Module 1: Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment

A Process for Working with Transition-Age Youth and Young Adults

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TIP and NNYT Websites

Transition to Independence Process (TIP) Model  
http://NNYT.TIPstars.org

National Network on Youth Transition (NNYT) for Behavioral Health  
http://nnyt.fmhi.usf.edu

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>About TIP Model Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Author's Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>About Orientation and Training Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2</td>
<td>Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3</td>
<td>Three Tier Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4</td>
<td>Instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>About this Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1</td>
<td>Learning Objectives for this Module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2</td>
<td>Recommended Citation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Overview of Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Purpose of Strength Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Description of Strength Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Comparison to Traditional Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3</td>
<td>Relationship to the TIP Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Application of Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Process Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Engage Young Person and Key Players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Conduct Semi-Structured Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Begin Futures Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Meeting the Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Resources and Selected Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Appendices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Strength Discovery Questions for Young Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Strength Discovery Questions for Family or Other Informal Key Players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>How to Obtain a Certificate of Completion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. About TIP Training

1.1 Author’s Note

The Transition to Independence Process (TIP) system is an evidence-supported model based on published studies that demonstrate improvement in real-life outcomes for youth and young adults with emotional/behavioral difficulties (EBD). These outcomes have been demonstrated at sites where personnel have undergone competency-based training that is conducted at the community site and through teleconference supports.

The TIP model training materials are designed for personnel serving transition-age youth and young adults and their families. The TIP Model Orientation Modules provide a helpful orientation for new staff in learning about the TIP model, but the modules cannot ensure proficiency in the application of the principles and practices of the TIP system.

The National Network on Youth Transition for Behavioral Health (NNYT) now has two “hubs” – one at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa FL and one at Stars Behavioral Health Group (SBHG) in Long Beach CA. SBHG serves as the NNYT Purveyor for the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) model and operates the NNYT Stars Training Academy. Although both NNYT hubs are involved in evaluation and continuing quality improvement efforts, the USF hub has more of an exclusive evaluation/research emphasis. This document has been adapted by NNYT faculty at the Department of Child & Family Studies, College of Behavioral & Community Sciences, University of South Florida for use by SBHG and NNYT under a contract from SBHG.

The faculty and staff of NNYT and SBHG hope that you find our TIP and NNYT website resources to be of value to you and your personnel. Please let us know if you would like to arrange for establishing a TIP model site for improving the progress and outcomes of youth and young adults with EBD and their families.

1.2 About Orientation and Training Options

1.2.1 Purpose

The TIP Model Orientation Modules provide a helpful orientation to the TIP model. The modules cannot ensure proficiency in the application of the principles and practices of the TIP system. Many sites which are receiving on-site, competency-based training in the TIP model, find that the most valuable use of these modules is for orienting new personnel to the TIP system. These personnel can then receive competency-based training through field-based coaching and some competency-based training by their supervisor and NNYT Certified TIP Model Consultants.
1.2.2 Audience

These modules make frequent reference to the Transition Facilitator and his or her role in assisting transition-age youth and young adults with EBD and their families. Transition Facilitators are the primary audience for the orientation, however, anyone who works with youth and young adults in transition (e.g., teachers, mental health specialists, employment specialists, transition specialists, guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, juvenile justice personnel, supervisors, parents, foster parents, and guardians) may find the orientation useful for learning about the TIP system.

1.2.3 Three Tier Training

The TIP Model orientation and training is supported across three Tiers.

Tier I: Overview of the TIP Model


The Transition Handbook:

- Brookes Publishing Company web site: www.brookespublishing.com/clark
- For more information regarding the Transition Handbook or the TIP system, visit our TIP web site or NNYT web site listed on page 2 of this module.

The TIP Model Orientation Modules section of the TIP website (http://NNYT.TIPstars.org) contains a quiz to support your reading of Chapter 2 in learning about the TIP Model.

Tier II: TIP Model Orientation Modules

The modules provide web-based educational opportunities to learn about each of the principles and core practices of the TIP model and present suggestions for putting the practices into action. The modules contain scenarios, sample forms, quick references, worksheets and other tools for applying the core practices. Tier II includes TIP Model Orientation Modules addressing the following practices:
Module 1: Strength-Discovery and Needs Assessment  
Module 2: Futures Planning  
Module 3: Rationales  
Module 4: In-vivo Teaching  
Module 5: Social Problem Solving (SODAS)  
Module 6: Prevention Planning for High Risk Behaviors  
Module 7: Mediation with Young People and Key Players (SCORA)

Tier III: Competency-Based Training

NNYT and SBHG provide flexible, on-site, competency-based training and support for implementing the TIP model with agencies and community collaboratives. The NNYT TIP Model Consultants use our Behavior Rehearsal Manuals for the on-site training and coaching of transition facilitators and their supervisory personnel to ensure proficiency in the application of the core competency practices. Please contact us for on-site training and site capacity-building offerings. (See Page 2 for our contact information).

