

BERNSTEIN ⁱModes

Using your strengths in challenging times:

A short guide to using the strengths-finding questionnaires

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What is a Healthy Adult side?

We all have a Healthy Adult side, a side of ourselves that helps us to function and get our needs met in healthy, adaptive ways. No one's Healthy Adult side works perfectly. It can be especially difficult when we face difficult or unusual circumstances. The idea is to recognize and appreciate the strengths that we have, the qualities that make up our own Healthy Adult side, and take small steps to use them to get our needs met. In doing so, you will function better and feel better.

How can I use the two questionnaires to find my own strengths?

I have developed two questionnaires to help you find your strengths: The Bernstein Strengths Scale (BSS) and the Bernstein List of 48 Strengths (BLS). The BSS asks you to rate a series of statements that describe your personal qualities. The BLS has a number of adjectives describing strengths. You circle the ones that best describe yourself. You can fill out and compare the scores on both of them, as they provide complementary ways of assessing your strengths. Using them together can give you a more well-rounded sense of your own strengths.

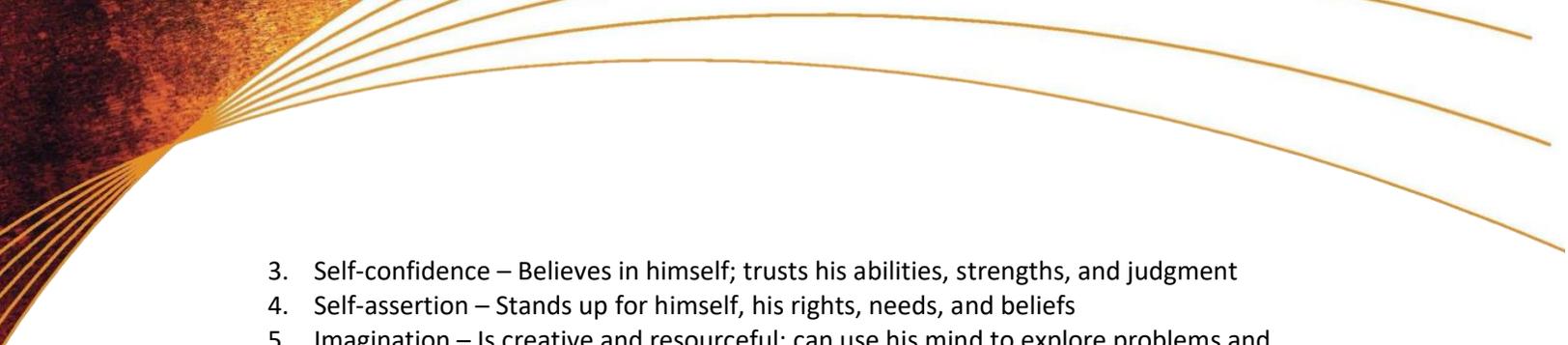
What are the 16 Strengths of the Healthy Adult?

The 16 strengths of the Healthy Adult are positive attributes or strengths that enable us to adapt to the challenges of human existence. Many theorists have described the self or personality as a dynamic system that accomplishes a number of life tasks: achieving a sense of personal identity; maintaining emotional self-regulation (including self-esteem); facilitating emotional bonds with other people; and negotiating the complexities of living in human groups. In this view, the self has evolved because of our fundamental nature as social animals, where meeting emotional and physical needs required us to adapt to complex social environments.

After extensively reviewing the literature on healthy adult functioning and psychological well-being, I have developed a four-factor (i.e., dimensional) model of the Healthy Adult, which includes the following specific strengths:

Factor 1 - Self-directedness: (5 strengths) – Sets and pursues his own life course

1. Identity – Has a clear sense of self, of the qualities that make him an individual
2. Self-reflection – Is able to look at himself, to examine his feelings, beliefs, and behaviors

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3. Self-confidence – Believes in himself; trusts his abilities, strengths, and judgment
 4. Self-assertion – Stands up for himself, his rights, needs, and beliefs
 5. Imagination – Is creative and resourceful; can use his mind to explore problems and solutions, picture future scenarios

Factor 2 – Self-regulation (5 strengths) – Regulates emotions, impulses, thoughts, and behavior

6. Emotional Balance – Stays centered, keeps emotions in balance, recovers quickly after emotional triggers
7. Resilience – Handles stress and difficulties; bends, but does not break, and bounces back
8. Self-control – Stops and thinks before acting; can put off immediate wishes and handle frustration
9. Self-care – Takes care of his emotional and physical health and well-being
10. Reality testing – Checks if his ideas, feelings, and perceptions are real, objective, and rational

Factor 3 – Connection (4 strengths) – Forms meaningful, mutual relationships

11. Empathy – Feels and understands what other people are feeling; can experience things from the other person's perspective
12. Compassion – Wants to ease the suffering of other people; shows kindness, caring, and a willingness to help others; directs compassion towards himself
13. Humor – Playful, funny, fun-loving; shares jokes and laughter; appreciates the absurd in himself, other people, and life
14. Responsibility – Reliable, trustworthy, dependable; takes his roles and obligations seriously

