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Strengths – A Hidden Opportunity for Improving Interactions

Overview: When a relationship struggles, we sometimes forget the power of our own, and our partner's, strengths. This Relationship Builder helps you and your partner identify strengths that you can use when you disagree.

Instructions: Create a list of strengths that you and your partner each have. Then, go back and circle *your own* strengths that might be able to be used in the conflict resolution process. For example, you might write of yourself "empathetic, brave, dependable, warm-hearted, strong, a good parent, a good provider." Of those, I would personally circle "empathetic, dependable, and warm-hearted" as strengths that have potential to help in the conflict resolution process.

The idea of this exercise is to get you to identify these strengths, then think creatively about how to use the strengths you each have to better communicate with each other. In the example above, I might start brainstorming about how I could act more empathetically towards my partner when we are disagreeing. Jotting down notes often helps me work through my thoughts, and it may help you, as well.

When thinking about empathy, it makes sense to ask your partner to identify moments when s/he feels you are being empathetic, to reinforce what works in that area. You may find that while you think you are being empathetic, your partner might think you are being critical or simply not pick up on your feelings.

At a future time, you could get together and have a relaxed and supportive conversation in which you share with your partner what you think his or her strengths are, as well as what resolutions you are making to use your positives to improve your conflict resolution skills. Make sure to focus on the positives in this conversation!

On a separate piece of paper:

My Strengths

My Partner's Strengths