Her voice was flat and monotonal, her arms folded across her chest, her body hunched forward.

When people are talking about strengths, however, they are more positive, energetic, and engaged. They sound happier, more confident, and more relaxed. There is a passion in their tone, their conversation is free flowing, and they explain things graphically. If we were to observe body language—as one can in therapy—it is likely to be open and receptive.

When discussing singing, one of Emma’s strengths, there was a marked difference. Her voice was animated, her energy levels increased, she sat more upright and made eye contact—all signs of greater engagement and confidence.

Listening for, and observing, these shifts in your clients’ conversation and body language is a good indicator of when they are revealing a strength. However, this leads us to an important caveat. While there are certainly remarkable consistencies across these different groups and diverse populations, there can also be important individual differences. Not everyone responds in the same way, and it is very important to keep this in mind. If we do not, we run the risk of misinterpreting the responses of people who are simply different. Psychological research is almost always nomothetic in that it seeks to create generalized laws that apply across the majority of people. These laws, in turn, are generally applied in idiographic ways that are specific to a given individual—such as in a therapy session. As therapists we need to (a) be aware of the general trends and (b) be conscious that the person sitting with us in any one session may respond quite individually.

Inquire about Self-Perceived Strengths

A simple way to find out about a person’s strengths is to ask—just as you would discover a person’s history by asking standard questions about family of origin, education, relationships, and the like. All that is different with strengthspotting is that the nature and orientation of the questions shifts the therapeutic dialogue to a greater focus on strengths. Here are some of the questions that we have used to elicit strengths with people in challenging life circumstances:

- What are you good at?
- What do you enjoy doing?
- Tell me about the best experience you have had.
- What do you admire about other people? Do you see any of that in yourself?
- When do you think you have been at your best? What enabled that to happen?
- What are your aspirations for the future? What can you do to make them happen?

When Emma responded to the first question by saying she was not good at much (in the present tense), I (GWB) shifted direction to inquire about what she had been good at in the past.

“I think I was good at supervising research,” she answered. “I loved to challenge students, to ask questions, to ensure that their research design was sound. I think I was also good at lecturing. My courses were commonly rated highly by students, and I achieved several teaching awards.”

“Congratulations,” I validated, and leaned over to shake her hand as an action of affirmation for her abilities. With each strength she described, we spent some time discussing and affirming it before moving onto the next question.

“What would you say you enjoy doing most?” I continued.

“Research and supervision have to be high on the list. I enjoy the intellectual challenge. But I think my greatest enjoyment came from singing. I belonged to the university choir, and a quartet from the choir formed a small group. We used to sing for weddings, conference dinners, and those sorts of things.”

“When do you think you have been at your best?”

“Definitely when I was singing. I used to get a bit nervous before a performance, but once I started to sing it was like every other worry and thought just floated away.”

“That sounds like an important skill to have. How did you enable that to happen?” I asked.

“The four of us in the quartet were great friends, we had a lot of fun rehearsing and practicing and, I guess, I was so focused into what we were doing.”

“And what are your aspirations for the future?”

“I am planning to go back to teaching next year perhaps part time, and it would be nice to start singing again. But I don’t know if I’m going to have time now that I am a mom.”

Watch for Telltale Signs of a Strength

As you listen for and inquire about strengths, it is helpful to watch for the telltale signs of a strength, such as:

- A real sense of energy and engagement when using the strength
- Losing awareness of time because the client is so engrossed and engaged in the activity
- Very rapidly learning new information, activities, or approaches that are associated with the strength
- A repeated pattern of successful performance when using the strength
- Exemplary levels of performance when using the strength, especially performance that evokes the respect and admiration of others
- Always seeming to get the tasks done that require using the strength
- Prioritizing tasks that require using the strength over tasks that do not
- Feeling a yearning to use the strength while also feeling drained if you have not had the opportunity to use it for a time
- Being irrevocably drawn to do things that play to the strength—even when you feel tired, stressed, or disengaged (Linley, 2008, pp. 74–75).