1.2.4 Instructions

We strongly suggest that you read Chapter 2 of the above mentioned *Transition Handbook* to provide you with a context for the practices presented in Tier 2 modules.

1.3 About This Module

1.3.1 Learning Objectives for this Module

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Describe what Strength Discovery is and how it is conducted.
- Explain why Strength Discovery is conducted, and how it supports person-centered planning.
- Describe when to use Strength Discovery.
- Distinguish between strength-based and traditional approaches to assessment.

1.3.2 Recommended Citation

2. Overview of Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment

2.1 Purpose of Strength Discovery

The primary purpose of Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment is to identify strengths and resources of the young person, his or her family, and his or her other supports so that a Transition Facilitation Plan can be developed from the strength-based foundation that emerges through this assessment. The three objectives of the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process are as follows:

1. **Learn about the strengths and resources of the young person and his or her family.**

   By learning about the individual and identifying strengths and resources, instead of deficits, we may facilitate collaboration and break down barriers to achieving goals.

2. **Demonstrate interest in the young person and the perspectives of people who are important to him/her.**

   The young person, his or her family, friends, and other key players need to feel they can trust the facilitator in order to rely on him/her. Strength Discovery provides an opportunity for the facilitator to show genuine interest in the individual and his or her key players, which can be the first step to improving rapport and developing collaborative relationships with them.

3. **Encourage the young person and his or her key players to see the young person in a positive light.**

   By communicating and sharing areas of strength, the young person and key players begin to see the young person and family, often for the first time, as capable of successful transition. The young person and family develop a more positive and hopeful outlook on their future, which is vital to the transition planning process. The focus on communicating strengths and resources changes
the prevalent perspectives of the young person’s deficits and the lack of resources available to deal with the challenges presented to the family. The transition planning process becomes so much easier for all involved.

Strength discovery is a powerful approach which often yields active involvement on the part of the young person and those around him or her; a sharp contrast to what typically occurs with deficit-based assessments that constantly revisit the young person’s impairments, problems, and/or pathologies.

Nelson and Pearson, 1991

2.2 Description of Strength Discovery

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment is a process for creating a profile of a young person’s personal and ecological resources (i.e., natural support system), needs and wants, as well as exploring his or her dreams and aspirations across the domains of:

- Employment and Career
- Educational Opportunities
- Living Situation
- Personal Effectiveness and Well-being
- Community Life Functioning.

Strength Discovery is not:

- a specific technique, nor
- a prescription for how to do things
- a one-interview event.
Rather, Strength Discovery is:

- an overall approach, and
- a set of guidelines on what to do and what not to do.
- an evolving profile of the young person and his or her situation that evolves over time.

The young person’s profile emerges during informal, semi-structured interviews sometimes referred to as “strengths chats” (VanDeBerg & Grealish, 1996). A transition facilitator would initiate these interviews or “chats” to identify strengths and resources of the young person, his or her family, and his or her other supports from the perspectives of the young person and family. What is learned provides a strength-based foundation for building a Transition Facilitation Plan.

Key players play an integral part in Strength Discovery and transition planning by providing support and resources to the young person and family. When key players are not identified, or are identified but do not adequately participate, their roles may be minimized or overlooked during the young person’s transition.
Benefits of the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment Process

- Demonstrates interest in a young person and the people who are important to him/her.
- Builds rapport between the transition facilitator and the young person.
- Views the young person as a resource, the source of solutions, not the problem.
- Emphasizes the young person’s strengths.
- Helps young people and families to realize their abilities.
- Provides the transition facilitator with an understanding of the young person’s environment.
- Encourages those who work with these young people to build solutions from these areas of strength.
- Helps the facilitator, and more importantly, the young person and others in the young person’s life, to see the young person in a positive light.
- Facilitates collaboration and the breaking down of barriers.
- Produces information for Futures Planning.

