

## USING YOUR CHARACTER STRENGTHS

This strategy is suggested in the following BrainWaves lessons:

**11-14 Understanding your strengths**

**14-16 Developing your strengths**

**16-18 Working to your strengths**

### About character strengths

In positive psychology, character strengths are positive traits that reflect a person through their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and contribute to their overall wellbeing and flourishing. Identified by Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson, they are core human virtues and represent universal qualities, such as kindness, creativity, and perseverance, that people can develop to live fulfilling lives.

Positive psychology recognises 24 character strengths, which are categorized into six core virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The belief is that every single person has all these strengths, varying in degrees, and that they are central to fostering personal growth, resilience, and positive relationships.



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Source: *The VIA Youth 24 Character Strengths* <https://www.viacharacter.org/resources/activities/via-youth-twenty-four-character-strengths>



Identifying, using and focusing on our character strengths has a lasting effect on our happiness and wellbeing. How do we develop these character strengths? The [Virtues in Action \(VIA\) Character Strength Survey](#) is a short test which identifies character strengths (an adolescent version is also available). After identifying which character strength you want to improve, you can make an action plan to practise the strength regularly.

### **The scientific evidence behind character strengths**

Several studies have explored the relationship between character strengths and wellbeing in adolescents:

Proctor, C. et al. (2011). [\*Strengths Gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and wellbeing of adolescents\*](#). The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6(5), 377-388. DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2011.594079

- In this study, 218 adolescent students participated in character strengths-based exercises for 6 months. The study reported increased life satisfaction in these adolescents compared to 101 adolescents who did not participate in the exercises.

Gillham, J. E., Adams-Deutsch, Z., Werner, J., et al. (2011): [\*Character strengths predict subjective well-being during adolescence\*](#). The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6:1, 31-44, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2010.536773

- In this study of 379 adolescents, the researchers found that those who demonstrated higher levels of certain character strengths, such as hope, gratitude, and love, reported greater subjective wellbeing. The study highlights that these strengths can serve as protective factors, enhancing resilience and helping adolescents cope with challenges, and that fostering character strengths can positively impact mental health and life satisfaction during adolescence.

### **Further reading**

Positive psychology's 24 character strengths: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-are-character-strengths-4843090>

Strengths-based activities and exercises: <https://www.viacharacter.org/resources/activities>

Character strengths and positive psychology: <https://posproject.org/character-strengths/>