In conversation, not only did Emma reveal a number of strengths, but she affirmed them through the telltale signs. There had been a shift in the tone of her voice and the degree of animation that she showed. It was possible to hear the difference between when she was talking about changing kids’ diapers and when she was talking about singing in her quartet. The signs were there in the sense of energy and engagement that was communicated about

using her strength of singing. She spoke of being engrossed and engaged in her activities of supervision, teaching, and singing.

These telltale signs are not necessarily always found together, at least at any given moment in time. Over time, however, it is likely that patterns will emerge. Thus, throughout the course of a series of psychotherapy sessions with a client, as therapists we have ample opportunities to become effective strengthspotters.

In each of these steps—listening for strengths, inquiring about self-perceived strengths, and watching for telltale signs of a strength—the therapist’s ear is attuned for any response that offers a glimpse into another, more positive side of their clients than that which brought them into therapy in the first place. While we know that negative mood primes negative memories, shifting our focus onto strengths and success helps engender more positive emotions that, in their own turn, prime more positive memories and more positive aspirations for the future.

A SURPRISING REVELATION

It was at the second consultation that Emma revealed the embarrassing and more pressing problem. She had unsuccessfully tried to keep it secret from her husband and had not told anyone else. It is hard to know, of all the things that happen in a therapeutic session, just which factors may influence a person to reveal and talk about a difficult subject or not. We would like to think that taking a positive, strengthspotting approach in the initial consultation gave Emma both the confidence and the hope to be able to approach the topic. Tearfully, she revealed that there were times when she got angry with her daughter, Samantha, her behavior contradicted all her principles and conflicted with the image that she had of herself as a mother. So difficult was this subject to discuss in detail that she had put it into writing and passed me the handwritten letter.

“Life fucking sucks,” I read. “Anger is everywhere. The rage has got to go. I hate this, I am out of control and our kids are copping it. I don’t have the energy or feel that I care (but I do very much). I hate this. Samantha is being yelled at, screamed at, pushed, shoved, poked. Gosh, no wonder she doesn’t know how to handle herself when she gets frustrated. What is going to become of our family? It’s not feeling very good at the moment. I have to change or I am going to have to leave for the sake of the children. Samantha needs her space and it’s only going to get worse as she gets older. I can’t keep it all together, our poor darling Samantha. Please let this stop!!”

A prime concern here in terms of one’s professional and ethical duty of care is, without question, the protection of the child. While Emma’s letter referred to pushing and shoving Samantha around, I was assured by the conviction of her comments to my inquiries that she had never hit or struck her, and vowed she never would. Herein was perhaps an indication of another of Emma’s strengths: She could choose how far she went in her anger and when she stopped. She had the strengths of choice and control at a particular given point, despite the level of her rage. She was not concerned about physically harming Samantha but rather about psychologically harming her. Two key questions in regard to client care and professional responsibility are to ask yourself: Does this issue fall within my field of professional competence? and, Can I provide the best source of assistance to this client? If there had been any question of physical abuse, my response to those questions then, or at any stage during therapy, would have been to refer her immediately to an agency that could ensure the protection of the child.

HOW DO YOU HELP A CLIENT SPOT STRENGTHS?

Strengthspotting can be a highly engaging activity for therapists and also for clients. However, while it is one thing for therapists to be able to spot strengths in their clients and communicate their observations to them, it may be another thing altogether for clients who have a long history of self-effacement or self-denigration to spot, acknowledge, and employ their own strengths. Yet therapy is surely at its most effective when it can teach clients the skills to discover, use, and enjoy their own strengths without being dependent on a therapist or others to point them out. This being the case, how do we go about helping a client like Emma to spot her own strengths? How do we teach our clients the ongoing skills to live an optimally functioning life? Let us offer two areas of possibility.

Teach Your Clients to Look for Strengths in Others

Teaching clients to look for strengths in others can hold four advantages.

