

Short Report: Evaluation of a pilot virtual workshop to support parents of autistic young people to learn about their children's Character Strengths

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Abstract

Parents of autistic children and young people (CYP) report several strengths in their CYP, spanning from cognitive skills to personality traits. The latter relate to Character Strengths (CS) which describe 24 qualities (e.g., Curiosity, Fairness) that are associated with wellbeing. Little is known about how building Awareness of, Exploring, and Applying CS can support autistic CYP and their families in daily life. Together with parents of autistic CYP, we co-produced and piloted a 2.5-hour virtual workshop to support parents of autistic CYP to learn about CS. 21 parents of autistic CYP aged 8-16 years old participated online. Prior the workshop, parents completed independent learning by watching a brief video explaining CS and completed the Values in Action-Youth survey to identify their child's CS. During the workshop, parents connected with each other and explored using the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS to reflect on their own CYP's strengths use. After the workshop, parents reported a significant improvement in CS knowledge and confidence in the Aware-Explore-Apply model. Parents valued connecting with each other through talking about their CYP's strengths. This pilot shows good acceptability and demand for co-produced single-session workshops to support parents of autistic CYP to learn about strengths identification and use.

Keywords: Autism, Positive Psychology, Character Strengths, Parenting, Single-Session-Intervention

Highlights

- Character Strengths (CS) describes 24 characteristics that can enhance wellbeing.
- We piloted a co-produced virtual workshop on CS with parents of autistic children.
- Parents valued connecting with each other through focusing on children's strengths.
- Single-session format has good acceptability and feasibility to enhance CS knowledge in parents.

Parents of autistic children and young people (CYP) often take on an advocacy role both within and outside of the family home to advocate for positive change when supporting their CYP (Boshoff et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2023). Parents may be asked to identify positive qualities and individual strengths in their autistic CYP when speaking with professionals, and when communicating about autism with their autistic CYP at home (Crane et al., 2019). Parents' openness to autism diagnosis disclosure and conversations with their autistic CYP can impact on adolescents' development of autistic identity (Riccio et al., 2020), and positive identity is associated with better mental wellbeing (Cooper et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2023). Furthermore, strengths use in autistic adults is positively associated with better quality of life, wellbeing and mental health, though autistic adults self-reported both reduced strengths knowledge and strengths use when compared to non-autistic adults (Taylor et al., 2023). When asked to describe the best things about their autistic CYP, parents describe personal characteristics (e.g., kind, loving, loyal, strong sense of moral justice, humour, and self-determined) (Carter et al., 2015, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2021). Such qualities resemble Character Strengths (CS) from Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which emphasises on supporting individuals to identify and utilise their positive qualities to lead meaningful lives that enhance personal and societal wellbeing (Lei & Nocon, 2024; Warren et al., 2021).

Strengths-based parenting draws on Positive Psychology and involves deliberately finding strategies to better identify and scaffold the development of positive states and qualities in one's children (Waters, 2015), as well putting parents' personal strengths into action when supporting their children's strengths development (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010; Waters & Sun, 2016). Moving towards Positive Psychology Parenting approaches involves providing both positive emotions within family interactions and seeking opportunities to spot and expand on each child's CS to promote individual and family wellbeing (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018; Seligman, 2002). CS describe a list of 24 positive traits (e.g., Creativity, Curiosity, Honesty, Fairness etc, see Niemiec (2017) for a full CS description) that have been identified across culture and time to showcase personal virtues that support individuals to lead meaningful lives (Niemiec, 2017). Although all CS are inherent in everyone, people differ in which CS are most valued and come most naturally to each person in guiding their actions (i.e., Signature Strengths). It is important to reflect on how such strengths can be used in a way that's beneficial to oneself and/or support others to enhance wellbeing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, whereas optimal use of Curiosity can lead to discovery and learning new information that brings joy and satisfaction, overuse of Curiosity may appear intrusive, and underuse of Curiosity may appear uninterested and disengaged (Niemiec, 2019). To flexibly navigate problem-solving and use one's strengths to enhance wellbeing, it is important to build *Awareness* of one's different strengths, *Explore* how such strengths are used in everyday life – including times when a

strength may be over- or under- used in a way that is no longer benefitting oneself or others, and *Apply* strengths use in new ways to best adapt to different situations (Niemicc, 2019).

