

Building a Robust SEL Toolkit with Janette

Dr. Lea Waters

“The Strength Switch: How the New Science of Strength-Based Parenting Helps Your Child and Teen Flourish”

<https://www.leawaters.com/>

- Parents mistakenly believe that weeding out kids’ weaknesses is the way to help them
- Instead, play to their strengths to expand what is already
- Scenario: Boss stops you in the hallway and says, “Hey can we meet Friday to discuss areas for improvement?”
 - Improvement = fixing what is wrong with
 - Even if boss is focused on amplifying strengths
 - This is what it’s like for our kids, “Hey, can I talk to you guys for a second?”
- Strength-based science tell us:
 - Taking what’s right with us and amplifying it
 - Help kiddos make the skills/talents/lovely nuggets be the starting point of raising, growing our children
 - BEFORE we focus on what’s wrong or not working
 - Science shows that the more we can utilize our strengths we have more energy, be more self-motivated
 - Strengths are the things we are good at
 - Self-reinforcing
- We tend to have a society that expects kids to be good at many things
 - We are not often giving our children opportunities to play to their strengths
 - Often people share concerns about focusing on strengths
 - Will my kid lack discipline?
- How much time and energy are going to improving weaknesses vs. focusing on strengths?
 - Most people are spending a disproportionate amount of time focusing on weaknesses vs. strengths
 - Jason pointed out that this is great news for parents—we can enjoy our children and their strengths
 - Dr Waters shared that the research showed that parents who focused on helping kids play to their strengths actually felt like they were better parents, more confident about their parenting and overall happier and more enjoyable to be together in relationship
- Cecelia asked, “What do we do when our child’s behavior doesn’t allow us to focus on strengths?”
 - Dr. Waters: Choose times to practice this. Strength finding is observing your children and noticing when they are exhibiting high levels of performance
 - Can be a skill or task (sports, music)
 - Also, a personality trait (kindness, positivity)
 - Practice during the “good times”: School holidays, vacation—when your brain is not overloaded with frustration
 - Work to flip a switch in your brain in order to notice patterns that are positive
 - Shine a light on strengths: Be intentional about finding strengths on which to focus
 - Even in the moments when things aren’t going well, flip the switch and change your lens
 - Example: Dr Waters’ son play a lot of PS4

- Worried that he is gaming too much
 - His brain is going to be affected
 - He isn't studying enough
 - When she flips the switch and can see the strengths she is able to deescalate and have a very different conversation with him setting limits around gaming
 - He is learning lots of American History
 - He is collaborating with other people around the globe
 - He is accessing diverse people
- Negativity bias exists in humans
 - Brain has a bias for noticing what is going wrong first before right
 - Evolutionarily, we had to do this to survive
 - Subconscious is always scanning the environment for danger
 - Useful mechanism to ensure safety, but not the greatest bias for being a parent
 - Even if we love our kids, our brain is scanning in the same way
 - We react so strongly because our brain helps us recognize the negative things quickly to fix them
- Good news! We can repattern our brain!
 - Our brain can be rewired to notice the good things
 - What about when we see our children doing the things that we ourselves do
 - Dr Waters = messy and loses keys all the time
 - When she sees her kids displaying these same traits, she jumps on this more than her husband = kids hold up mirror to our own less than positive traits and hits our hot buttons
 - Start strength-based parenting with ourselves first
 - Acknowledging our own reactions
 - Flip the switch to regulate
 - Then engage with the kids to have a more positive conversation and a far more enjoyable experience overall
- What about special needs kids (diagnosis, ADHD, etc)?
 - Everyone has strengths, by virtue of being a human being
 - Strength of heart empathy, kindness, etc
 - Every single child in the world has their own UNIQUE strengths
 - Parenting a child with special needs requires acknowledging the challenges, but also use this same perspective to find the strengths that the child has in spite of
 - Build up the strengths and capitalize on them

Concrete strategies for HOW to practice strength-based parenting for free on her web site

<https://www.leawaters.com/>

- Start tonight
 - When you get home don't notice the lost soccer shoes, notice that they are starting homework and getting chores done