

## Supporting Parents of Autistic Young People to Learn About Their Children's Character Strength

### Background

Parents of autistic children and young people can use the *Character Strengths* approach to learn more about their children's positive qualities. Character Strengths are 24 traits, such as curiosity, kindness, and fairness. When families learn to notice and use these strengths, it can help them in everyday life and to support their wellbeing.

To support, Jiedi Lei and her team set up the Carer Parent Advisory Group (CPAG). It included parents and carers of autistic young people aged 11–16. In the first meeting, parents shared ideas for a workshop to help others learn about Character Strengths. They suggested using short videos, simple learning materials, and creating a safe and friendly space where people could share experiences.

### What we did

The team worked with the CPAG to create and test an online workshop for 21 parents and carers. The aim was to help them use the "Aware, Explore, Apply" model of Character Strengths in daily life to identify strengths in their autistic young person.

A parent from the CPAG helped to run three workshops with the researchers. These were run online so it was easier for parents to join. Each workshop was divided into three small groups; each small group had its own facilitator. The facilitators supported discussion and helped everyone feel safe and focused. From the first set of workshops, parents learned to spot their children's strengths. Many also said they wanted to think about their own strengths and the importance of self-care. Because of this, the team worked with another parent from the CPAG to co-design and run two more online workshops. These were focused on supporting parents/carers to recognise their own personal strengths in everyday life. These were attended by 15 parents and carers.

### What difference did it make?

The parents and carers said they felt more confident and knowledgeable about using Character Strengths. They also enjoyed meeting other parents and talking about their young person's strengths.

*The workshop was informative. We had time to think about our children's strengths in everyday situations.*

*As carers, we often focus on what we don't achieve. It was powerful to recognise our own strengths.*

Because the workshops were helpful, the team also created sessions for teachers and mental health professionals who work with autistic young people. The work has been shared at major events, including the Autism Europe Conference, the Character Strengths and Neurodiversity Summit, and the Stanford Neurodiversity Summit.

The group has also received new funding to grow Character Strengths training over the next five years. This includes testing an AI coaching assistant that can give parents real-time advice on activities linked to their child's strengths.

*Jiedi Lei is a Paul Foundation Clinical Research Fellow. More details about the study found [here](#). This document has a [Flesch-Kincaid](#) readability score of 59, according to Microsoft Editor.*