

A Strengths-focused dialog is simply the sharing of positive moments, and the articulation of possible strengths with a partner.

Participants take turns in the roles of speaker and listener.

The **speaker** describes a recent positive moment or a good experience from any time in their life. They describe the positive feelings they experienced, and they articulate some of the strengths they hear in their own story.

The goal of the **listener** is threefold:

First: to listen fully, without distraction

Second: to communicate to the speaker, both in body language and verbally, that they are being heard

Third: to facilitate the speaker's articulation of the good experience or positive moment, the positive feelings, and the self-articulated strengths.

The second and third listening goals can be accomplished by asking useful questions that inspire the speaker to further or deeper articulation.

There are many examples of questions and prompts that facilitate the speaker's articulation of the good experience or positive moment. Here are a few:

Is there more?

How did you learn to _____?

Tell me more about _____.

Examples of questions and prompts that facilitate the speaker's articulation of positive feelings:

How did you feel when _____? (with a focus on the positive moment)

I heard you mention these positive feelings: _____. Were there other positive feelings?

Looking at the positive feelings list, which word is the most like what you felt? Is there a better word or phrase?

Examples of questions and prompts that facilitate the speaker's articulation of strengths:

What strengths might you have been using?

Do any other strengths come to mind?

Looking at the list of strengths words, which word or words best describe the positive qualities you brought to this moment or experience?

Significantly, the listener's job is not:

- To express sympathy or empathy.
- To share a similar experience.
- To give advice.

All of these might happen at another time, but are not part of the Strengths-focused dialog process.

At the beginning of a new relationship with a Strengths-focused dialog partner, it is very useful to follow these guidelines carefully. This kind of dialog does not follow the patterns of conversation to which most of us are accustomed. These guidelines create a feeling of safety, ensuring that the focus of the dialog remains upon the speaker articulating his or herself without judgment or criticism. Focus remains on the positive.

As the relationship continues over a number of Strengths-focused dialog sessions, the listener may begin to recognize and suggest feeling words and phrases, as opposed to strictly supporting the speaker in articulating words and phrases. The speaker is always free to “take it or leave it” and remains the author of their articulation of feelings.

Later yet, the listener might suggest possible strengths that the speaker had demonstrated during the experiences or moments they described. As the dialog proceeds, there is a progression from primary focus on feelings to subjective strengths that might have influenced the feelings. This can include discussion of the speaker’s “Top 10 Strengths” at the time that this list has been articulated. Clearer and deeper articulation of the speaker’s Top 10 is a goal of the Strengths-focused dialog process.