Amongst parents of autistic CYP, a recent literature review that explored positive aspects of parenting found that parents not only cherished joyful moments of witnessing their CYP's learning and development, they often chose to place greater emphasis on the development of moral values such as courage, hope, and perseverance to cultivate greater psychological growth and resilience rather than imposing social norm or expectation on their children's development (Curley et al., 2025). Parents of autistic CYP also valued building social connections and strong support networks with each other to gain multiple perspectives on situations that can elicit hope, and in turn improve parental wellbeing (Curley et al., 2025). Despite overlap in the types of strengths and values endorsed by parents of autistic CYP and the CS framework, to date, there is limited research in exploring how the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS (Niemicc, 2014) may support autistic CYP and their families in everyday life. Supporting parents of autistic CYP to familiarise with and understand the CS framework can equip them with a language paradigm to spot, explore, and share their CYP's strengths use with other people. As a stepping stone towards adopting strengths-based and positive psychology parenting, a better understanding of their autistic CYP's unique CS profile may support parents to reframe difficult situations by reflecting on their CYP's potential strengths over- and under-use, and provide opportunities for using different strengths in new ways to flexibly problem-solve (Lei & Nocon, 2024).

Together with parents of autistic CYP, we developed and piloted a single session virtual workshop to support parents of autistic CYP to draw on the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS when embedding strengths-based practise in their everyday life (outlined in Community Involvement). Our aim was for parents to gain knowledge of CS through the Aware-Explore-Apply model, reflect on their autistic CYP's CS, and explore ways to strengths-spot and scaffold opportunities to enhance CS use when supporting their autistic CYP. Specifically, we evaluated:

- 1) Changes in parent-reported CS knowledge before and after the single session workshop using quantitative ratings
- 2) The acceptability of the workshop based on qualitative feedback from parents on what they liked and disliked about the workshop content and process, and take-home messages on what they learnt form the single session

Methods

Participants

21 parents (20 mothers, 1 father) of autistic CYP aged 8-16 years old (M (SD) = 11.38 (2.77) years) recruited online via social media (workshop registration link was shared via LinkedIn and X through the research team's personal

and research group accounts) and via autism parent support networks in the UK (shared by parent co-facilitator with different groups via WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn) consented to participate in the workshop (20 from the UK, 1 from Brazil). Parents reported all CYP had received a formal autism diagnosis (M (SD) for age of diagnosis = 9.37 (3.37) years) except for two, who have been waiting for over two years for full diagnostic assessment. Eight parents self-identified as neurodivergent.

Community Involvement

Following participatory research guidelines (Keating, 2021), we consulted with our Parent/Carer Advisory Group (CPAG) of five parents (4 mothers, 1 father, two parents/carers self-identified as being neurodivergent) of autistic CYP aged 12-15 years old throughout the project. All CPAG members were recruited online from social media and autism parent/carers networks in the UK. The co-production followed an iterative process over three rounds of collating feedback, with each round spaced one month apart.

In round one, we first explored with our CPAG whether a single-session CS workshop would be of interest to support other parents of autistic CYP to have a positive psychology-based framework when supporting their CYP to use strengths. We wrote an outline of the project aim, summarising how strengths in autistic CYP have been captured in research literature to date, the potential to adopt CS framework to provide consistent language use when describing individual strengths in autistic CYP, and the proposed workshop aim, length, format and outline, and pre-workshop activity. We outlined how the workshop will follow the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS throughout, with example questions and guided time allotment for group discussions. We then created written worksheets that asked parents to provide written open-text responses to the following questions: 1) “What are the priorities of parents/carers of autistic CYP when attending a workshop entitled “Understanding Character Strengths in Autistic CYP”? What might parents want to learn about and gain from the workshop?; 2) On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not at all, 5 = very much so), how well do the current workshop aims meet the goals/objectives you’ve identified above? Please explain your rating; 3) Is there anything you liked about the workshop plan?; 4) Is there anything you disliked about the workshop plan?; 5) Do you have any feedback about the session format?; 6) Any other suggestions you have for the workshop that would enable parents/carers to feel more confident in being able to support their autistic child/young person by drawing on character strengths in daily life? Anything that might be missing/important to consider?; 7) Do you have any suggestions on what would make a helpful resource to include in a handout we can share with parents/carers attending the workshop as a quick guide on “Aware-Explore-Apply” model of character strengths? Parents spent between 60-95 minutes reviewing the workshop proposal and providing written feedback.