A strength-based approach is empowering—it creates a sense of personal accomplishment; contributes to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults; and contributes to resiliency in personal, social, and academic arenas during times of adversity and stress (Epstein & Sharma, 1998; Rapp, 1998; VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996).
2.3 Theory

2.3.1 Background

Strength-based assessment has its roots in the writings of Bertha Capen Reynolds, a social worker who was influential in creating a strength-based theory. A team from the University of Kansas, including Dennis Saleebey, Charles Rapp & Anne Weick expanded on the work done by Reynolds and formally developed a strength-based practice.

The Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process is adapted from VanDenBerg & Grealish (1996) to serve the transition-age youth and young adult population with emotional and behavioral difficulties (EBD). Other assessment processes have influenced this process ever further in introducing the notion of the function that a behavior might be playing for a young person (e.g., Hieneman et al, 1999).

Fortunately, a strengths perspective, under which many like-minded theorists are assembling, has been working its way into the forefront (Wieck, Rapp, Sullivan, & Kisthardt, 1989). This perspective is a mindset to approach clients with a greater concern for their strengths and competencies and to discover mutually how these personal resources can be applied to building solutions.

“A strength-based approach encourages those who work with young people “to see the possibilities rather than the problems, options rather than the constraints, and once seen, achievement can occur. As long as we stay in the much and mire of deficits, we cannot achieve.”

2.3.2 Comparison to Traditional Assessments

In the past, the accepted and regularly utilized model was based on pathology and sought to identify, diagnose, and treat problems. This medical model traditionally focused on assessment of deficits and problems (Milne, Edwards, & Murchie, 2001). In addition to this model providing a foundation from which people often take a negative perspective, finding fault and failures in these young people, the young people themselves were often viewed as the problem. “Practices that are preoccupied with deficits can interfere with achievement and excellence.” (Anderson, Cave, & McDowell, 2001). The unintended effect can be to:

- Demoralize youth and erode self-confidence
- Reduce motivation and aspirations to excel
- Focus on past failures.”

Challenging circumstances can arise for youth in transition with EBD. Recognizing and balancing strengths and resources in the context of those situations is important. Unfortunately, many individuals who work with young people with EBD often take the traditional approach to working with this population, focusing on what is wrong, what is missing, and what is abnormal while the strengths and healthy patterns are passed over and ignored.

The Strength Discovery process is intended to overcome limitations of formal, deficit-based assessment. Strength-based approaches focus much more on action than on uncovering all of the problem areas and ensuring that the individual understands the problems. A strengths-based perspective views the individual as a great resource and values the individual’s input in the process of intervention, believing that he or she has strengths that should be tapped.

Research supports the use of a strengths-based approach for achieving better outcomes for young people with EBD.
Armstrong, et.al. (2003) found that youth who showed improvement in strength-based adaptive behaviors achieved better outcomes.

Bender, et.al. (2006) reported that a systematic review of the empirical literature on treatment interventions for youth (ages 12 to 18) with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders indentified a strength-based approach as a feature of effective services.

Cox (2006) reported that youth with emotional or behavioral disorders who received mental health services incorporating strength-based assessment from highly strength-based therapists made better improvements in functioning over time compared to similar youth who did not receive strength-based assessment and care.

In a study conducted by Styron, et.al. (2006), chart reviews indicated that transition-age youth receiving “strengths-focused” treatment (where the youth’s social and cognitive strengths and assets were integrated into the treatment plan) had fewer symptoms, reported less loneliness, fewer problems, higher functioning, and greater satisfaction with services compared to youth who did not receive “strengths-focused” treatment as part of a comprehensive system of services and supports.

Chart A highlights the differences between a strengths-based and a deficits-based approach.

**Chart A: Comparison of Deficits-based and Strengths-based Approaches**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficits-based</th>
<th>Strengths-based</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relies on professionals</td>
<td>Relies on key players including family, teachers, coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on the past</td>
<td>Focuses on the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific technique</td>
<td>General approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses formal tools</td>
<td>Uses both formal and informal tools (e.g., Dare to Dream, Interest Inventory)</td>
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2.3.3. Relationship to the TIP Model

