

# FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS

## Focusing on Strengths Changes the Entire System

A strength-based orientation represents a significant shift in the way service providers' view and service families. For the past fifty years, professionals have been taught and reinforced for identifying problems and offering solutions – building a problem-focused approach. Gradually, more and more human service providers are making the shift to a strength-based orientation. The family strengths approach encourages service providers and entire service systems to support and reinforce family functioning rather than focusing on individual or family deficits.

Systems that shift from a deficit-based to a strength-based orientation communicate the following attitudes and beliefs.

1. All families have strengths. Their strengths are unique and depend on the family's beliefs, cultural background, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc.
2. The absence of particular competencies within families or individuals should not be seen as a failure or inadequacy on the part of the family or individual. Sometimes the formal or informal human service system fails to promote opportunities for a family to display or learn competencies they need.
3. Families with problems are not “broken” and “needing to be fixed.” A strength-based orientation means that families are approached in ways that focus and build on the positive aspects of functioning. Providers not only accept but highly value individual differences among families and family members.
4. The goal of intervention is not “doing for people.” The goal is to work with families as partners in order to help them become less dependent on agencies. This means that professionals are not viewed as experts that are expected to solve a family's problems.