

SESSION 4 AMARILLO CASE

STRENGTHS IN FAMILIES WORKSHEET

Your ability to identify strengths in families depends partially on which lens—the resource lens or the deficit lens—you use in your work with families. The lens you choose will also influence your work with others involved in the case.

Using a strengths-based approach means acknowledging the resources that exist within a family (including extended family) and tapping into them. For instance, you may identify a relative who can provide a temporary or permanent home for a child, you may help a parent reconnect with a past support system or you may identify healthy adults who in the past were important to a child or family. Using a resource lens creates more options for resolution, and it empowers and supports children and families.

Following are a few questions you can ask when using the resource lens to assess a family:

- How has this family solved problems in the past?
- What court-ordered activities have family members completed?
- Does the family have extended family or non-relative kin who could be a resource?
- How are family members coping with their present circumstances?

Cultural Considerations

Strengths don't look the same in every family. Family structures, rules, roles, customs, boundaries, communication styles, problem-solving approaches, parenting techniques and values may be based on cultural norms and/or accepted community standards.

For instance, in a deficit model, a family with a female head of household may be viewed as dysfunctional or even immoral. But using a resources lens, the female-head-of-household structure is appreciated for the strength and survival skills of the mother, and there is a deeper examination of historical and institutional factors that have contributed to the existence of matriarchal families.

In another example, many Western cultures believe that children should have a bed to themselves, if not an entire room. In contrast, many other cultures believe that such a practice is detrimental to a child's development and potentially dangerous. Additionally, in the United States the ideal of the nuclear family dominates. However, in many communities, extended family have a greater role in childrearing and family may include members of a faith community or others who are not blood relatives.

People in different cultures and socioeconomic classes may use different skills and resources to deal with stress and problems. Material goods are one source; however, some individuals and cultures value other resources above material wealth.

For example:

- Mental ability allows for the access and use of information.
- Emotional resources provide support and strength in difficult times.

- Spiritual resources give purpose and meaning to people’s lives.
- Good health and physical mobility allow for self-sufficiency.
- Cultural heritage provides context, values and morals for living in the world.
- Informal support systems provide a safety net (e.g., money in tight times, care for a sick child, job advice).
- Healthy relationships nurture and support.
- Role models provide appropriate examples of and practical advice on achieving success.

Strengths vs. Deficits	
If I look through a STRENGTHS lens, I am likely to...	If I look through a DEFICITS lens, I am more likely to...
Look for positive aspects	Look for negative aspects
Empower families	Take control or rescue
Create options	Give ultimatums or advice
Listen	Tell
Focus on strengths	Focus on problems
Put the responsibility on the family	See the family as incapable
Acknowledge progress	Wait for the finished product
See the family as experts	See service providers as experts
See the family invested in change	Impose change or limits
Help identify resources	Expect inaction or failure
Avoid labeling	Label
Inspire with hope	Deflate the family’s hope

Adapted from materials developed by CASA for Children, Inc., Portland, Oregon

SEEING THE STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES IN THE AMARILLO FAMILY

Review the Amarillo case notes and interview summaries prior to answering the questions.

1. Based on both the case notes and summary interviews, what are the strengths of the Amarillo family? What are the strengths of Maria Amarillo in particular?
2. If you don't know whether or not a particular strength exists in this family, how might you gather information to find out?
3. How does looking only at strengths or only at deficits affect your recommendations for Maria?
4. Think about the Amarillo family. What potential biases might you have about this case based on race, gender, age, sexuality, socio-economic class, etc.? Being aware of potential biases is critically important to your role as an advocate. Write down the biases you might have and how you could address them.
5. What were the strengths of the CASA volunteer in the Maria Amarillo case that you were able to learn from reading the interview summaries? Did the CASA ask the right questions in his/her quest to prepare to make recommendations to the court on behalf of Maria Amarillo? Why or why not?