1. It helps them to look for, be aware of, and acknowledge strengths in general.
2. This awareness of the positives and strengths around them is likely to enhance their own sense of well-being.
3. By looking for strengths in others, rather than seeing the negatives, they are likely to form the basis for more positive relationships with people such as spouses, partners, friends, children, and work colleagues.
4. Getting into the enjoyable habit of spotting strengths in others means they are more likely to spot strengths in themselves.

How do you get clients to look for strengths? One way is by what we call day-to-day strengthspotting. Just as you have learned to do as a therapist, ask your client to (a) listen for strengths; (b) inquire about strengths; and/or (c) watch for telltale signs of a strength as they share a meal with a spouse, discuss a project with a colleague, listen to their child recounting the events of a day at school, stand in line at a supermarket checkout, or hear an athlete being interviewed on television. It is hoped that clients will discover that strengths can come to the fore at any time, from anyone—possibly even from unlikely people in unlikely places.

What does it take to be a strengthspotter? In essence, spotting strengths in whatever we are doing, wherever we are, and whoever we're with requires just a simple orientation of mind—a mind prepared to look out for and acknowledge a strength when it has been “spotted.” To help this orientation, you could ask clients to carry a notebook with them between now and the next session, daily noting the strengths they spot in other people and what led them to define it as a strength.

Emma was asked to spot and note the strengths she saw in Samantha—just three things per day to start with. At first the request took her by surprise, as she had been so focused on the negative, problematic aspects of her daughter's behavior. Often what we focus on is what we see. As Emma started to shift her attention, she began to see a different child. She began to speak of her daughter's independence and determination as positive qualities. She became more aware of Samantha's playfulness, creative engagement, and laughter. Samantha, as any child is likely to do, responded to the positive attention with more positive behaviors, and the mother-daughter relationship quickly began to improve.

Teach Your Client to Look for Strengths in Him- or Herself

Having you, the therapist, as a model of strengthspotting in therapy is one way your clients can learn to replicate this skill. Another that we use is the Individual Strengths Assessment (ISA) (Linley, 2008). The questions that make up the ISA are all designed to encourage people to talk about their great experiences, their enjoyment, their best successes, who they are at their core, and when they are at their best—to look for strengths within themselves. They cover each of the emotional, thinking, and behavioral aspects of people, and range over the past, present, and future, always looking for consistent themes that would indicate the presence of a strength.

Rather than being an inventory or psychometric scale, the ISA is more of a guided conversation and does not work according to a script. It is, unfortunately, not a foolproof process, whereby anyone can read the questions from the list and determine what someone's core strengths are. In contrast, it is a subtle but powerful combination of the ISA questions and the expertise of the strengthspotting therapist. The questions orient people into the right territory to be thinking about their strengths. The therapist's objectives are, first, to draw strengths out through the guided conversation and, second, to feed them back to the client in such a way that the client understands, values, and engages with the strengths.

Here are some sample ISA questions. You may wish to consider your own answers as you read through them and to see what strengths your responses may lead you to identify in yourself. You might also want to try them out with some of your current clients, seeing what sort of responses you receive and what you can glean about that person from how they respond. This is a good way to see if this approach to therapy fits for both you and your clients.

- What sort of everyday things do you enjoy doing?
- What makes for a really good day for you? Tell me about the best day that you can remember having.
- What would you describe as your most significant accomplishment?
- When you are at your best, what are you doing?
- What gives you the greatest sense of being authentic and who you really are?
- What do you think are the most energizing things that you do?
- Where do you gain the most energy from? What sorts of activities?
- What are you doing when you feel at your most invigorated?
- Tell me about a time when you think that “the real me” is most coming through.
- Do you have a vision for the future? What is it about?
- What are you most looking forward to in the future?
- Thinking about the next week. What will you be doing when you are at your best?