Chart B: How the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment Puts the TIP System into Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIP Guideline</th>
<th>Strength Discovery &amp; Needs Assessment</th>
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| 1. Engage young people through relationship development, person-centered planning, and a focus on their futures. | • Strength Discovery engages young people by facilitating a trusting relationship between the facilitator, young person, and key players, and also by laying a foundation for setting strength-based goals for the future.  
• Process respects the cultural and familial values and the young peoples’ perspectives. |
| 2. Tailor services and supports to be accessible, coordinated, appealing, non-stigmatizing, developmentally-appropriate – and building on strengths to enable the young people to pursue their goals across relevant transition domains. | • Strength Discovery provides information for creating transition plans that include appealing services and supports built on strengths.  
• Involving key players in Strength Discovery paves the way for future coordination of services and supports. |
| 3. Acknowledge and develop personal choice and social responsibility with young people. | • Young people identify their own dreams and goals thus maximizing the likelihood of their success. |
| 4. Ensure a safety-net of support by involving a young person’s parents, family members, and other informal and formal key players. | • Reveals the needs of parents, family members, and other informal and formal key players to support the young person’s transition and provides a structure for mediating differences and encouraging continued commitment. |
| 5. | Enhance young persons’ competencies to assist them in achieving greater self-sufficiency and confidence. | • By utilizing Strength Discovery and functional assessment methods, facilitators teach meaningful skills which are important to young people.  
• Strength Discovery gives young people opportunities to develop and practice skills in problem-solving, self-advocacy, and self-evaluation. |
| 6. | Maintain an outcome focus in the TIP system at the young person, program, and community levels. | • Engaging the young person in Strength Discovery increases the likelihood that the young person will continue to focus on achieving his or her goals. |
| 7. | Involve young people, parents, and other community partners in the TIP system at the practice, program, and community levels. | • Strength Discovery fosters relationships which encourage involvement by and partnerships with young people and families. |
3. Application of Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment

3.1 Process Overview

The Strength Discovery process is less formal than most assessment processes, yet more formal than a casual conversation. The process is implemented in three steps as shown in Chart C.

Chart C: Diagram of the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment Process

There is no firm division between the steps. Strength Discovery is an iterative process in which steps overlap and repeat. The following examples illustrate the fluidity of this process.

- While first engaging the young person, a facilitator learns some of the young person’s strengths and dreams for the future.
- During person-centered planning, a young person asks if his new girlfriend could participate in transition planning discussions. The facilitator would engage the girlfriend and have a Strength Discovery conversation with her.
- One of a young person’s goals in her transition plan is “enroll in nursing school.” She decides that nursing is not for her but is unsure what career she would like to pursue. The facilitator would conduct Strength Discovery conversations with her to help the young person redefine her dreams for the future.
3.2 Engage Young Person and Key Players

Soon after being linked with a young person, a facilitator meets with the young person in a youth-friendly, non-stigmatizing location such as:

- Public library
- Fast food restaurant
- Young person’s home
- Community youth group gathering

Facilitators sometimes find it difficult to remain open to the perspectives of the young person, family members, and other key players rather than pursue the deficit trail that is usually documented in the young person’s records. Following are some suggestions for focusing on the strengths and perspectives of the young person rather than on the deficits of the past.

a) **Conduct Strength Discovery conversations first with the young person** before interviewing the family or providers so that one may gain the young person’s trust and more easily focus on the young person’s perspectives.

b) **Utilize “reframing”**, a way of looking at each deficit from a strength perspective and describing the deficit as a skill or asset. Reframing helps the facilitator, young person, and key players to stay focused on strengths and the future rather than on problems and the past. Chart D contains some examples of reframing.
Chart D: Examples of Reframing Deficits as Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A documented deficit...</th>
<th>May indicate this strength...</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Argumentative</td>
<td>• Advocates for himself/herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rebellious</td>
<td>• Courageous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thrill-seeker</td>
<td>• Willing to try new approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Runs away from home</td>
<td>• Takes action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skips school to be with friends</td>
<td>• Is sociable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has tantrums and outbursts</td>
<td>• Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manipulative</td>
<td>• Good at controlling environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attention seeking</td>
<td>• Looks to attach to someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Close-mouthed</td>
<td>• Cautious, protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Class Clown</td>
<td>• Creative, good humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disabled</td>
<td>• Learns detours around roadblocks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c) Adapt approaches for cultural influences.

To engage young people and keep them engaged, a facilitator will need to recognize the young person’s and his or her family’s culture and how the culture influences their decisions and actions. It may be necessary for facilitators to adapt approaches to
facilitate the young person’s and family’s acceptance and application of transition services. Keep in mind that culture encompasses both behavior and beliefs. When applying the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process, a facilitator may need to modify the language used and the processes so that they are applicable to persons in diverse cultures and with varied linguistic heritage.

