Strength-based approach

What is it?

The strength-based approach is an approach to children that views situations realistically and looks for opportunities to complement and support existing strengths and capacities of children as opposed to focusing on, and staying with, the problem or concern. The problem and the child are separate; however, the problem is never minimised.

The strength-based approach is a shift in thinking.

The strength-based approach represents a paradigm shift—a movement away from a deficit-based approach which can lead to a long list of things considered to be ‘wrong’ with a child’s learning and development or things a child cannot do. The deficit-based model fails to provide sufficient information about strengths and strategies to support a child’s learning and development.

In response to the limitations associated with the deficit-based approach, a growing body of research and evidence has shown support for the strength-based approach that encourages educators to:

• understand that children’s learning is dynamic, complex and holistic
• understand that children demonstrate their learning in different ways
• start with what’s present—not what’s absent—and write about what works for the child.

The strength-based approach consists of questioning strategies to identify what works for the child and how it works so that those strategies can be continued and developed.
to match the child’s abilities. In other words, the strength-based approach is about assisting people (educators, children, families) to build a picture of what a child’s learning and development could look like in the future.

What it isn’t!

A strength-based approach is not about describing a child’s learning and development in a positive light and neglecting to identify areas for further development and/or areas of concern. Nor is it about framing the learning and development message one way for families and another way for educators – it’s about the consistent sharing of information.

Underlying principles

The underlying principles of the strength-based approach include:

• all children have strengths and abilities
• children grow and develop from their strengths and abilities
• the problem is the problem—the child is not the problem
• when children and those around them (including educators) appreciate and understand the child’s strengths, then the child is better able to learn and develop.