A Positive Psychology Approach to Strengths

Strengths provide a language for who we (and others) are at our best and for what we aspire to be. They describe the qualities of character that we most admire and cherish in others, and most hope to nurture in our children. These qualities facilitate positive relationships, outstanding achievements, and contributions to humanity. They contribute to resilience and enable people and societies to thrive.

Positive Psychology, a relatively new field within psychology, aims to identify and cultivate the personal qualities, experiences, and contexts that promote human flourishing. With their colleagues, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, two of the founders of Positive Psychology, set out to identify strengths and virtues that have been valued by across time and across cultures. Their Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV) classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) provides a rich and useful description of six virtues and related character strengths.

Table 1 lists the CSV virtues and related strengths, along with the Resilience Core Concepts (Compiled 2010 by Joan Smith, M.A. and Maci Elkins, M.A.)

CSV Classification and Resilience Core Concepts

Virtue	Strengths	Resilience Core Concept
Courage	Authenticity & integrity Bravery & valor Industry & persistence Zest	Sense of competency
Humanity	Love Kindness Social intelligence	Caring & Respect of Self & Others
Justice	Fairness Leadership Teamwork	Caring & Respect of Self & Others
Temperance	Forgiveness Humility & modesty Prudence Self-regulation	Ability to Reframe Stress Problem-Solving & Coping
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty & excellence Gratitude Hope & optimism Playfulness & humor Spirituality & meaning	Optimism & Hope for the future Sense of Meaning and Purpose
Wisdom & Knowledge	Creativity Curiosity Love of learning Open-mindedness Perspective	Problem-Solving & Coping

References and Further Reading

Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology.* New York, Oxford University Press.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY, US: Free Press.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being.* New York, NY, US: Free Press.

Concepts Chart - Compiled 2010 by Joan Smith, M.A. and Maci Elkins, M.A.