In round one feedback, parents noted the importance of developing a parent/carer workshop that focused on exploring strengths in autistic CYP, as it is important for parents to feel like “their children are not broken and can contribute something positive to society. This would counteract the deficit-model that we are inculcated into when our kids are first diagnosed.” One parent noted the importance of learning new strategies to embed into everyday life: “as a parent, I will always want to learn strategies that will support my child’s happiness and resilience, so ideas about how we can incorporate character strengths in daily life.” Another parent noted that such a workshop is important to help parents feel empowered through “a sense that they will help to move forward understanding and acceptance of autism.” Parents noted that many parents may have encountered negative experiences in the past, and it is important that the workshop will provide “an opportunity to have their experiences heard and feel validated, without judgement”, especially when parents are time poor, and would be keen to explore something bespoke for their child that can explore strengths use in different contexts such as at home, community or at work. Parents rated that the workshop proposal reviewed during round one met their stated objectives with an average score of 4 out of 5, with the main questions focused around time allocation, needing more concrete examples to bring the model to life, having strong facilitators in small breakout rooms and encouraging conversations to focus on possibility for change in adopting strengths-based practice based on story sharing. Parents liked the idea of using breakout rooms to facilitate connection and experience sharing with other workshop attendees, however parents commented the need to ensure there is psychological safety for all parents to feel able to participate and share lived experiences. Parents emphasised that the learning space should feel inclusive of different neurotypes and learning styles, including sharing workshop information using alternative media formats such as via short video. One parent suggested on having attendees complete the CS survey to identify their child’s strengths prior to attending workshop, to ensure parents can come to the workshop feeling prepared to share reflections with each other. Parents were divided in their preferences of hosting workshop online or in-person, though most commented that both formats would feel acceptable with good facilitation. Parents also noted that although some simple resources sharing at the end of the workshop would be welcomed, it is important to keep this to a simple model that does not feel too overwhelming, and some signposting can encourage continued learning.

After identifying a clear gap in the need to create a strengths-focused workshop for parents/carers of autistic CYP through round one feedback, we then drafted initial workshop draft that introduced the CS framework, the Aware-Explore-Apply model, and proposed breakout room activities using PowerPoint slides. We invited all CPAG members to join a one-hour virtual focus group meetings where we shared preliminary drafts of the workshop material based on parents’ feedback from round one, and asked the CPAG to brainstorm ways of making the material more lay-person friendly and accessible to parents/carers with different learning styles, and to ensure we can meet workshop aims within

the proposed allocated time. Together with CPAG, we discussed ground rules, breakout group and workshop size, and simplified workshop content. Parents highlighted that “less is more” for information sharing and provided suggestions on sharing information in a more digestible and flexible manner, such as reducing didactic teaching component during the workshop and turning some of the information about CS framework into a short psychoeducation video that can be shared ahead of the workshop, to facilitate self-learning and preparation. Parents also spoke about the need to bolster psychological safety within the workshop. Parents suggested ice breaker activities at the start to help parents share any strengths they notice in their child and goals they’d like to achieve in the workshop. Parents also highlighted the need for workshop facilitators to have clear guidance on how to both validate difficult lived experiences that families may share around supporting their children to access education and healthcare services and feeling confident and able in steering the conversation towards focusing on strengths exploration in everyday life. Parents discussed the importance of sharing key ideas such as top, middle, and lesser strengths, as well as strengths under, over, and optimal use to guide parents to reflect on their child’s strengths use across contexts before attending the workshop, and bringing their reflections to the workshop to further ensure conversations can be scaffolded around strengths use in their CYP. Based on CPAG’s suggestions, we then drafted outlines of revised workshop materials and content for the psychoeducation material within the focus group, to ensure main ideas are captured by the research team to update workshop content. We invited all CPAG members to indicate if anyone would be interested in helping us co-facilitate the workshop, and one parent who is neurodivergent expressed interest in co-facilitation.

