RATIONALE:
Strength-based interventions can be used during the therapy process to help families recognize and build on their existing--and valuable--competencies and accomplishments.

Families often come into therapy with difficult and even traumatic stories to tell, and may feel overwhelmed by the events that they describe. Strength-based interventions help families to augment these difficult stories with positive narratives, drawing on their past experiences to highlight individual and family values, traits and characteristics. These enhanced stories can lay the groundwork for positive expectations for therapy. At the same time, they facilitate a shift in the family’s expectations of the therapeutic process: from the therapist having pre-conceived answers to the therapist helping the family search for unique answers as to what might work best for them.

APPLICATION: This activity is especially designed for use with families, but can be adapted for use in individual therapy.

GOAL: This playful intervention uses the theme of a “treasure quest” to engage children and families in recognizing individual and family strengths. The activity provides a structure by which the therapist can initiate a dialog with the family that helps them to “search” for their strengths and to “dig beneath the surface” of family life to find the hidden treasure of shared values and competencies.

Note: Previous training in narrative therapy (or similar approaches) will help the therapist guide the dialog.

Materials needed:
1) One copy of the Treasure Map (pictured at right.)
2) One set of pocket scrolls with questions. Each scroll has an icon corresponding to one of the icons on the map border. (To make scrolls, see instructions on the next page.)
3) Optional: 1 copy each of the Family Treasure Quest Log and the “What We Treasure” map

Instructions:
1. Prior to the session, hide the question scrolls throughout the room.
2. Tell the family about the activity: Family Treasure Quest.
   In this activity, your family will go on a quest to discover things that you--and other people--might treasure about your family. This isn’t the kind of treasure that pirates hide, like gold coins and jewels. It’s the kind of things that people treasure about one another, things like honesty, caring, faith, hard work, fairness, persistence and respect. To help discover these things about your family, I’m going to ask you some questions about your family.
   I’m sending you on a treasure hunt to find the questions. The questions are hidden around the room. Here is a treasure map. There is one question hidden for each of the symbols around the border of the map. Who wants to go first?
3. Have the family members take turns finding the pocket scrolls and reading the questions out loud. Note that these questions should just be a starting point for the therapist to help the family dig deeper into past experiences in order to identify underlying values, traits, and strengths. You can use the list of character traits and strengths on page 10 as a guide. (The therapist will need to be skilled in asking the right kinds of questions to elicit this information, especially when talking about past challenges and difficulties and identifying “hidden” competencies. Training in narrative therapy or similar approaches can help therapists develop this skill.)
   If desired, the children can place an “X” over the icon on the map border after each question on the corresponding scroll is answered.
4) OPTIONAL: As the discussion proceeds, the therapist can jot notes on the Family Treasure Quest Log (page 11) regarding the highlights of the family’s discussion of each question. If desired, this log can then be used to have the family complete the “What We Treasure” map (pictured at right). They can recall the values, strengths and competencies that were “discovered” during the Treasure Quest activity, and write them in the border of the map.

The “What We Treasure” map can then be used in future therapy sessions to help the family remain mindful of the their strengths. The therapist can help the family to
1) add to the list as more strengths are discovered and
2) consciously call upon the identified strengths as the family faces current challenges, For example, the therapist could say:
   Remember that Thanksgiving when you were stranded away from home? You told me that even under such difficult circumstances, because of Jo’s perseverance and mom’s creativity you put together a special celebration that was one of the best ever. Can either of those traits help with what’s happening right now?

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How to Make Pocket Scrolls

Materials:
You will need twelve question scrolls* (included), plus glue and plastic straws.
  *Choose from two sets of scrolls are included in this activity: one with ready-made questions (pages 4-6); one set of blank scrolls (pages 7-9) for you to formulate your own questions.

Instructions:

1. Cut the scrolls apart on the dotted lines; you will have 12 scrolls.

2. Cut some straws to match the width of the scrolls (You need 2 cut straws per scroll)

3. Fill the shaded area at one the end of the scroll with glue. Then place one piece of straw at the end of the scroll and roll the straw into the scroll, stopping when you reach the end of the glue area. Hold until the glue is set.

Repeat on other end of the scroll. You now have a scroll with a dowel on each end for rolling.

4. Now roll the scroll up tightly from both ends and hold in place for a moment or two to set the shape. If desired, you can then tie the scroll with a string or ribbon, but it is not necessary; the scroll may relax a bit, but it will keep it’s rolled shape.
Treasure Map
What is a family tradition or ritual that is very important or valuable to you?

Tell about a time that your family helped someone.
(It can be a family member that you helped or someone outside the family.)

Tell about what your family has done to help one another during “stormy times.”

If you are feeling lost, not knowing where to turn, what does your family do to help guide you along the right path?
Tell about a time that your family figured out how to overcome an obstacle.

Tell about something you have that is old, or even damaged, that is important to you and so you treasure it.

Tell about a time that your family “pulled together” to get something done.

Tell about a meal that your family had together. What did each person do to make that meal enjoyable?
What does each person in your family do to help keep your "ship" running smoothly?

When a ship raises its Anchor it is time to begin a new voyage. Tell about a time that your family moved on to something new.

Tell a wish that you have for your family. What could you do to help make that wish come true?

X marks the spot.
Sometimes a treasure is buried right under our nose and we don’t know it! What is a good thing about your family that you tend to take for granted and not appreciate enough?
The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

The VIA Institute on Character classifies 24 character strengths in six categories:

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge** - Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge, including **Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment, Love of Learning** and **Perspective** (wisdom).

2. **Courage** - Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal, including: **Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty** and **Zest**.

3. **Humanity** - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others including **Love, Kindness** and **Social Intelligence**.

4. **Justice** - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life including **Teamwork, Fairness**, and **Leadership**.

5. **Temperance** – Strengths that protect against excess including **Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence**, and **Self-Regulation** (self-control).

6. **Transcendence** - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning including **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor**, and **Spirituality**.

From the VIA Institute on Character.

Visit their website a [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org). You can print out an expanded list of these strengths in several different formats, including a "word cloud" and a poster. The color poster with pictures is great for children: [http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Poster.pdf](http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Poster.pdf).
What We Treasure