



STRENGTH-BASED LEADERS

An Affirming and Successful Approach for Supporting Victims' Recovery and New Life

By Teresa Green (pseudonym)

Many programs offered by Victim Services in northern Virginia ascribe to the “strength-based approach” when working with victims. Do you know about this uniquely empowering – and new – approach in therapy, including for victims of trauma and abuse?

Strength-based therapy fosters recovery (and transformation) in individuals and groups by operating with the primary belief that each person has strengths on which they can ground their work overcoming trauma or healing/managing mental illness (Laurson 2003).

Strength-based therapy views clients as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity (Rashid and Ostermann 2009). Its process builds on each person's skills, interests and support systems (Nissen, Mackin, Weller, Tarte 2005), identifying what is going well, in order to do more of it and to build on such success (Barwick 2004). Strength-based therapy promotes personal growth along with healthful personal relationships.

The strength-based approach to recovery from abuse and trauma is a gentle, step-by-step process with a focus on the future, not analyzing the past. It is seen as an effective way to build self-esteem and personal confidence. Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of this approach are not yet well-developed, but anecdotal evidence is abundant. For a lay person’s read, see [Strength-Based Therapy](#), which is a hub for information in the *Psychology Today* online archive.

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Also, the strength-based approach was used by the Gallup organization to launch strength-based self-assessments for career and other life changes. You may have heard of some of the books, like the bestseller by Tom Roth called [Strengths Finder 2.0](#). While trade books take therapeutic rigor to a very casual level, the positive reaction to building on one's strengths to move forward has universal appeal. It speaks to the aspirational in all people, including victims who have managed to survive very difficult life experiences.

It's great to know our regional victim services are strength-based leaders, operating on the cutting edge of scholarship and in sync with the population into which they are helping victims resume healthful and whole lives.

Teresa Hartnett founded and works with Spirit Fire, which promotes collaborations with survivors in Christ-centered restorative justice for adults, families and faith communities wounded by child abuse. Spirit Fire offers spiritual mediation, pastoral training and survivor partnerships to inspire and energize Catholic and all other Christian ministries. For our resources and services, see SpiritFire.Live today.

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