In order for facilitators to ensure that services and supports are culturally competent, facilitators must be aware of the following:

- their own culture,
- the factors that influence their decisions and color their perspectives,
- the culture of the young person and family,
- the factors that influence the decisions and color the perspectives of the young person and family, and
- how these cultures and factors might influence one’s approach.

The following scenario shows how culture might influence a facilitator’s approach.

- Facial piercing makes a facilitator extremely uncomfortable. How would he develop a trusting and collaborative relationship with a young woman who has many piercings on her face? How might the facilitator prevent his own discomfort from affecting his verbal and non-verbal communication with the young woman?

  The facilitator could recognize what makes him uncomfortable, understand how he might express discomfort or disapproval in tone, facial expression, and/or body language, and practice culturally sensitive approaches before being faced with uncomfortable situations.
Exercise A: What Influences You?

Write down your answers to the following questions on a sheet of paper. Then ask someone close to you to answer the questions about you. Compare your answers to see if what you think is how you appear to others.

1. What is your culture? (Culture is the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.)
2. How does your culture affect what you do?
3. How does your culture affect what you think?
4. How would your culture facilitate rapport with a young person and his or her family?
5. What makes you uncomfortable?
6. How might other people tell when you hear or see something that makes you uncomfortable?
7. What difficulties might you encounter when working with youth of a different culture?
3.3 **Conduct Semi-Structured Conversations**

In Step 2, a facilitator conducts multiple, brief semi-structured conversations to identify the strengths and resources of the young person and his or her family. Appendix 5.1 and 5.2 contain possible questions that a facilitator might ask the youth or young adult, family member, and other key players. These documents are useful for:

- Practicing Strength Discovery conversations.
- Guiding conversations between a facilitator and young person or key player.
- Recording brief notes during interviews and elaborate notes after conversation is ended.

The order of the questions is not necessarily important. Try to start the conversation with a relevant or proximate situation. For example, if Michael’s grandmother drops him off for the initial interview, the facilitator might ask Michael who brought him to the meeting. This information could naturally lead the conversation into questions about his family.

Depending on the amount of time available for Strength Discovery assessment, consider prioritizing questions and including the most pertinent questions in the initial conversation. Be sure to keep the Strength Discovery interview conversational in nature.
Following are suggestions for the timing, location, participants and approach for conducting Strength Discovery conversations:

**Timing**

- Begin as soon as possible, either during first meeting or when interviewee appears to be open and ready to provide information.

**Location**

- Select youth-friendly, non-stigmatizing locations such as parks, libraries, fast-food restaurants, gyms, home, in the car, and in community locations.
- Do not conduct Strength Discovery conversations in work offices, treatment centers, or from behind a desk.

**Participants**

- Conduct initial conversations one-on-one with the young person.
- Later and in the same manner, interview key players who are selected by the young person to participate in transition planning.
- Conduct key player interviews one-on-one or with the young person.

**Approach**

- Do not read from a list of questions. Integrate the questions into conversations in a logical and easy-flowing manner.
- Ask open-ended (not answerable by yes or no) questions with genuine curiosity.
- Focus on the future. Avoid discussing past problems except as they relate to needs for the future.
• Do not attempt to ask all questions at one time. Space them out over several meetings.

• Summarize the interviewee’s observations.

• Consider doing “themed interviews” which focus on one or a few topics during a conversation. Themed interviews help the young person stay focused and probe a topic in depth. For example, say “Why don’t we talk about your family (education/plans for the future/things you like to do, etc) today?” Possible themes for a Strength Discovery conversation include the following:
  ✓ Interests and preferences
  ✓ Skills, abilities, and competencies
  ✓ Values and traditions
  ✓ Other helpful personal attributes (e.g., sense of humor, resilient)
  ✓ Dreams and aspirations
  ✓ Priority needs and goals for each transition domain.
  ✓ Strategies that worked well in the past
  ✓ Settings that are most comfortable
  ✓ Formal players, family members, relatives, friends, and other people valued by the young person.