After updating workshop content based on CPAG feedback in round two, we then invited all CPAG members to review all workshop materials (including workshop advert, preparation video and transcript, information sheet, registration and feedback forms, session slides) via written feedback in round three. CPAG members were asked to provide feedback on the clarity and format of the workshop advert and participant information sheet, and review questions on the registration form as well as pre-workshop psychoeducation video that introduced CS and directed workshop registrants to complete the CS survey on VIA character strengths website. Parents shared that they liked seeing photos of all workshop facilitators on the adverts and having a clear mix of text and visual material on the participant information sheet and felt that the workshop video (10 minutes) was of a suitable length and offered clear guidance on what to expect on the day of the workshop day. CPAG members also suggested that the registration form should allow parents to clearly indicate whether they do or do not consent to participate in the workshop after reading the information sheet.

After all workshop content were finalised, we then invited our parent co-facilitator to attend an extra online meeting to talk through the format of the workshop and all breakout room activities, and asking the parent to share any

questions, worries, and suggestions they had about the workshop overall. Together with the parent co-facilitator, we drafted a facilitator guide that outlined the procedure for each section of the workshop, starting from icebreaker activity, through to suggested questions to prompt conversations in each of the Aware, Explore, and Awareness section. We worked with the parent co-facilitator to ensure that the questions were framed in a sensitive and gentle manner that guided parents to reflect on their experience of completing the strengths survey online, reading their child's CS report, and reflecting on everyday examples of strengths expression. We also worked with the co-facilitator to discuss any examples he felt comfortable sharing with workshop attendees based on his own experience of adopting the CS framework in his own parenting practice. We agreed that all small breakout rooms should be kept to maximum five parents each and facilitated by the workshop team (including one qualified clinical psychologist and autism researcher, one research assistant, and one of the CPAG members who is a neurodivergent parent who volunteered to support co-facilitation). We discussed a clear protocol of how to manage potential risk on the day, a check-in system with each other as co-facilitators both before, during and after the workshop, with protected time to share reflections with each other and debrief after workshop delivery.

Workshop Procedures

Parents completed online registration form and provided consent for workshop participation, information retention, and for use of anonymised feedback for publication purposes. Parents were contacted by the workshop organisers to complete pre-workshop preparation material, which included watching a ten-minute video that introduced the concept of CS (including different types of CS, including signature, middle and lesser strengths) and what to expect from the workshop. Parents were asked to complete the Values in Action – Youth (VIA-Y) form on the VIA website (www.viacharacter.org) either on their own (i.e., answering for their young person) or together with their young person. Parents were asked to download, read through, and bring their young person's CS report to the workshop for discussion. The workshop lasted for 2.5 hours on Microsoft Teams. Workshop format, duration of each section, and content are summarised in Table 1. The workshop followed the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS, where participants had the opportunity to connect with other parents in both small breakout room activities guided by one group facilitator, and as a wider group when sharing feedback. Participants were invited to complete workshop feedback evaluation forms anonymously at the end of the workshop. After the workshop, all co-facilitators met online for a debrief session to reflect on learnings from the workshop, and feedback on key ideas shared during their breakout room conversations.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Outcome Measures

