

The following guidance is based on the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program.

When a child or youth is diagnosed with any illness or health condition, it is important for the parent and youth to focus on understanding the plan for treatment. There are often questions that cannot be answered right away and depend on what happens in the next few weeks or months. There are some things, however, that are not in question—your child's and family's strengths. It's important to remember, as Nan Henderson says, "What's right with you is more powerful than what's wrong with you." Use the following ideas, which were taken from many sources, to help you identify these strengths.

You are the expert on your child and your family. Please consider these only as suggestions.

All children have strengths, and all children can better develop their strengths. Researchers suggest looking for the following qualities in your child:¹

Generosity: Does your child show affection and caring to you and others? Does your child have an opportunity to help others at home, at school, or in the community? Does he express empathy for others?

Independence: Is your child learning to do things on her own? Does she make decisions independently, problem solve, or adapt to new situations?

Mastery: Does your child know that he is good at certain tasks like reading, caring for a pet, or sports? Are there healthy activities in which he participates? Does he enjoy these activities? Has he made progress in choosing healthy behaviors, eg, conflict resolution, controlling anger, acting in a manner consistent with family rules, managing stress in constructive ways?

Belonging: Is your child making connections with friends and family?

Your love and support, along with your child's strengths, are what will help your child manage her illness and become a successful adult. There are simple things you can do to support your child's development of strengths.²

Offer Guidance: Actively guide your child toward the values and skills you want for him.

- Regularly discuss what you expect from him.
- Suggest ways he can pursue his interests and enhance his strengths.
- Discuss your values, what you do and do not believe.
- Model positive behavior. Let your kids see you learning, working, contributing to your community, and trying new things.
- Be supportive when things go wrong.
- Help your child manage and deal with stress and negative emotions such as frustration, anger, sadness, or worry.
- Help your child make healthy choices.
- Create a supportive learning environment.

Get Involved: Your child needs to know that what she thinks and does matters to someone.

- Talk together often.
- Attend and volunteer at school and extracurricular events.
- Help with homework.
- As appropriate, make plans together for your child's future independence (eg, money management, housekeeping skills, education, career).
- Meet your child's friends and their parents.

Acknowledge and Reward: The Search Institute has identified ways to show children that you appreciate them and enjoy being around them.³

- Ask their opinion.
- Include them in conversations.
- Encourage them to share their talents with others.
- Listen to their stories.
- Go places together.
- Share their excitement.
- Tell them how proud of them you are. Follow them when they lead.
- Do what they like to do.
- Praise them often.
- Cheer their accomplishments.
- Believe what they say.
- Help them take a stand, and stand with them.
- Join in their adventures.
- Introduce them to good people.

When things go wrong, remember...you have a great kid! No child is perfect. When conflicts arise, make a list of your child's strengths to help you calm down and refocus. When you finish the list, review the strengths and make a plan for moving forward.

And don't forget, you have strengths as a parent.

- You are the expert on your child.
- You have experiences and guidance that can help your child.
- Your child needs you.

Your doctor cares about you and your child. Talk to your doctor about your questions and concerns.

Resources

Suggestions and resources on how to take a strengths-based approach to well-child care are available through Bright Futures (<http://brightfutures.aap.org>) and *Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure* (www.aap.org/connectedkids).

References

1. Brendtro LK, Brokenleg M, Van Bockern S. *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service; 2002
2. Guajardo M, Roybal P. *The Power of Parents: Parent Engagement in Schools and the Developmental Assets*. Denver, CO: Assets for Colorado Youth; 2001
3. Roehlkepartain JL. *150 Ways to Show Kids You Care*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute; 1997

