

TABLE 4.1 Twelve Propositions that Outline the Basic Principles of Strength-Based Counseling (Smith, 2006).

1. Humans are self-righting organisms who are constantly working to adapt to their environments. Strengths develop as people try to right themselves.
2. Strengths develop as a result of internal and external forces and as part of the human driving force to meet basic psychological needs.
3. All people have the capacity for strength development and for growth and change. Strength development is a lifelong process that is influenced by the interaction of individual's heredity and the cultural, social, economic, and political environments in which they find themselves. All people have a reservoir of strengths, some of which have been tapped and others have been left unexplored and unrecognized. Strengths can be learned or taught. All people also have a natural drive for positive growth and a natural tendency to seek the realization and/or expression of their strengths and competencies.
4. Strength levels vary, ranging on a continuum from low to high.
5. Strength is the end product of a dialectical process involving a person's struggle with adversity. (Strengths can develop out of adversities.)
6. Strengths act as buffers against mental illness. All people possess the potential to experience mental disorder. Mental illness occurs when strengths are insufficient to deal with threats to psychological well-being.
7. People are motivated to change during counseling when practitioners focus on their strengths rather than deficits.
8. Encouragement is a key source or form of positive regard that the therapist intentionally provides to effect behavioral change in the client.
9. In Strength-Based Counseling, therapists consciously and intentionally honor client efforts and struggles to deal with their problems or presenting issues. Clients who feel they have been intentionally validated are theorized to achieve their counseling goals at a higher rate than those who have not been so validated by their counselors.
10. Strengths-based counselors understand that people are motivated to change dysfunctional or self-defeating behavior because they hope that doing so will effect the desired life changes and anticipated rewards. Those with higher hope are hypothesized to achieve their counseling goals at a higher rate than those lacking hope.
11. The strength-based counselor understands the process of healing from pain and adversity and designates counseling sessions to help clients heal from their pain.
12. The strength-based counselor assumes that race, class, and gender are organizing elements in every counseling interaction.