

# Highlighting the Shadows

*Identifying Strengths in Your Most Difficult Cases*

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# Objectives

- Understanding what strengths are and how to incorporate a strengths based perspective
- Becoming a strengths detective and shifting focus from problem oriented to strength building
- Understanding the importance of focusing on strengths especially in difficult circumstances
- Importance of using strengths within a team process

# Definitions

- Strength
  - the quality that allows someone to deal with problems in a determined and effective way
  - a strong or positive quality
- Strength-Based
  - Services and supports are based on the identified strengths of the child and family



# Strength-Based Orientation in Systems

- All families have strengths. Their strengths are unique and depend on the family's beliefs, cultural background, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc.
- The absence of particular competencies within families or individuals should not be seen as a failure or inadequacy on the part of the family or individual. Sometimes the formal or informal human service system fails to promote opportunities for a family to display or learn competencies they need.

# Strength-Based Orientation in Systems

- Families with problems are not "broken" and "needing to be fixed." A strength based orientation means that families are approached in ways that focus and build on the positive aspects of functioning. Providers not only accept but highly value individual differences among families and family members.
- The goal of intervention is not "doing for people." The goal is to work with families as partners in order to help them become less dependent on agencies. This means that professionals are not viewed as experts that are expected to solve a family's problems

# Strengths Discovery & Family Story

- Gathered through observation, discussion, and activities
- Completed after meeting the family on more than one occasion
- Ideally with more than one person
- Should be fun and focused on what makes their family unique
- Culturally Competent
  - Don't forget about traditions, holidays, customs

# Strengths Discovering

- Ignored Strengths
  - Simply overlooked because no one was looking for them
  - Excellent cook, piano player
- Hidden Strengths
  - Reframing stumbling blocks into stepping stones
  - Builds empathy among teams members
  - Allows teams to see beyond pathology/labels

# Buried Strengths

Problem Statement	Potential Need Areas	Possible Reframe
Runs away	Supervision, Boredom	
Assaultive, Aggressive	Social skills, safety, communication	
Family is always in crisis	External pressure, Basic Needs, Unspoken Conflicts	
Negative Peer Group	Loneliness, Excitement	
Family is dysfunctional	Fear of change, external stressors	
Can't form Relationships	Trust, Safety, Cultural	

## *Ursula the Cecaelia.*



Successful Businesswoman.  
Savvy Negotiator. Creative Problem-Solver.

A former employee of King Triton, Ursula was a skilled magician with a genuine desire to help out less fortunate merfolk. She was killed by the hands of the foot-walker enemy but will be remembered for her theatrical presence and larger-than-life personality.

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Everyone has strengths!

- Make strengths functional
- Recognize even the baby steps at successes
- Model for the team how to be strengths-based





### *Town Mourns Loss of Hero*

Gaston, 26, of Small Town, France died as he lived – falling for Belle. He valiantly gave his life leading an attempted rescue of the kidnapped woman. In life, he was a confident hunter and body builder who always placed interpersonal relationships above books and other forms of entertainment. Beloved by all the townspeople, he was admired for his mastery of competitive spitting, unusually large consumption of eggs, and rustic decorating taste. My, what a guy.

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Gaston

Beauty & the Beast

### **HIS MAJESTY KING "SCAR" TAKA**



The charismatic orator was a leader in time of crisis and created a rare interspecies alliance between lions and hyenas. Preceded in death by his brother Mufasa. Survived by his nephew Simba, and probably all the other inbred lions in his kingdom.

