

Bounce back: How positive psychology can give a post-pandemic boost to your family's wellbeing

Section 2.2 How to use character strengths with your family to enhance wellbeing

Using your signature strengths

The interactive diagram has a centre circle which reads character strengths. Around the outside are six satellite circles. The first circle says Wisdom. Clicking on this opens further information saying achieve the virtue of wisdom by using the strengths of creativity, curiosity, judgement, love of learning and perspective. Then there are a series of sections as follows: Creativity. Select a routine daily task and make a conscious decision to be creative and do it completely differently, using one of your other signature strengths. Develop the habit of 'brainstorming' as many solutions as possible to any problem you face, before looking at price and payoff of each and selecting the best option. Write a very brief accurate description of the most beautiful scene you can call to mind. The next section is Curiosity. Select a local place you pass every day, but know little about, and find out everything about it. Come home a different way from work or college and notice everything new that you see. Select an activity that you have to do regularly but dislike. As you do it, pay attention to three things about the activity that you have not previously noticed. Discuss these with a friend. The next section is Judgement. Write down an opinion you strongly hold. Then write down five reasons why someone might doubt its validity. Next time someone says something important you disagree with – ask them why they believe it so strongly. Listen carefully to what they say and try to understand their point of view. With an open mind, watch a political tv programme which advocates a position that differs from your own. The next section is Love of learning. Make a point of learning a new idea each day. Select a topic that really interests you and find out as much as you can about it. When you have to learn something that is boring, consider how knowing about this topic might benefit you and others. Spend 15 minutes today reading a book or article that you would not otherwise read. The next section is Perspective. Next time you are with two friends who are arguing, do not take sides. Instead try to understand both sides of the argument. For one day, spend more time questioning and listening than talking. Only give an opinion or advice when asked, and then only after careful deliberation.

The second circle says Courage. Achieve the virtue of courage by using the strengths of bravery, perseverance, honesty and zest. The first section is Bravery. Catch yourself being nervous but do whatever it was that made you nervous and acknowledge that you can be brave. The next time you are frightened to do or say something good, acknowledge to yourself that you are frightened and then do or say something good in that situation, and acknowledge that you have been brave. When you have to do something that scares you, remind yourself of how it will help you or other people. The next section is Perseverance. Today, plan to do one thing, assignment or task to completion and follow through on this plan. Take an important task you have been avoiding doing for some time, and plan to do it in small stages. Then follow through on your plan. Identify a new goal today. List some of the pain obstacles to achieving it. Then brainstorm ways of overcoming these obstacles. The next section is Honesty. For one day, only say things you genuinely believe to be true. Contact someone with whom you have not been completely honest about a particular issue and tell them the whole truth. Do one thing each day that you think reflects your most deeply held values. The next section is Zest. Do something today because you really want to, not because you think you should. Sleep for eight hours, eat three moderate-sized healthy meals and exercise vigorously outside in nature for an hour – all during one, 24-hour period. Notice how energetic you feel as a result. Tell a friend or family member, in vivid detail, about the positive things that have happened to you today.

The third circle is Humanity. Achieve the virtue of humanity by using the strengths of love, kindness and social intelligence. The first section is Love. Do something with your family, partner or friend that they really want to do. Tell someone about one of their strengths that you really appreciate. Give them examples of how you have seen them expressing this strength. Accept a compliment by saying 'thanks' and no more than that. Develop a meditation practice. The next section is Kindness. Do a favour for a family member, friend or stranger and don't make a big deal out of it. Visit someone who is lonely and listen to them. The next section is social intelligence. When someone says or does something to annoy you, don't immediately retaliate. Try to understand their motives. Do or say something to make another person feel at ease in a tense situation. In complex situations when you have very mixed emotions, practise naming each of them, for example, feeling guilty about being angry and frightened.

The fourth circle is Justice. Achieve the virtue of justice by using the strengths of teamwork, fairness and leadership. The first section is Teamwork. Today, turn up on time and do more than your fair share of whatever teamwork you are involved in. Use 'we' much more than 'I' when talking about your team's achievements, successes, hopes and positive beliefs. Do some voluntary work for a charitable organisation. The next section is Fairness. Today, when you find you have made a mistake in your dealings with others, admit it and take responsibility for it. Listen to people with whom you disagree without interrupting them. If you have to make decisions that affect others, involve them in the decision-making process, allowing them opportunities to express and discuss ideas that differ from yours, and explain the reasons for final decisions that you reach. The next section is Leadership. Organise a social event for your friends or family. Make a new person or an unpopular person in your social circle feel welcome and part of the group.

The fifth circle is Temperance. Achieve the virtue of temperance by using the strengths of forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation. The first section is Forgiveness. Write a letter of forgiveness to someone who has wronged you, but don't send it. Read it each day for a week. Once a day, when you feel annoyed with someone, try to understand and empathise with the other person's reasons for being annoying. And let go of your negative feeling. The next section is Humility. Today, don't talk about yourself. Compliment a friend on something he or she does better than you. The next section is Prudence. Today, ask yourself if the health risks are worth it the next time you eat junk food, drink more than too much alcohol or drive over the speed limit. Curb one excess today. The next section is Self-regulation. Engage in one small act of self-control every day in one area of your life where you find self-control challenging (eating healthily, drinking alcohol, exercising, shopping, expressing anger, etc.). Count to 10 the next time you feel you are going to lose your temper. Give up gossiping and saying mean things about others for today.

The sixth and final circle is Transcendence. Achieve the virtue of transcendence by using the strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour and spirituality. The first section is Appreciation of beauty and excellence. Stop and notice the natural beauty all around you twice a day. Write down the most beautiful thing you see every day for a week. The next section is Gratitude. Tell someone who is rarely thanked for their good work that you appreciate what they do. At the end of each day, in your journal, write down three good things that you experienced and for which you are grateful. Write a gratitude letter to someone who helped you and you never thanked, describing in detail how they helped you, and send them the letter. The next section is Hope. Write down your goals for the next month and make plans for accomplishing them. Think of a thing that disappointed you, and the positive opportunities it created for you. Watch a film that contains a hopeful message and reflect on how this applies to your life. The next section is Humour. Make one person smile today. Make fun of yourself today. At the end of each day, in your journal, write down

the three funniest things that happened to you that day and explain why those things happened. The final section is Spirituality. Meditate today for 15 minutes. Think about the purpose of your life today. Think about a spiritual role model and consider which of their positive attributes you most want to emulate.