All parents completed registration form that asked them to report their young person's age and age of diagnosis, open text boxes to share any strengths they noticed in their CYP and goals for the workshop and had the option to indicate if they self-identified as being neurodivergent. Parents rated on a scale of 1 (none) to 10 (very good) their current knowledge of CS. During workshop preparation, parents completed the Values-in-Action Youth (VIA-Y) survey (McGrath & Walker, 2016; Park & Peterson, 2006) online which has a list of 96 statements that examine all 24 CS, and participants are asked to state whether each statement is "not at all" like their child (0) or "very much" like their child (4), and a free CS profile report is generated after survey completion. After the workshop, parents completed a short feedback form anonymously that asked them to re-rate their current knowledge of CS on a scale of 1 to 10, and also rate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) on their confidence of applying the Aware-Explore-Apply model, how helpful they found different aspects of the workshop (pre-workshop preparation, icebreaker, small breakout rooms, larger group feedback). Parents shared what they liked and disliked about the workshop as well as take-home messages via open text boxes and rated on a scale of 1 (definitely not) to 10 (definitely recommend) on how likely they would recommend this workshop to other parents/carers of autistic CYP.

Analysis

Using SPSS Version 30, we used descriptive statistics to summarise the mean and standard deviation of different workshop ratings and completed a one-sample t-test to compare how anonymised responses on post-workshop CS knowledge differed from pre-workshop mean. We used conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to summarise parents' awareness of their autistic CYP's strengths and workshop goals prior to participating in the workshop, and to analyse parents' evaluation of what they liked and disliked about the workshop and take-home messages. Conventional content analysis was selected as codes are derived from the data rather than through preconceived theoretical frameworks or research literature, with an intention of capturing the diverse range of perspective shared by workshop participants through their response to open-text questions.

Results

Pre-Workshop: Parent-Reported Strengths in Autistic Young People and Workshop Goals

Seventeen parents identified one or more strengths in their autistic CYP prior the workshop. Endorsed strengths were love and kindness (n = 7), logical thinking (n = 6), good memory and humour (all n = 4), justice/fairness and creativity (all n = 3), honesty, curiosity, affiliation with nature/animals (all n = 2), hyper-focused attention and empathy (all n = 1). For goals, the majority of parents indicated they'd like to develop a better understanding of their CYP's strengths (n = 11), and to be able to communicate with other people to advocate for their CYP's strengths, and focus on a

strengths-based rather than deficit-focused approach when supporting their CYP (all n = 8), as well as helping their CYP recognise and apply their strengths to boost self-esteem (n = 5), and find more adaptive coping strategies (n = 1).

Post-Workshop:

Character Strengths Knowledge – Aware, Explore, Apply

Fifteen parents (71%) completed anonymised post-workshop evaluation. Parents reported significant improvement in CS knowledge ($t(14) = 14.22, p < .001$) post- (M(SD) = 8.07 (1.16)) compared to pre-workshop (M(SD) = 3.81 (2.80)). Parents reported relatively greatest confidence in developing better awareness of their CYP's CS (M(SD) = 4.07 (0.59)), as well as having good confidence in exploring their CYP's CS use in everyday life (M(SD) = 3.73 (0.59)) and thinking about ways to apply CS when supporting their CYP (M(SD) = 3.40 (0.74)).

Feedback on Different Workshop Components

Overall, parents found small group discussions rated to be the most helpful (M(SD) = 4.6 (2.83)), and pre-workshop video, completing the VIA-Youth survey, reading CYP's CS report, icebreaker, and larger group feedback to be all very helpful (M(SD) range = 3.93 (0.88) to 4.27 (0.96)). All parents shared what they liked the most about the workshop, mostly having the opportunity to connect with other parents, having the opportunity to reflect on their CYP's CS, gaining new perspectives about strengths use, and feeling heard and understood. Five parents provided feedback on how the workshop can be improved, largely around making the Application of CS more concrete, and the limitations in applying the VIA-Youth survey to explore CS in non-verbal CYP. A summary of likes, dislikes, their endorsements and sample quotes are shown in Table 2.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

Take Home Messages

Fourteen parents shared take-home messages from the workshop. Many noted the importance of gaining knowledge in CS to support their CYP by acknowledging their many strengths (n = 7) and develop positive thinking (n = 7). This was further supported by parents acknowledging the workshop in being helpful for them to develop more empathy and compassion towards their CYP by noticing their strengths (n = 5) and notice that “*my self-care and own strengths are important*” as a parent/carer (n = 2). Parents spoke about the need to take a step back and recognise that “*strengths display can often be different to the expectation*” (n = 2), and it is important to share this framework with both family members and their CYP's school to “*get them on side to start working with similar goals*” (n = 2). Finally, two

parents emphasised the importance of helping their autistic CYP “to celebrate [their strengths] and help them to recognise and build their self-esteem” through talking about CS.