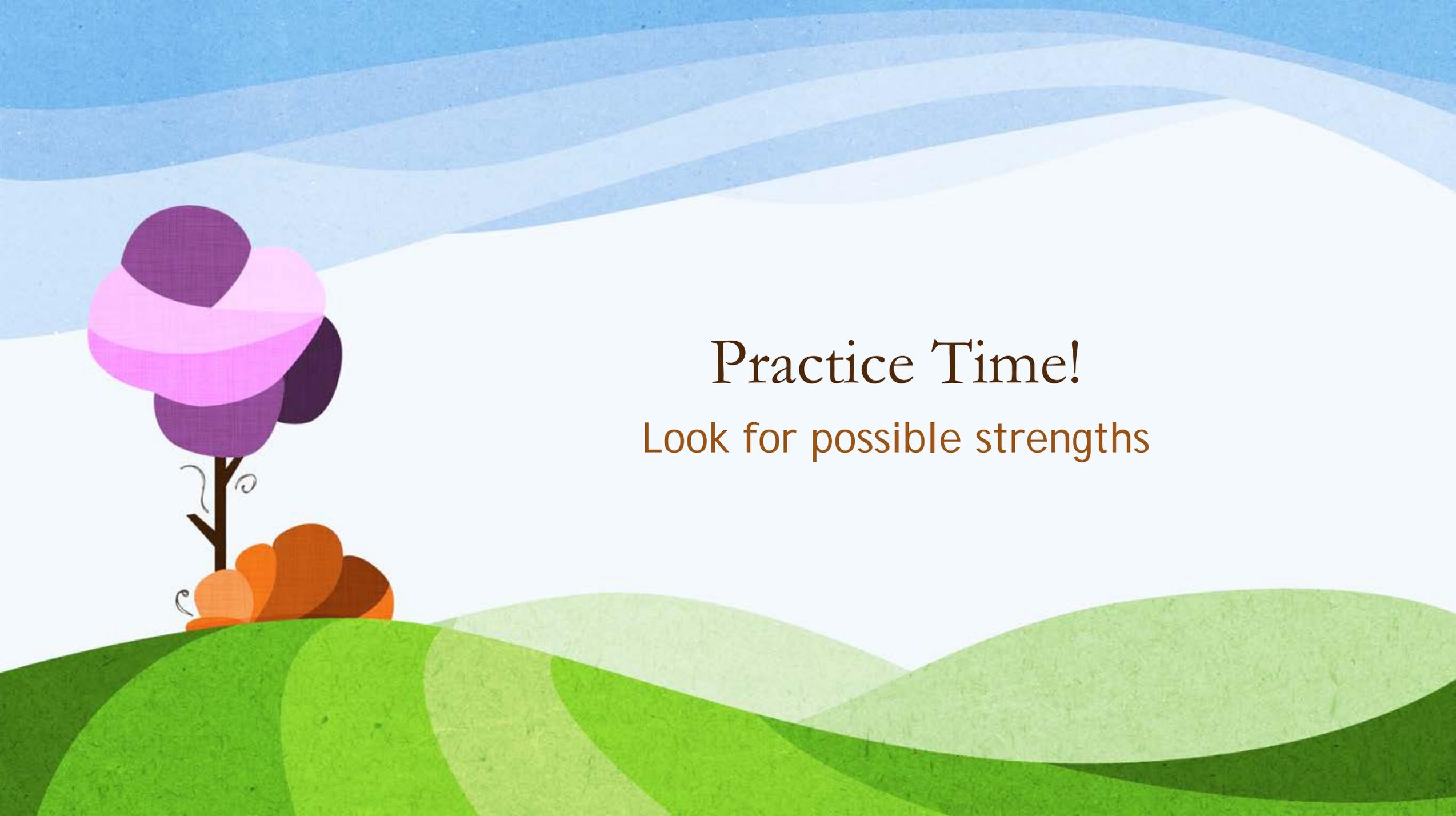
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Scar

The Lion King

# Activities to Understand Family Strengths

- Family Genogram
- Photos
- Strength Chats
  - Inventories, Scales
- Completed Strengths Discovery
- Team, Individual, Family Flags, Coat of Arms, License Plates, etc.



