

Using a Strength-based Approach with Resistant Parents

In your work you might encounter some parents/guardians who are resistant to focusing on their child's strengths, competencies, or potential competencies.

The reasons for this resistance may include the following:

- Their anger at the youth for the crisis the behavior has caused the family
- Their embarrassment that the youth's behavior has involved law enforcement and the juvenile justice system
- Their frustration with the youth if the behavior has been difficult to manage for a long period of time

Types of resistance you may face:

- A desire for the youth to experience sanctions. Some parents/guardians will feel that their child needs to learn a lesson and be punished for misbehavior.
 - ❖ Response: This approach includes both accountability and competency development. What that means is that the youth is expected to do a lot of work, both in repairing harm done to the victim/community and in making positive behavioral changes. By focusing on skill development, we help ensure that the youth becomes a productive adult.
- Difficulty finding positives about the youth or anger that gets in the way. Some parents/guardians have developed a pessimistic view of their child and their child's potential. They may feel that they have tried everything, and can't control the youth or get the youth to change. They may also feel concerned that the youth is a bad influence on other siblings or causes conflict in the home.
 - ❖ Response: One of the principles underlying this approach is that every youth has strengths or potential competencies, even when it seems that all the youth's behaviors or attitudes are negative. In the midst of conflict, it sometimes takes an outside person to be able to see this potential and to help motivate the youth to change. Think about the power of a self-fulfilling prophecy – if we look for positives, we are likely to find some. Finally, if all is going wrong, why not try this approach – at least it isn't likely to make anything any worse!

- Reluctance to engage. Some parents are uncomfortable divulging personal information about their family, and are resistant to outsiders interfering with their parenting decisions. Their cultural beliefs could be a factor in their resistance as well. In addition, they may be concerned that other activities will be too difficult or expensive to fit into their lives.
 - ❖ Response: A strength-based approach helps engage and build trust and rapport with parents/guardians. Explaining the strength-based approach to family members may help convince them of the usefulness and potential benefits of their participation. Considering the time and financial implications of each goal is also important in showing the family that you are considerate of the realities of their lives. Finally, being aware of and sensitive to the impact that a family's cultural, religious, ethnic, or racial background may have on their views and values will help form a plan that all parties can be comfortable with.