Recommendation to other parents

Almost all (n = 14) parents reported they would almost definitely recommend this workshop to other parents/carers of autistic CYP (M(SD) = 9.07 (1.67)), with only one parent who gave a rating of 4 out of 10.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first single-session virtual workshop centred on the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS for parents/carers of autistic CYP, co-developed by and co-delivered with parents of autistic CYP. The current workshop builds on the recent momentum of applying Positive Psychology parenting approaches to support the wellbeing of autistic individuals and their families (Wright et al., 2024), especially drawing on the CS framework (Lei & Nocon, 2024). In translating such a theoretical stance into practice, a major strength of this study is in community involvement from the conceptualisation and development of workshop format and content to the co-facilitation with a neurodivergent parent of autistic young person to ensure that the lived experience of autistic CYP and their families are at the centre of the workshop. Overall, feedback showed that the workshop provided an opportunity to connect parents through a strengths-based lens, and recognising CS in their autistic CYP can help parents reframe and deescalate difficult situations, as well as scaffold opportunities to embed strengths application in everyday life.

When reflecting on the workshop, co-facilitators discussed how parents openly shared and supported each other by offering different perspectives on CS spotting in their CYP. In keeping the conversations strengths-focused, parents reframed some difficult situations encountered at home through exploring individual differences in CS use and endorsement from different family members, including themselves. For example, during whole group feedback, one parent shared an anecdotal story of using the CS framework to reconceptualise arguments at home about organisation and tidiness as a clash between their child’s zest and creativity (starting many projects at once) and their own prudence and appreciation of beauty and excellence (valuing careful decision making around feasibility of completing the project and having a well organised home). When asked to think about new ways of applying CS to problem solve, the same parent identified this clash to create opportunities for Teamwork and Perseverance for both the parent and young person, and to recognise the different strengths each person brings to the activity. It was evident from feedback and group discussions that parents valued learning about the different CS to bridge communication differences and approach the same situations through a strengths-based narrative, to de-escalate strong emotions, and enhance flexible skills use.

As group facilitators, we reflected on how the workshop not only supported parents to gain knowledge and develop skills in CS identification and application, but most importantly, there was a collective sense of shared optimism that parents conveyed throughout the workshop. Literature highlights that parents/carers of autistic CYP often experience poor self-efficacy (Almendingen & Pilkington, 2024), which can both cause and be a consequence of greater stress, and lower mental health when comparing their parenting experiences to parents of non-autistic CYP (Enea & Rusu, 2020; Hall & Graff, 2010; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012). Although we primarily captured the acceptability of the workshop and feasibility in improving parents' knowledge of CS through a single-session virtual workshop format, we note that further work in this area is needed as some parents stated they would have liked to receive more concrete advice around strengths application and how to translate the framework into daily practice.

One limitation of the current study design is that we did not embed longer-term follow-up to evaluate how parents/carers were able to implement CS framework in their daily life after the workshop, through both embedding daily practices such as strengths spotting in their child, and also ways of scaffolding opportunities for CS development both in the family home and other contexts. In addition, other than exploring changes in CS knowledge before and after the workshop, we did not have other measures that evaluated changes in mechanisms such as parental stress, wellbeing, and parental self-efficacy, as well as potential longer impact on family functioning and parent-child relationship. Furthermore, we did not collect information about child-related factors such level of autistic traits, co-occurring mental and physical health needs, other developmental factors to consider that may have an impact on parental stress, wellbeing, and self-efficacy amongst parents who attended the workshop. One recent systematic review that explored parental self-efficacy in parents/carers of autistic children noted that whereas parental stress was positively associated with autism symptom severity in children under 4-years old, and with behavioural difficulties in children aged 5-15 years old, both of which in turn negatively impacted parental self-efficacy (Brennan et al., 2024). Gathering more contextual information around both parent and child-related factors prior to workshop participation may offer greater scope of tailoring future workshops to address specific challenges parents may face in adopting Positive Psychology Parenting strategies in everyday life. Exploring contextual factors can also support workshop facilitators to support parents/carers to create bespoke action plans to scaffold strengths exploration in a way that meets their child's developmental needs and feels manageable for parents/carers and can support self-efficacy over time.