• Apply the Qualitative Features of Effective Interactions listed in Chart E.
Chart E: Qualitative Features of Effective Interactions

- Solicit the person’s input throughout interactions.
- Acknowledge the person’s input.
- Remain non-judgmental.
- Avoid lecturing.
- Maintain a pleasant and steady voice tone.
- Express enthusiasm where appropriate.
- Maintain pleasant facial expression, eye contact, and body language.
- Express empathy, concern, care, and encouragement.
- Offer assistance, as appropriate.
- Set limits and expectations, as necessary.
- Use positive descriptive praise.
3.4 Begin Futures Planning

Futures Planning is a process which produces a Transition Facilitation Plan or intervention based on an individual’s strengths and resources which were identified by the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process. The Futures Planning process is presented in Personnel Training Module 2: Futures Planning which is available on the TIP website. (See Page 2 for website and contact information.)

The Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process facilitates Futures Planning in the following ways:

- Some components of a Transition Facilitation Plan (e.g., goals, activities, responsibilities, and timelines) may emerge during Strength Discovery interviews.
- The trusting relationships, and open, honest communication that develops between the facilitator, the young person, and key players during Strength Discovery create the spirit of collaboration which is essential to the Futures Planning process.
- After having gone through the Strength Discovery process, the facilitator, young person, family, and other key players share a common understanding of the interests, strengths, and resources of the young person and his or her family.
- It is easier to set goals from a strength base than from the traditional deficit base. Even the obstacles and needs that were collaboratively identified by the young person and his or her key players can now be put into strength-based, present- and future-oriented goals and action steps.
- Young people are more likely to take ownership of and achieve their goals when they are developed through this strength-focused framework.

When youth and young adults are guided to see their life from a strengths perspective, they and their families are more likely to recognize their power and potential to plan and achieve transition goals.
3.5 Meeting the Challenges

Strength Discovery assessment may appear straightforward but it is actually difficult to do well. Challenges may appear at the organization and individual levels. For example, organizations may require facilitators to assess deficits associated with risk or to use pre-existing assessment protocols. Individual facilitators may be uncomfortable with the semi-structure of interactions or they may be experienced only in deficits-based approaches. By working together, facilitators, organizations, young people and families may overcome challenges. Possible solutions are:

- Incorporate strength discovery into the initial assessment.
- Treat every session and interaction as a strength discovery session... come prepared and record information later.
- Implement case-based reviews to help personnel keep strengths in the forefront.

Exercise B: What are Your Barriers?

Write down your answers to the following questions on a sheet of paper. Use your responses to help yourself and your organization overcome challenges to practicing the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process (e.g., raise challenge during staff meeting, take training and/or practice to increase your competencies.)

When implementing the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment Process in your organization,

a) What organizational challenges have you experienced or expect to experience?

b) How might those organizational challenges be overcome?

c) What are your individual challenges?

d) How might you overcome these challenges?
Following are the most common challenges faced by transition facilitators when applying the Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment process.

**Engaging Young People**

Engagement is influenced by many factors including available time, commitment, and relationships. Strength Discovery, when implemented properly, may increase rapport, trust, and a spirit of collaboration, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging the young person and his or her family.

**Recording Conversations**

How might the facilitator record information while keeping a conversation flowing? The facilitator is not filling in spaces on a form, as is done during a traditional assessment, so he or she will need to operate a bit differently.

The facilitator would take brief notes as the conversation unfolds while continuing to guide the conversation and apply the active listening techniques listed in Chart E. The facilitator writes for very short periods of time, taking down just enough information to complete the Strength Discovery protocol later. It’s helpful to have a good memory when conversations take place in locations where note taking is impossible, such as when driving a car.
Involving Key Players

Young people are sometimes reluctant to identify and involve informal and formal key players in discussions about their futures for reasons such as embarrassment, cultural preference, and the desire for privacy. Because the involvement of key players in transition planning and other activities has been shown to improve outcomes, facilitators need to assist the young person in understanding the benefits to him or herself for involving parents or other family members in the transition process.