All of these questions are designed to open up the dialogue around strengths, what energizes and invigorates people, what gives them a sense of authenticity, and what enables them to be at their best. Strengthspotting therapists are always at liberty to tailor the questions to fit within the context and flow of the conversation as well as the needs and expectations of the client. The questions should be used as a helpful framework and prompt rather than as an exercise that constrains and gets in the way of what would otherwise be a nicely flowing conversation.

Wanting to tailor questions specifically to her maternal strengths, I asked Emma, “When do you feel you are best as a mother? When are the times that you feel really good in your mothering role, the times that you feel that the real you is shining through?”

“Not too often at the moment,” she answered.

“I wasn’t asking how often they occurred,” I responded, “but rather what those times and feelings are like when you do have them.”

“I guess they are the loving kind,” she said. “The times when the day hasn’t gone too bad, and I lie beside her to read her a story and feel her falling asleep in my arms.”

“Are there other such times when you feel really good about your role as a mom?” I inquired.

“The playful times. The times when we are just fooling around and she does those funny things that have me laughing out loud.”

To facilitate client skills of personal strengthspotting, it is very often helpful to conclude by asking what, on the basis of the conversation, they think their strengths are. This can also be a good opportunity to inquire about what formal or informal feedback they have had about their strengths from other people and whether that feedback is consistent with what they have started to identify through the ISA conversation. They may also keep that notebook with them to record further personal strengths as they spot them.

When we start to explore strengths, we often find that clients ask, “What are my top strengths?” Paradoxically, answering this question without appreciating the wider context and implications for it can be unhelpful. There is no fixed number and no set hierarchy of strengths. It is an open question as to how many strengths a given individual has or needs, and also an open question as to how many of those strengths are “top strengths.” In addition, strengths may shift, some moving into the foreground and others receding into the background, as the context and need changes.

HOW DO YOU ENABLE AND DEVELOP STRENGTHS?

Questions we have found that almost inevitably come up at the end of an ISA conversation include, “What next? I have spotted my strengths. Where do we go from here?” If the client doesn’t ask them, however, it is important for the therapist to do so. Knowing one’s strengths may be interesting; putting them to use is what creates change. These questions are about helping clients to find or create situations where they can deploy their strengths more or explore ways in which they can have conversations with others (spouse and supervisor being classic examples) about what they would like to do to maximize their strengths more in the future.

Emma had spotted many strengths in herself as a person, an academic, a singer, and a mother. How could she now enable and develop those strengths for the ongoing benefits of herself, her daughter, and their relationship? She had successfully defined *what* her strengths were; the task now became *how* to put them into practice or facilitate them more frequently, and *when* she could do so.

This enabling process revolved around questions such as: How can you enable and develop these loving and playful strengths in your role as a mother? How can you create more of the intellectual challenge you are good at and miss? How can you recapture that mindful engagement you have when singing?

When she said she was most looking forward to getting back to work and singing, I asked, “Then *how* and *when* do you see you might start to resume those things?”

“I would feel guilty about putting the kids into child care. I would feel that I failed as a mom,” she said.

“But aren’t you feeling guilty and a failure at the moment?” I asked, confronting her gently. “What would be the difference?”

Within a couple of weeks, she had enrolled Samantha and Jason in a day care facility for two half days a week, arranged to resume some part-time PhD supervision, and rejoined the quartet’s evening rehearsals while her husband looked after the children. As she started to utilize her strengths again, she began to feel better and happier in herself. This, in turn, seemed to have her relating with the children in a happier and more relaxed manner. Samantha blossomed in the day care facility, especially through the social interactions with other children of her age. And Emma seemed to be progressing so well after five sessions that we did not arrange any further consultations, leaving the option open for her to contact me if she felt the need in the future.

Almost always—and almost inevitably—the conclusion of a strengthspotting session is characterized by clients’ realization of a deeper insight and understanding of themselves, particularly when they are at their best, and what they can do to achieve that best more often. There is also a marked shift in realization toward the practical steps that can be taken to reshape and refine their life and work on this basis.

WHAT WAS THE FOLLOW-UP?