The importance of longer-term follow-up using longitudinal design is evident from a meta-analysis that explored positive parenting of children with developmental disabilities (including autism, Down's syndrome, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities), and positive parenting included practices that fostered parent-child connection, improved behavioural regulation, and respected children's individual differences (Dyches et al., 2012). The authors noted

that most interventions focused on very young children (average age at initial evaluation was 3.2 years, range 1.6 – 6.4 years), though the effect of positive parenting practice on child behaviours saw a larger effect size in longitudinal designs ($r = .29$) compared to cross-sectional designs ($r = .07$), suggesting that positive parenting effects have greater impact on child behaviours in the future and over time rather than immediate responses (Dyches et al., 2012). Understanding the longer-term impact of positive psychology parenting practice on older children and young people is key, and future studies should include both quantitative and qualitative follow-up to explore how optimism and readiness for action conveyed during the workshop can be translated into longer term practice of putting CS framework into action. For example, using diary cards to track the use of strengths-spotting over time may support parents/carers to build CS awareness and explore everyday CS expression in autistic CYP, and guide parents to reflect on ways of reframing difficult situations through the lens of strengths over, under, and optimal use.

Another limitation highlighted by one parent of a non-verbal autistic child is in how CS assessment can be made to be more inclusive of CYP of different abilities, and that validated measures such as the VIA-Youth survey has implicit assumptions about individual ability to express different CS in predefined ways that may be unhelpful. Recent work by Greenberg and colleagues (2024) highlighted the need to revise language accessibility to support adults with intellectual disability to complete the VIA CS survey. One future direction is to create universally designed CS assessments with alternative formats (such as using short videos, stories, visuals) to increase accessibility for individuals with different cognitive and language abilities. In the context of neurodiversity, it is also vital to ensure that individual differences in CS expression and US are captured in a neurodiversity-affirmative manner. Studies of VIA CS assessment with autistic individuals are limited to adult self-report measures (Kirchner et al., 2016; Nocon et al., 2022; Samson & Antonelli, 2013). One future direction may be to introduce different CS to parents of autistic CYP and invite them to use creative methods (e.g., such as journaling or taking photographs) to document their CYP's unique strengths use in everyday life and bringing such examples to workshop discussion. This may also help parents to actively embody strengths spotting when interacting with their CYP and sharing such examples with other parents/carers may also spark conversations around how to make strengths application more concrete and individualised, thus addressing parental feedback on wanting more time dedicated to information sharing on strengths application.

In conclusion, we found that a co-developed single session virtual group workshop on supporting parents of autistic CYP to learn about the Aware-Explore-Apply model of CS framework was feasible to deliver, well-received by parents who attended the workshop, and supported parents to explore, interpret, and reframe their interactions with their autistic CYP through a strengths-based lens that adheres to Positive Psychology Parenting principles. Drawing on single-session intervention literature, we invite researchers and practitioners to consider the value in offering an easily

accessible and low time-commitment form of strengths-focused intervention to support parents/carers of autistic CYP and giving parents the autonomy to decide when it may be suitable for them and their family to engage with and adopt the CS framework when supporting autistic CYP through adopting Positive Psychology Parenting approach (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018).

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Ethical Standards

Given the purpose of all anonymised data collected are for the purpose of evaluating the pilot workshop, this study was deemed as a service evaluation and not a research project by the Health Research Authority tool defined by UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research. Ethical approval was waived by the University Ethics Committee. All participants completed online consent to confirm that they have read and agree to the information sheet that outlined the workshop and how anonymised information collected may be retained and used for publication purposes, before registering and participating in the workshop. Completion of workshop feedback form was optional. The authors declare that all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interests in this study.

