

# Utilizing CANS Strengths in Therapy

## Why Focus on Strengths?

- Increase self-efficacy and instill hope
- Enhance motivation and engagement - makes treatment more fun for the youth *and* provider
- Function like an "immune system": a strong immune system helps protect clients from problems
- Help youth feel seen and they may be more open to making changes
- Serve as a role-model for parents to focus on their child's positive attributes
- Identification and development of strengths among youth who have experienced trauma can mitigate future risk-taking behaviors, mental health symptoms, and functional difficulties [2,3]

## Strength-focused Assessment

- Sharing feedback on youth strengths can engage them from the outset of the process. For instance, identifying activities that youth like to do, and do well, and showing them how these ratings look both as scores and graphs can be "effective as an engagement strategy" [3].
- One study found that strength-based assessments did not enhance youth and family engagement if providers merely administered strength-based assessments, and did not integrate the results into treatment [1].

## Strength-focused Objectives for the Client Plan

- Develop or enhance youth strengths by focusing on areas for future growth (CANS Strength items with a score of '2' or '3')
- Generalize or expand youth use of strengths (e.g., applying a strength at home to school)

## Strength-oriented Intervention(s):

- Raise client awareness of strengths (CANS Strengths items with a score of '0' or '1')
- Balance discussion of strengths with problems during therapy
- Explore and reinforce current strengths
- Amplify strengths
- Teach clients new skills to build strengths
- Utilize client strengths to enhance their prosocial behavior (e.g., joining band)
- Use strengths as reinforcers when progress is made towards a goal (e.g., playing piano for the therapist)