Practice Time!  
Look for possible strengths







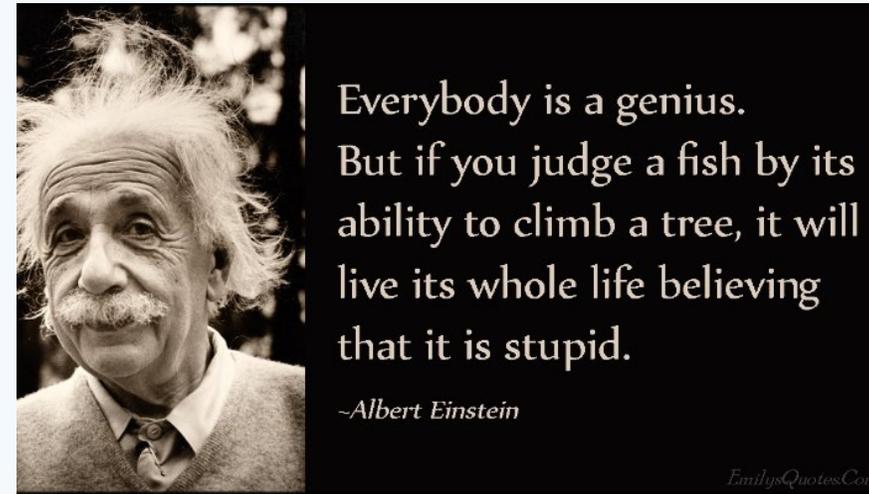
# Child and Family Team

Using Strengths in the Team Process



# Points to Remember

- **Strengths-based means:**  
Services and supports are based on the identified strengths of the child and family.
- The strengths of the family and child/youth are the most useful ingredients for **making plans that work.**



# Using Strengths in Team Meetings

- Set ground rules that are strengths-based rather than negativistic
- Start each meeting with successes and individual team member strengths
  - Challenge professionals to look outside of their experience in the field
- Reward people for modeling strengths based language

# Brainstorming in Meetings

- Make sure the team is comfortable using “every idea counts” to generate large list of options.
- The Team will look at the list of brainstormed options and decide which strategies to utilize to meet the need.
- From the list of all possible options choose only those that can match with strengths
  - Remember strengths are discussed at the beginning
    - Refer team back to this list
    - If needed, post it right beside the brainstorming list
  - Do not choose an option just because someone likes it or because that service or program has an opening.
    - This is hardest for the professionals in the room

# WHY Strengthen Strategies

- When an option/strategy matches the strengths of family members, it is much more likely that it will work to meet the needs.
- Example: Youth is outspoken, honest, stands up for other kids and thinks he may want to be a lawyer when he grows up.
- Options might be:
  - 1. Participate in peer conflict resolution/Mock Trial
  - 2. Tape record thoughts for later discussion.



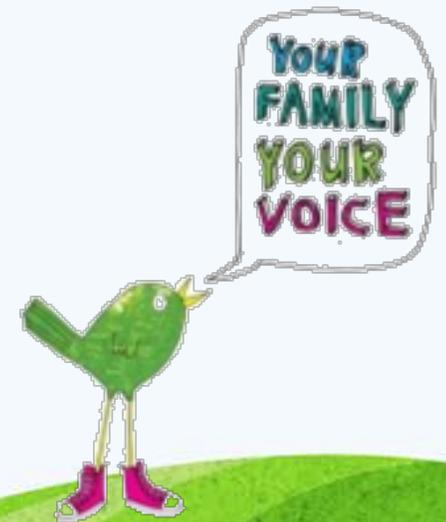
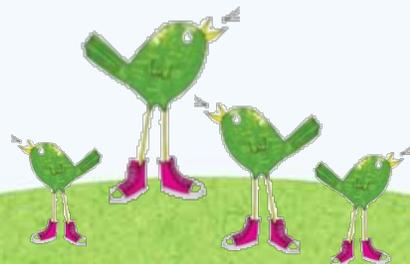
# Practice

- First let's identify possible strengths
  - Child
  - Dad
  - Grandfather
- Now let's create a list of possible strategies
- Think beyond services



# Key Points to Remember

- Individuals, Children, Youth and Families have strengths and can change
- Families deserve respect
- Families, relatives and communities are our allies and best resources



A stylized, colorful illustration of a landscape. The foreground features rolling green hills in various shades of green, with a dark brown path winding through them. On the left, there are several stylized trees and plants: a large green tree, a purple flower, and an orange flower. A small red bird is flying in the sky above the trees. The background consists of light blue and white wavy bands representing a sky or water.

# Questions?

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