



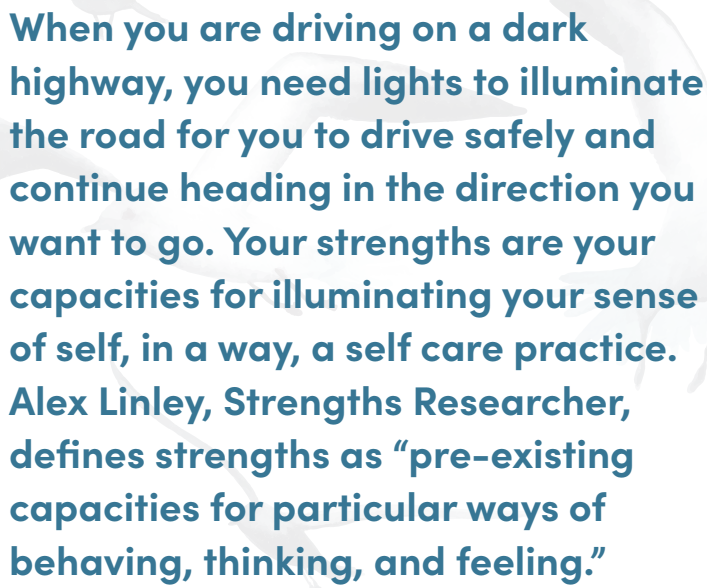
Tools for Caring

Strengths

— THE WIND IN YOUR SAILS

CREATED BY

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When you are driving on a dark highway, you need lights to illuminate the road for you to drive safely and continue heading in the direction you want to go. Your strengths are your capacities for illuminating your sense of self, in a way, a self care practice. Alex Linley, Strengths Researcher, defines strengths as “pre-existing capacities for particular ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling.” They enable you to do your tasks well, connect with others, and find your own way through challenges.

Your strengths are a part of you, and they may not be getting acknowledged. The person you support also has strengths. Knowing each other’s strengths can build your relationship, help you achieve the care goals in place and encourage self worth. Perhaps the strength of “Judgement” (making rational and logical choice and being open to evidence that does not necessarily support your own view) helps you choose the best Doctor or treatment. The strength of “Love of Learning” (a desire and passion to learn for the sake of learning) assists you in creating new and fun activities, meals or routines that can be enjoyed. By finding out your unique strengths, you make sense of who are you and then you can bring all of you into your day and your relationships.

This is possibly a new way of looking at who you are, so be patient. It might feel confusing because you have lived your whole life believing and thinking you can only be who you know yourself to be. This can be even more challenging with someone you feel you know, like a loved one who is changing who they are in front of your very eyes. It can feel discouraging, even frustrating to adopt new ways of thinking. In positive psychology we call this cognitive dissonance: you are consciously learning something new that is contrary to what you already think you know. This can happen when you are learning.

Educational neuroscientist, Jared Horvath explains that the process of learning something new means you are making sense of something you do not already know. What happens when you must admit to yourself that you do not know something? When what you know is no longer true? You can feel failure. And failure can feel rather uncomfortable. Jared explains, the moment your brain feels failure, you get to decide what to do next. You either take the new information, learn it and use it, or you discount it and within 72 hours your brain forgets about it. You can choose to apply a strength and learn from the process or choose not to apply a strength and not learn from the process. To learn is to feel failure and that does not feel good, but it is necessary if you are going to change your daily story, the story you currently tell yourself about your role as a caregiver.

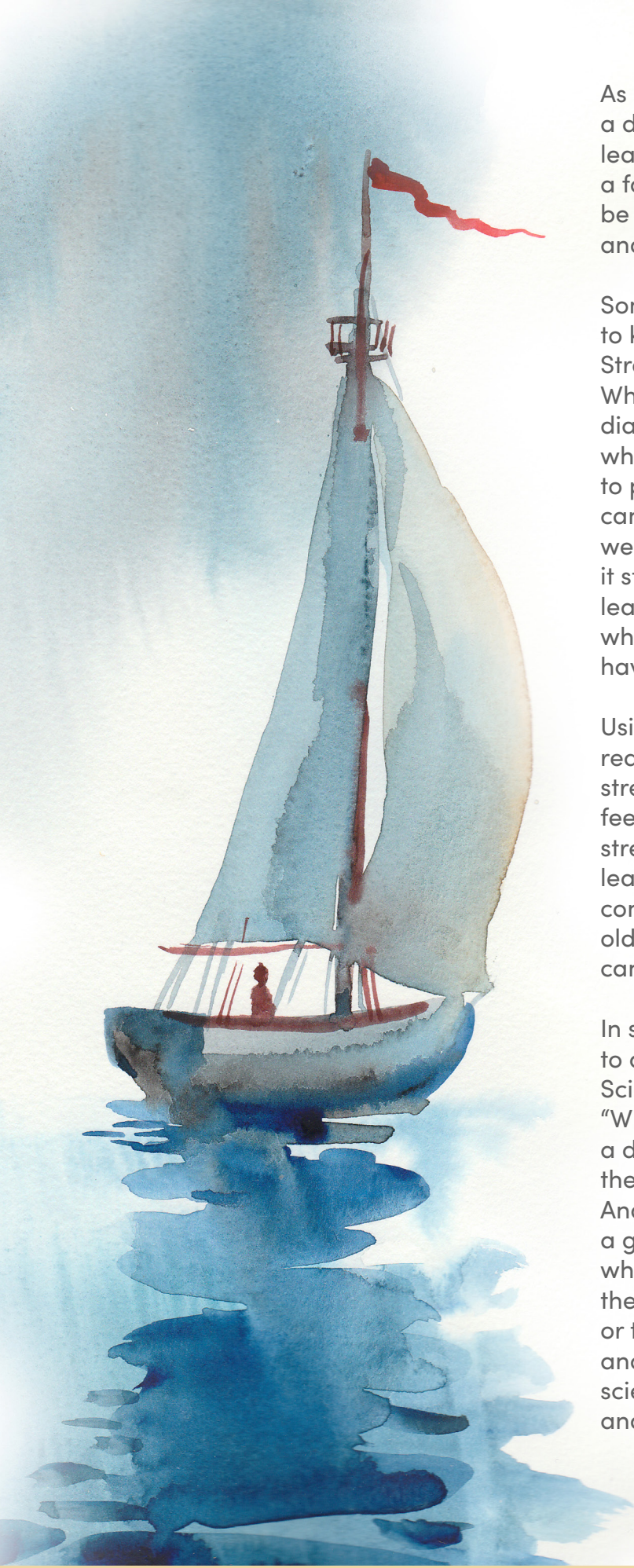
**What is has your learning
experience been like?**