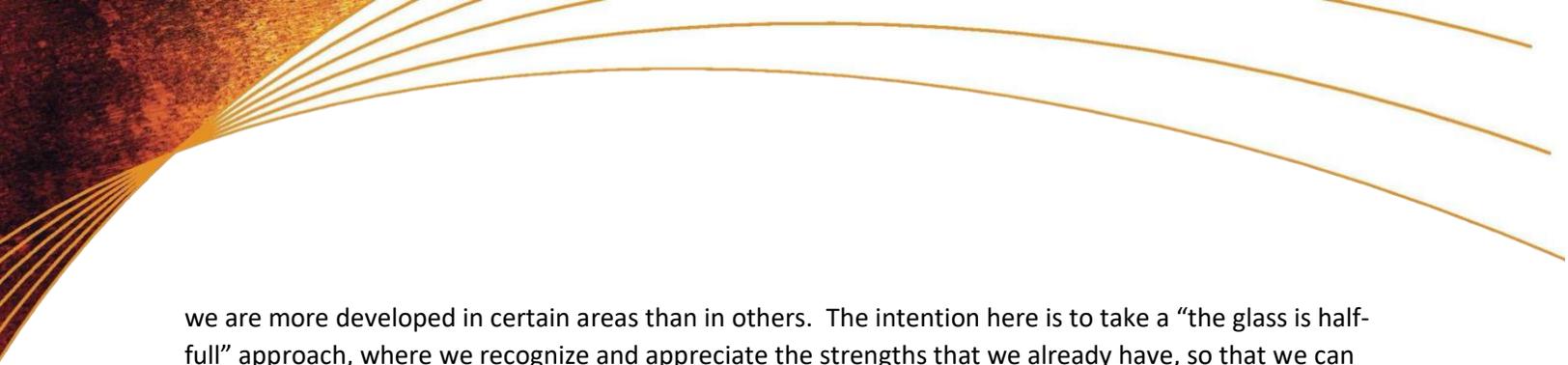
Factor 4 – Transcendence (2 strengths) – Pursues higher purposes or meanings in life and human relations

15. Thankfulness – Grateful, happy for what he receives; appreciates things, rather than taking them for granted
16. Wisdom – seeks truth, knowledge, life lessons; shows good judgement; learns from experience

How are the 16 Strengths related to the 4 Factors of the Healthy Adult?

The specific strengths within each factor contribute to the overall strength of that factor. For example, there are five strengths in factor 1. Each of these strengths can help you pursue your life's course, your direction in life. The more of the strengths you have, and the more you use them, the better you can find your direction in life. This does not mean that you need all, or even most, of these strengths to find your direction. Even having one of these strengths can help you.

Most people have strengths that are greater in some areas than in other ones. That is normal. We develop our strengths based on many factors: our genes, upbringing, the challenges that we face, and social supports and role models that we have in our lives, and so forth. It is quite common to find that



we are more developed in certain areas than in others. The intention here is to take a “the glass is half-full” approach, where we recognize and appreciate the strengths that we already have, so that we can mobilize them to meet our immediate needs.

How can I mobilize the strengths that I have to get my needs met?

In building strengths, it helps to start with the strengths that we already have. Most of us have strengths that we often do not utilize. If you can mobilize these strengths, it can help you in times of adversity. We can also build new strengths in areas that are under-developed, but that is a longer-term process. For example, in times of adversity, connections can help us.

Perhaps you are someone who has strengths such as humor, empathy, and compassion. However, sometimes, you forget or don’t take the time to reach out to other people for support. Maybe you are the kind of person who is good at helping other people (e.g., maybe you are a good listener), but don’t so easily ask for help for yourself.

Taking small steps to mobilize your strengths

Start small. The first step is to become aware of what you need, such as the need for connection. Then, imagine small ways that you could get that need met. Maybe there are old friends that you haven’t connected with in a while. Or you met someone recently who seems interesting. Then take a small step in the direction of meeting your need. If it feels too intimidating to take the step, take an easier one to start with, or break a big step into a few smaller ones. Keep in mind your strengths. If you are a person with humor, empathy, or compassion, other people will respond to those qualities. That can help you to feel confidence as you move in the direction of getting your needs for connection met.

Think of your positive qualities as “Islands of Strength.” When you have a need, such as the need for connection, you can visit “Strengths Island,” an island where you own personal strengths are. It is a place where you can replenish and nourish yourself. Visiting Strengths Island is a metaphor. It reminds us that we often has strengths that we don’t use. If you visit Strengths Island every day, it means doing something small to nourish yourself every day. Taking small steps to use the strengths that you have to get your needs met.

Good luck with your journey!