Author Contribution

All authors conceptualised and co-delivered the workshop. JL led data analyses and draft of the original manuscript, supported by EJ and RL. All authors reviewed and approved this article submission. This article has been solely submitted to *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

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Table 1. Workshop overview, including pre-workshop preparation material.

| Workshop Section | Content | Duration |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Pre-Workshop Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to different types of strengths (including interests, skills, talents) and how they relate to Character Strengths • What are Character Strengths? • Instructions for taking the VIA-Youth Survey • Introduce the 24 different types of Character Strengths in relation to report • Signature, Middle and Lesser Strengths – what they are, strengths over- and under- use • Read your child’s report – note down any surprises and reflections • Online workshop preview – what to expect | 10 minutes |
| Virtual Workshop | | |
| Meet the group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-introductions including ice-breaker activity (share one character strength you notice in your child, and one goal for the workshop) [Small Breakout Room] • Setting ground rules [Whole Group] | 20 minutes |
| Awareness of my child’s Character Strengths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you think of your child’s strengths report? Consider Signature, Middle, and Lesser strengths used in different contexts [Small Breakout Room] • Feedback and Questions [Whole Group] | 30 minutes |
| BREAK (10 minutes) | | |
| Explore my child’s Character Strengths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your child use their strengths? Consider overuse, underuse, and optimal use of strengths in different contexts [Small Breakout Room] • Feedback and Questions [Whole Group] | 30 minutes |
| BREAK (5 minutes) | | |
| Apply my child’s Character Strengths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of how to apply character strengths to support flexible problem solving – guided by facilitator [Whole Group] • How might you support your child to use their strength(s)? Consider building strengths use in new ways and in different contexts [Small Group] • Feedback and Questions [Whole Group] | 40 minutes |
| Closing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next steps: Continue Strengths Spotting and sharing resources • Complete anonymous evaluation questionnaire | 10 minutes |

Table 2. Feedback from parents on what they liked and disliked about the workshop and sample quotes.

| A) What parents liked about the workshop (n = 15) | Quotes |
|--|--|
| Connect with other parents (n = 10) | <p>“Very helpful to share experiences with other parents in small group discussions”</p> <p>“It was wonderful to meet with other parents going through similar experiences”</p> |
| Helpful/Useful to broaden horizon of how my child’s strengths can be used (n = 8) | <p>“Very useful and enlightening course”</p> <p>“It gave me a new perspective”</p> <p>“I liked how I could relate to what was being said and discovered that my child’s strengths could be applied to many things, not just what I originally thought.”</p> <p>“The workshop was very informative and at the same time it allowed us time to reflect on our children’s character strengths, on how we can relate them to everyday lived situations.”</p> <p>“It was good to explore overused and underused strengths.”</p> |
| Learning about how other children and families perceive their children’s strengths, and each other’s strengths (n = 3) | <p>“Really interesting to hear other families’ perspectives on how their children perceive themselves and how their families see their strengths”</p> <p>“Time to think about how the strengths of different family members can help each other.”</p> |
| Focus on strengths rather than deficits (n = 3) | <p>“To focus on strengths and positives rather than challenges”</p> <p>“Very interesting to me personally – we have spent months talking about our child’s weaknesses so it’s great to have time to think about our child’s strengths”</p> |
| Good facilitation – feeling heard and understood (n = 3) | <p>“Good facilitators”</p> <p>“Time to honestly share experiences and feel understood”</p> |
| B) What parents disliked about the workshop (n = 5) | Quotes |
| More concrete information around support (n = 4) | <p>“I would like to go more in depth about how to support the strengths”</p> <p>“Too abstract.”</p> <p>“More advice/methods to support our young people to apply their strengths.”</p> |
| Questionnaire not suitable for non-verbal children | <p>“The questionnaire was difficult because my child is non-verbal... I felt a lot of the questions were irrelevant and couldn’t get a full picture of my child’s strengths.”</p> |