About three months later, Emma called requesting an urgent appointment. Fortunately, I was able to offer her a cancellation. Again she handed me a handwritten letter. It read: “Bad, bad blow-up with Samantha yesterday. Had just come home from shopping. She wasn’t well with a throat infection and started screaming. I swore and went ballistic for no reason at all. I didn’t touch her; I was just very violent in my body language and voice. I got her into her room behind closed doors as quickly as I could to remove myself from her. I have been doing well, so well, that I think I blew it all in one go. I plugged in my MP3 player and started singing along, then went out and hung out the washing while I was singing. Later I came back and calmly apologized to Samantha. I was so deeply sorry for scolding her. It had been a long while since I had done this.”

While it was troubling that Emma had “gone ballistic,” it was good news that it had not happened for a long time. It was also good to note that she was (a) aware of her own behavior, (b) able to take action about it by separating herself from the situation, and (c) could tap in to her strength of singing. This enabled her to relax, review her reaction from a more distant perspective, and deal with the situation more appropriately. I sought to reassure her about the strengths that she had exercised in this situation and reinforced the fact that once we are capable of doing something, we have clearly demonstrated to ourselves that we are capable of doing it again. If she had been able to go for several months without exploding into her former anger, it was possible to do it again. If anger did arise, she knew that she was capable of picking up on the triggers and taking action to spot and utilize her strengths. Indeed, her management of it was proof of even more strength.

And what of the chocolate consumption? After the first session, Emma made no mention of it again, and nor did I. My guess was she had found other, more adaptive ways to experience happiness.

Strengthspotting is a tremendously powerful way of opening up a conversation about strengths and enabling people to talk in ways that allow the expert therapist to identify and draw out the core strengths people are describing through their responses. Through spotting, enabling, and developing clients' strengths, psychotherapists have another powerful approach in their repertoire to help them help their clients improve functioning and achieve life goals. We hope that one of the many contributions of positive psychology to psychotherapy will be the reenvisioning of psychotherapy from a process of problem-spotting to one of strengthspotting. In time, psychotherapy really may become a place where people like Emma go to talk about their strengths and empower themselves to great achievements.

Putting It into Practice

1. Spot the strengths in your clients.
 - a. Listen for the differences when clients are talking about strengths compared to other topics, like when Emma was discussing her singing as compared to changing diapers. How can you use that observation to alert you to the presence of a strength?
 - b. Inquire about self-perceived strengths, remembering that the type of questions you ask will determine the type of answers you get and, in turn, the things that your clients discover about themselves. Ask what people are good at, when are they at their best, when are they functioning most optimally.
 - c. Watch for the telltale signs in a person's engagement, energy, loss of time, heightened learning, and so on. Discussing supervision and singing produced a new level of animation and body language for Emma. What can you look for in your clients?
2. Help your clients spot their own strengths.
 - a. Teaching your clients to spot strengths in others has a number of payoffs for them. For Emma, it opened up a fresh perception of, and relationship with, her daughter. Coach your clients to do this, perhaps even carrying around a strengths notebook.
 - b. Teaching clients to spot strengths in themselves helps them discover the sounds and signs of their own strengths and to keep building on their discoveries. Emma unveiled a number of strengths she had let slide by the way in her commitment to full-time mothering and even some she had not realized in her outbursts of anger. Let yourself be curious and open to the things your clients may discover.
3. Use the Individual Strengths Assessment.

The ISA is a useful tool to engage in strengthspotting conversations with your clients. We encourage you to experiment with it. Try it out. See how it fits for you and your clients. Observe the responses and how you might use them in moving toward the therapeutic goals.

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4. Enable and develop the spotted strengths.

While strengthspotting may hold intrinsic value for clients and help mobilize them, the art of good therapy is about enabling and developing those strengths toward the attainment of the goal. Ask your clients: Now that you have discovered what your strengths are, how can you use them beneficially? and When can you begin to do so? This, in part, is about getting commitment to action.

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