**What is the story you have been
telling yourself about your role as a
caregiver?**

**How might your strengths contribute
to your story?**

**Can you embrace all your failures?
Can you allow them to become part
of your story?**





As illuminators, your strengths are how you make a difference in the world. Physiotherapist and leadership coach Kit Wisdom describes self care as a form of other care. You care for the self so you can be in connection with the people you support in good and bad times.

Sometimes the dark deepens, and you need to know how to brighten or intensify your light. Strengths are also an avenue through hard times. When your family is dealing with a life-threatening diagnosis or trying to determine who will take on which responsibilities, consider giving certain tasks to people with the strengths to do the job. Anyone can do the job, even if the task requires the use of a weakness, but when you lead with your weaknesses it strips you and your loved ones of energy and leaves you feeling depleted. On the other hand, when you lead with your strengths you are likely to have energy to spare and relationships can thrive.

Using strengths is necessary in caring and in life. It requires a challenge. In the process of using your strength there is a time of feeling like a failure or feeling inauthentic. Stick it through. Try using your strengths. Give it a go. As you apply what you are learning, a moment will arise that feels different, a context will show up that did not exist in the past, an old view will expand. This is part of the learning. You can still be confused and make sense of it.

In science, there is a methodology that is followed to advance the work of scientists, it is called The Scientific Method. The first step is to ask questions. "Who am I?" "What am I great at?" "How do I make a difference?" "How can I not feel so exhausted at the end of every day?" You are a science experiment. And you are the scientist. Start with questions, take a guess at what might happen and then take note while engaging your strengths, so you are aware of the outcomes. It is not about getting it right or wrong, or trying to make it better. You just start again with another question. Science fails and that is how new science is born. The aim is to fail. You will feel failure and you can learn and grow from it.

Today, the science of strengths indicates that people who use their strengths achieve higher levels of happiness and wellbeing (Govindi & Linley, 2007), are more resilient (CAPP, 2010), more likely to achieve their goals (Linley, Nielsen et al., 2010), and feel more satisfied with their life (Park & Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The use of character strengths as defined using the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) (Peterson, 2004) is a summary of 24 human strengths and virtues, that when used, are connected to high levels of wellbeing. One study found that focusing on activities that use the strengths of “judgement” and “kindness”, “teamwork” and “creativity” can be protective factors against depression and suicidality (Kim, et al., 2018).

From this information, you can translate what you know into valuable life experience for yourself and the people you support. Caregiving is an opportunity to discover your personal strengths (Peacock, et, al. 2010). At this moment, you have a choice. Will you choose to be patient with yourself, feel the uncomfortable nature of failure and move forward to make sense of it, or will you choose to forget what you learned. Victor Frankl, psychiatrist and holocaust survivor said “between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.” How will you choose to use your space?

Your Strengths Journey: Here is where you will find the wind for your sails.

STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT

What are your top strengths? Find out using a free tool at viacharacter.org
If you are struggling to think of one of your strengths, try asking a friend or family member what they think one of your strengths are.

Think through a situation that went well. What strengths did you use to make something great happen? Who was there? What was most awesome? What strengths did you lean on to help you through? How did it impact you as a person? How did it impact the person you support? How did it impact your other relationships?

Make sense of a challenging experience. How were you your best self through a challenging situation? What strengths did you use to get through a challenging situation? Who was there? What was most tricky? What strengths did you lean on to get you through? How did it impact you as a person? How did it impact the person you support? How did it impact your other relationships?

Design your own Scientific Method. Be ok with not knowing it all. What will you write about yourself in your strengths report? What strengths are you using? What failures arise? What observations have you noticed? What questions do you have now? Is there a way you would like to use your strengths differently for your future self? What would you like to shift? Is there something new you would like to try? What would you keep the same? What strength would you like to build upon?

Try an activity that resonates with you. What activity can you design for yourself to encourage the learning of what your strengths are and how they can be applied?

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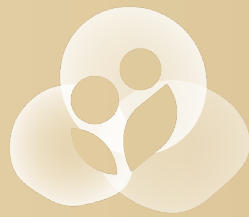
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Approaching a task that feels right and energizes you is a clue that you are using an inner strength.



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