

Identifying Child Strengths

Strengths-based assessment practices are used to identify a child's interests and the abilities he or she uses during participation in everyday activities. Multiple sources of information are used to accomplish this important part of an assessment process. Information collected about the things a child likes to do and is able to do provides the foundation for engaging the child in strengths-based everyday learning activities, supporting the child's participation in the activities, and interacting with the child in ways that build on the child's strengths to promote new learning.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Identifying Children's Abilities and Interests

- Use different methods to gather information about a child's strengths (i.e., his or her abilities and interests). Observe the child participating in everyday indoor and outdoor activities and routines. Talk with parents and others who know the child well, using open-ended questions about how the child expresses his or her abilities and interests as part of everyday life.
- Consider using a child interest and strengths checklist completed by a parent or other adult familiar with the child to identify personal interests and behavioral strengths.
- Use your observations and interviews to identify the child's abilities. Find out about things the child is able to do, does easily or independently, and is good at doing. Notice the behavior that keep the child engaged in activities and the things the child is just beginning to do. Identify how the child shows curiosity, explores and uses objects and materials, and tries to do new things.
- Also, identify how the child initiates and maintains interactions with adults and other people, including peers. Note the behavior the child uses to respond to interactions from others. Pay particular attention to the ways in which the child expresses his or her needs, wants or desires.
- Identify the activities, events, objects, people, places, and actions that are the child's interests. Pay attention to what the child likes to do, prefers to do, chooses to do, and works hard at doing. Identify the child's favorite things to do that the child enjoys, capture the child's attention, and make the child smile, laugh, have fun, and get excited.
- Record your findings by writing notes, keeping a journal, taking photographs, and collecting samples of the child's work. Describe the strengths assessment findings for the child's parents. Solicit their additional input and modify the strengths assessment findings based on their feedback and comments. Explain how the strengths-based assessment information can be used to plan and provide their child everyday learning opportunities.
- Use the results of the child strengths assessment to identify and select everyday child learning activities, promoting the child's participation in the activities, and encouraging and supporting child learning and independence by building on child strengths in the activities.



A Quick Peek

Joni had been observing Bobby playing indoors and outside during the past several days. She wanted to gather information that she and the other teachers could use to plan activities and to support Bobby who was new to the classroom. She had learned that Bobby loved to do all the "messy" activities – use finger paints, splash in the water table, shape play dough, and squeeze sand and mud through his fingers. Today when Bobby played in the sand, Joni noted that, as during many indoor activities, he was content to play by himself for quite a while. She watched as Bobby shoveled sand into a bowl, shook it through a sifter, and packed it into a mold. He had some difficulty using the big scooping spoon but persisted and worked hard. He giggled as he plunged his hand into the bowl of sand. Joni watched when Paul approached and asked Bobby for the spoon. She noticed that Bobby just smiled at Paul and continued scooping the sand, but quietly relinquished the spoon when Paul asked again. Later, when Joni met with the other teachers, they compared their notes and impressions about Bobby's abilities and interests. They were able to plan different activities that would be engaging to him, including numerous sensory activities that he could do with other children.

You'll know the practice is working if...

- Children are engaged in activities that match their abilities and interests
- Children enjoy participation in everyday classroom activities and routines
- Children become more independent participating in everyday classroom activities and routines

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Assessment 2, 4, 7, 9, 10
 The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sp.ed.org/recommendedpractices>

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