Following are essential actions for a transition facilitator when involving key players in transition activities:

- Learn about and follow one’s legal and ethical responsibilities to the family. (In most states, parents are legally responsible for the actions of their child until the age of 18 and must be included in transition planning meetings.)
- Seek to learn about the people who are important to the young person and how they help him/her.
- Develop approaches to assist youth and family with understanding the benefits of involving key players.
- Set clear ground rules with the young person regarding the limits of confidentiality.
- Identify the assistance needed by key players to understand and participate in the transition period. Guide key players to obtain the information and assistance that they need to support the young person’s transition.
  - Assist in mediating differences between the young person and his or her key players.
4. References


5. **Resources and Selected Reading**

- **National Network on Youth Transition (NNYT) for Behavioral Health**  
  http://nnyt.fmhi.usf.edu

- **Transition to Independence Process (TIP) System**  
  http://NNYT.TIPstars.org


- **Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice.**  
  Resources and articles on strength-based assessment using the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) assessment instrument.  
  http://cecp.air.org/interact/expertonline/strength/sba.asp

- **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition**  
  http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/diversity/partIV.asp

- **University of South Florida, College of Behavioral and Community Sciences,** Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Department of Child and Family Studies. Site contains information on research, education, publications, logic models, policies and resources relating to child, youth, and family mental health.  
  http://cfs.fmhi.usf.edu/
Selected Reading


6. Appendices

Appendix 6.1  Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment: 
Possible Questions for Young People

Appendix 6.2  Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment: 
Possible Questions for Family and Other 
Informal Key Players

Appendix 6.3  How to Obtain a Certificate of Completion

Note:
The questions in Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 are useful for:

- Practicing Strength Discovery conversations.
- Guiding conversations between a facilitator and young person or key player.
- Recording brief notes during interviews and elaborate notes after conversation is ended.
Appendix 6.1

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Young People

❖ People Who Are Close to the Young Person
(e.g., family, extended family, relatives, and other informal key players)

● Who would you define as your family?
● Who in your family do you admire the most and why?
● When do you feel the closest to your family?
● What are your happiest memories with your family?
● What do you like most about your mom, dad, sister, brother, aunt, grandmother, etc.?
● What do you think they like most about you?
● Who would you define as your friends/social network?
● What are some of your happiest times with your friends?
● Who are you closest to?
● What do you admire the most about them?
● What are some ways that your friends have helped you?
● Who else is an important part of your life?
● Is there anyone else who ever helps you or your family?
● What services that you receive do you or your family feel help you?
● What services/resources have you received in the past that helped you or your family?
● What obstacles do you face to have the relationship you want with family/friends/formal supports?
● With whom would you like to have a better relationship?)
Appendix 6.1
Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Young People

❖ Young Person’s and Family’s Strengths and Interests

- What are some of the things you think you are best at?
- What does your family think you are best at?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- What groups and activities are you involved in or would you like to be involved in?
- What are your dreams/goals?
- What are the interests/dreams/goals of your informal key players? (e.g., mom, dad, sister, brother, grandmother, uncle, aunt)
- What activities and interests do you share with your family? With friends?
- What keeps you from engaging in the activities/interests that you enjoy?

❖ Values, Culture, and Natural Resources of the Family

- What traditions do you have with your family? (If spiritual beliefs are shared, discuss areas of strength around these.)
- What would you say your family’s values are?
- What areas do you wish you could strengthen as it relates to your values? Your culture?
Appendix 6.1
Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Young People

Vision and Needs of the Young Person Across Life Domains

Employment/Career

- What types of jobs/volunteer opportunities have you had?
- What types of jobs/volunteer opportunities would you like to have?
- What might get in the way of you reaching your employment and career goals?

Educational Opportunities

- When do you do your best educationally?
- What educational goals do you have?
- What could get in the way of you reaching your educational goals?

Living Situation

- What types of living situations do you do your best in?
- What is your ideal living situation?
- What skills do you need to learn to obtain your ideal living situation?
Appendix 6.1

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Young People

**Personal Effectiveness/Well-being**

- Who do you help?
- How do you help other people?
- How do you keep up your relationships with the people who are close to you?
- What do you still need to learn about keeping up relationships?
- How do you deal with stress?
- What do you do to relax?
- What dangers do you face?
- Where and when do you face dangers?
- How do you deal with these dangers?
- When do you speak up for yourself?
- When you want to find out something, where do you get information?
- What do you do to take care of your health?
- How do you get the medical and dental services that you need?
- If the young person is pregnant or a parent:
  - How do you take care of the health of your child (children)?
  - Who gets (will get) medical attention for your child (children)?
  - Who does (will) rear your child (children)?
  - Who does (will) discipline your child (children)?
  - Who does (will) pay for your child’s (children’s) needs?
Appendix 6.1
Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Young People

Community Life Functioning

- How do you get around your neighborhood?
- What community groups do you take part in?
- What dangerous situations do you see in your neighborhood?
- How do you avoid these dangerous situations?
- What do you need to avoid dangerous situations?
- Where do you go to have fun or get entertained?
- Who do you usually go with to have fun?
- What services would you like to see offered in your community?
- How do you manage your money?
- What do you need to learn about managing your money?
- Where do you find spiritual comfort?
Appendix 6.2
Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Family and Other Informal Key Players

Note: Questions are presented with alternate wording so that they may be asked of a family or extended family member or of someone who is not a member of the young person’s family. The words occurring first within each parenthesis are used with family or extended family. The words occurring last within each parenthesis are used with non-family key players.

