



# YOUR CHILD'S CHARACTER STRENGTHS:

4 STEPS TO  
DEVELOPING FAMILY  
WELLBEING



# Your Child's Character Strengths: 4 Steps to Developing Family Wellbeing

Research into the science of wellbeing (also known as positive psychology) has made enormous progress in the past 20 years. Today, we have a deep understanding of the elements that contribute to our health and happiness – and children and adults alike can learn the skills and adopt the mindset necessary to build and manage lifelong wellbeing.

Underpinning the field of positive psychology is the science of character strengths. Developing and utilising character strengths has been linked to increased life satisfaction in addition to improved health, academic and professional outcomes.

Niño Early Learning Adventure's e-book *Your Child's Character Strengths: 4 Steps to Developing Family Wellbeing* presents an introduction into the VIA classification of character strengths, an overview of the benefits of a strengths focus, plus evidence-based strategies to help you develop character strengths in yourself and your child.

## What are Character Strengths?

Character strengths are defined as a pre-existing capacity for a way of thinking, feeling, and behaving that comes naturally and easily to a person, enabling high functioning development and performance. Character strengths are the qualities that come most naturally to you.



## Why are Character Strengths important?

Research has found that people who know and use their character strengths:

### ARE HAPPIER

Studies show that people who actively use their strengths enjoy a greater sense of wellbeing, increased happiness and lower levels of depression.

### ARE LESS STRESSED

Studies reveal that people who lead with their character strengths report enhanced positivity and lower levels of stress.

### FEEL HEALTHIER

The use of character strengths is associated with healthy behaviours including leading physical activity, pursuing enjoyable activities and eating well.

### EXPERIENCE GREATER LIFE SATISFACTION

Studies have found that people who use four or more of their top character strengths at work are more likely to experience job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement, and meaning in their work.

### ARE MORE CONFIDENT

Strengths knowledge and strengths-use is linked to higher levels of self-efficacy (confidence) and a belief in our ability to achieve goals.

### EXPERIENCE FASTER GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Children and adults learn faster and perform better when working with their strengths.

### ARE CREATIVE & AGILE

Studies reveal that the feelings of authenticity, vitality and concentration created by developing strengths encourage greater flexibility, the inclination to engage in more creative and proactive behaviours, and to enjoy enhanced attention and endurance.

## Identifying Character Strengths using the VIA Framework

Whilst there are several strengths frameworks, the one most commonly referenced in positive psychology and education is the VIA (Values in Action) Character Strengths Classification. Niño ELA's methodology is also grounded in this framework, informing the way we educate and care for children at every centre.

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths was developed by leading positive psychology and education researchers Professors Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman. They identified 24 character strengths which are classified under 6 virtues that appear to be universally valued across cultures, religions and history. Everyone possesses all 24 character strengths, with some strengths being more developed than others – giving each person a unique character profile.

**Your top 5 strengths are considered to be your signature strengths. They are the strengths that are effortless and natural to use.**

To be a signature strength, it is essential that the trait be:

- Essential to your personality
- Energising and joy-bringing
- Easy and natural to engage with

Research reveals that with focused and deliberate use, you can nurture and develop a strength which is of value to you. The VIA Classification of Character Strengths has a free survey that can be taken to better understand your unique combination of strengths.

## Identifying Characters Strengths in Your Children

Whilst there is no current research that specifically addresses character development in children, there is considerable evidence identifying the early emergence of the aforementioned 24 strengths in children.

Examples of early emerging character strengths include:

### Kindness:

Children - even those beneath the age of 24 months - have been found to respond with kindness and empathy to sad events.

### Teamwork:

Sharing toys and engaging in cooperation are early examples of teamwork, which emerges in toddlers and continue to develop in the early years.

### Justice and Fairness:

As their verbal abilities develop, toddlers can express concern with issues of justice and fairness.

### Persistence:

Toddlers are naturally relentless, and capable of intense focus and persistence in achieving their goals.

### Gratitude:

Children can express gratitude – a corollary of joy and pleasure – from an early age.

### Humour:

An ability to see the funny side of life can appear in very small children. Humour is a strength linked to resilience, and an enhanced capacity for balanced perspective.

### Moral Judgment:

Children begin to develop an understanding of right and wrong from an early age.

## The Benefits of a Strengths Focus in Children

There are a multitude of benefits for children when we engage with them on a strengths-focused basis. They may:

**Develop Faster:** Supporting your child's natural strengths and inclinations allows them to accelerate their development. By focusing on strengths, children's potential can be elevated from excellent to outstanding.

**Enjoy Enhanced Wellbeing:** The use of strengths is associated with an increase in life satisfaction, confidence and positive emotions.

**Create Deeper Bonds:** Engaging with your child based on their strengths helps to foster a better parent-child connection. When we engage with the best in one-another, we build bonds of trust and affection.



## The 4 Steps to Developing a Strengths Focus in Your Family

Connecting with your own innate character strengths enhances not only your wellbeing and sense of joy in life – it supports the development of your child and gifts them confidence, resilience and an intuitive self-knowing. Here's how you can develop a positive psychology-influenced strength focus in your family.

### Step 1

#### **Understand your own character strengths**

It is important to become aware of your own core character strengths. Undertake your own profile survey at VIA. By developing character strengths literacy, you will better be able to identify and foster these strengths within your family. You're your newfound language of strengths, spend time exploring how you bring your character strengths to life across your life – both in the workplace and at home, as a partner, friend and parent. How do you feel when you are in flow with your strengths?

### Step 2

#### **Become a strength sleuth**

Practice strength spotting by looking for and acknowledging character strengths in your family members. When are your children most energised, creative and at their best? Consider which strengths underpin these positive experiences. Does your child enjoy the great outdoors, appreciating the sights, sounds and tactile experiences of nature? Perhaps their character strength is an appreciation of beauty. Maybe your child likes puzzles, word-games and taking things apart before putting them back together. Their character strength may be persistence.

Character strengths are a wonderful lens through which to observe a child's behaviour – particularly when it is challenging. As parents and educators, it supports our understanding of the motivation behind their behaviour. Does your child insist on performing certain tasks on their own? This can be frustrating, especially when we need them to move a little faster. If we interrogate their desire for independence further, we note they are using their character strength of persistence to master life skills – whether tying shoelaces or doing up a zipper.



### Step 3

#### **Reinforce character strengths**

Focus on and reinforce your child's strengths by acknowledging them as they appear. This positive reinforcement helps your child to name their character strengths, and to begin building upon them. An example of positive reinforcement may be telling your child how kind it was for them to share their toys with a friend. You can then name this quality explicitly, by stating that 'kindness is one of your great strengths'.



### Step 4

#### **Link character strengths to feelings**

Reminiscing about how using their character strengths make them feel will help your child to reinforce positive emotions about their natural qualities, supporting them to adopt the strength as a core self-belief. i.e. 'I am a kind person.' You could reflect on a behaviour, and invite inquiry with questions such as 'How did you feel when you used your character strength of kindness with Jacinta?'

To learn more about developing character strengths in your family and to support your child to be their best, visit the VIA website.



## **Let the Adventure Begin!**

Niño Early Learning Adventures are leading Australia's Positive Education movement. In collaboration with Geelong Grammar School, Niño's comprehensive syllabus empowers our educators and carers to foster character strengths in your child.

To register your interest in Niño's Early Learning Adventure centres or to learn more about our unique approach to wellbeing and the family, click [here](#).



**niño**  
Early Learning Adventures