

What Are the 24 Character Strengths?

Everyone has varying degrees of these positive traits

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People often look for good character in others, whether they are employees, students, friends, or potential dating partners. According to positive psychology, good character is exemplified by 24 widely valued character strengths.

Learn how the idea of these character strengths came about, how they are organized, and how to assess which strengths a person may possess. We also share ways to maximize one's character strengths, enabling a person to live to their fullest potential.

History of the 24 Character Strengths

The notion of character strengths was first introduced by psychologists Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson. Seligman and Neal Mayerson, another psychologist, created the Values In Action (VIA) Institute on Character, which uses the VIA Inventory of Strengths developed by Peterson to identify people's positive character strengths.

A character strength inventory can identify both a person's strengths and ways they can use those strengths in their life. Building on one's positive character strengths can help them improve their life and emotional well-being, as well as address the challenges and difficulties they are facing.

It's also important to note that the 24 character strengths that these tools identify have been studied across cultures. These strengths are important components of individual and social well-being globally, with different strengths predicting different outcomes.

For instance, intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal character strengths can help a person better cope with work-related stressors, ultimately impacting their level of job satisfaction. Interventions that help build character strengths can also improve the psychological well-being of people with chronic illnesses.

Classification of Character Strengths

The 24 character strengths are divided into six classes of virtues: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Here is a closer look at the six virtues and the positive character strengths that are grouped with each of them.

Wisdom

Those who score high in the area of wisdom tend to have character strengths that lead them to acquire knowledge and use it in creative and useful ways. The core wisdom character strengths are:

- **Creativity:** Thinking of new ways to do things
- **Curiosity:** Taking an interest in a wide variety of topics
- **Open-mindedness:** Examining things from all sides; thinking things through
- **Love of learning:** Mastering new topics, skills, and bodies of research
- **Perspective:** Being able to provide wise counsel to others; looking at the world in a way that makes sense

Courage

People who score high in courage have emotional character strengths that allow them to accomplish goals despite any opposition they face—whether internal or external. The character strengths associated with courage are:

- **Honesty:** Speaking the truth; being authentic and genuine
- **Bravery:** Embracing challenges, difficulties, or pain; not shrinking from threat
- **Persistence:** Finishing things once they are started
- **Zest:** Approaching all things in life with energy and excitement

Humanity

Those who score high in humanity have a range of interpersonal character strengths that involve caring for and befriending others. These core character strengths are:

- **Kindness:** Doing favors and good deeds
- **Love:** Valuing close relations with others
- **Social intelligence:** Being aware of other people's motives and feelings

Justice

People who are strong in justice tend to possess civic strengths that underscore the importance of a healthy community. The character strengths in the justice group are:

- **Fairness:** Treating all people the same
- **Leadership:** Organizing group activities and making sure they happen
- **Teamwork:** Working well with others as a group or a team

Temperance

Those who score high in temperance tend to have strengths that protect against the excesses in life. These strengths are:

- **Forgiveness:** Forgiving others who have wronged them
- **Modesty:** Letting one's successes and accomplishments stand on their own
- **Prudence:** Avoiding doing things they might regret; making good choices
- **Self-regulation:** Being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

Transcendence

People who are strong in transcendence tend to forge connections with God, the universe, or religions that provide meaning, purpose, and understanding. The core positive character strengths associated with transcendence are:

- **Appreciation of beauty:** Noticing and appreciating beauty and excellence in everything
- **Gratitude:** Being thankful for the good things; taking time to express thanks
- **Hope:** Expecting the best; working to make it happen; believing good things are possible
- **Humor:** Making other people smile or laugh; enjoying jokes
- **Religiousness:** Having a solid belief about a higher purpose and meaning of life

Positive Character Traits List

The 24 positive character strengths are split into six virtue classes:

- **Wisdom:** Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective
- **Courage:** Honesty, bravery, persistence, zest
- **Humanity:** Kindness, love, social intelligence
- **Justice:** Fairness, leadership, teamwork
- **Temperance:** Forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation
- **Transcendence:** Appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness

How Character Strengths Are Assessed

A person's character strengths can be determined using one of two inventories. The VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) is for people aged 18 and older, while the VIA Inventory of Strengths—Youth Version (VIA-Youth) is designed for kids and teens aged 10 to 17.

The goal behind the classification of strengths is to focus on what is right about people rather than pathologize what is wrong with them. It's important to point out that people typically have varying degrees of each positive character strength. In other words, they will be high in some strengths, average in some, and low in others.

There is no single indicator of good character. Instead, a person's character should be viewed across a continuum.

The VIA Institute on Character stresses that the traits not included as signature strengths are not necessarily weaknesses, but rather lesser strengths in comparison to the others. Likewise, the top five strengths should not be rigidly interpreted because there are usually no meaningful differences in their magnitudes.

Uses for Character Strengths

One of the main reasons for assessing positive character strengths is to use this information to better understand, identify, and build on these strengths. For example, identifying and harnessing character strengths can help young people experience greater academic success. It can also help people increase feelings of happiness.

Knowing a person's character strengths provides a lens through which psychologists, educators, and even parents can look. It helps them see not only what makes a person unique but also enables them to better understand how to help that person build on those strengths to improve their situations or outcomes.

For example, one strategy involves encouraging people to use their signature strengths in a new way each week. Studies have found that taking this approach can lead to increases in happiness and decreases in depression. Another approach involves focusing on a person's lowest-rated character strengths in an attempt to enhance those areas of their lives.

Research has demonstrated that traumatic events can change a person's character

strengths, as evidenced by studies investigating the effects of shooting tragedies. Other studies note that some character strengths can help people better cope with these types of situations, such as was found with people who lived through Hurricane Michael, a category 5 storm.

Summary

Overall, determining and using one's character strengths has the potential to improve their health and well-being, enhance their job performance, and improve their academic success. It's also a more positive way of viewing and improving oneself than focusing on their shortcomings and faults.

13 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

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