❖ Young Person’s and Family’s Strengths and Interests

- What are your dreams and goals for the young person?
- What are some of the things you think the young person is best at?
- What are the young person’s interests?
- When and in what situations is the young person most successful?
- Who is part of (your / the young person’s) family?
- Who do you admire or respect among (your / the young person’s) family? Why?
- What do you think (your / the young person’s) family is good at?
- Who are the young person’s friends?
- What do you like or respect about the young person’s friends? Why?
- Which of these friends are you closest to?
- Who else is the young person close to?
- Who helps the young person and his or her family?
- What services do (you / the young person and his or her family) receive that helps the family or the young person?
Appendix 6.2

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Family and Other Informal Key Players

- What do you need to support the young person in his or her journey to adulthood?
- When do you feel the closest to the young person?
- When does the family seem to pull together?
- What do you think the young person likes best about his or her grandmother, mom, dad, brother, sister, etc.?
- What do you think they all like most about you?
- What are your interests?

Values, Culture, and Natural Resources of the Family

- What family traditions do (you / the young person’s family) have?
- How do these traditions affect how (you / the young person’s family) live (your life / their lives)?
- What do (you / the young person’s family) value?

Vision and Needs of the Family Across Life Domains

Employment/Career

- What types of jobs/volunteer activities has the young person had?
Appendix 6.2

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Family and Other Informal Key Players

- What strengths did the young person demonstrate when doing these jobs/volunteer activities?
- What needs did the young person have when doing these jobs or activities?
- What types of jobs/volunteer opportunities do you think would be best for the young person?
- What could get in the way of the young person reaching his or her employment/career goals?

Educational Opportunities

- When does the young person do his or her best educationally?
- What educational goals would be best for the young person?
- What could get in the way of the young person reaching his or her educational goals?

Living Situation

- What types of living situations does the young person do best in?
- What is the young person’s ideal living situation?
- What skills does the young person still need to learn to obtain and maintain the ideal living situation?
Appendix 6.2

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Family and Other Informal Key Players

Personal Effectiveness/Well-being

- Who does the young person help?
- How does the young person help other people?
- How does the young person keep up relationships with people who are close to him/her?
- What does the young person still need to learn about keeping up relationships?
- How does the young person deal with stress?
- What does the young person do to relax?
- What dangers does the young person face?
- How do you help the young person protect himself/herself from these dangers?
- What skills does the young person need to advocate for his or her needs and wants?
- Where and how does the young person find information?
- How does the young person take care of his or her health?
- How do (you and the young person / the young person and the family) get needed medical and dental services?
- What do (you and the young person / the young person and the family) need to take care of (your / their) health?
- If the young person is pregnant or a parent:
Appendix 6.2

Strength Discovery and Needs Assessment:
Possible Questions for Family and Other Informal Key Players

- How does the young person take care of the health of his or her child/children?
- Who gets/will get medical attention for the child/children?
- Who does/will rear the child/children?
- Who does/will pay for the child’s/children’s needs?
- What skills does the young person need to take care of his or her child/children?

Community Life Functioning

- What dangerous situations do you see in the young person’s neighborhood?
- How does the young person avoid these dangerous situations?
- What does the young person need to avoid dangerous situations?
- What community groups or services does the young person belong to or use?
- What community services or organizations would you like to see the young person belong to or use?
- How does the young person manage his/her money?
- What does the young person need to learn about managing money?
- Where do (you / the young person and family) find spiritual comfort?
Appendix 6.1

How to Obtain a Certificate of Completion

After you successfully complete an exam to demonstrate learning, you will receive a certificate of completion. To take the test and receive your certificate, please do the following:

2. Select “Personnel Training Modules”.
3. Select “Take Exam”.
4. Follow the instructions to complete the exam and receive a certificate.

Thank you for completing this training

Please contact us (see page 2 for our contact information) if you have any suggestions for improving any of our training materials.