

Caregiver Strengths and Needs

CANS-NY User Tip Sheet

Caregivers play a critical role in their children’s development. It is important to understand that identifying the caregiver’s strengths and needs helps us to build a successful plan of care for children to be properly served.

Caregivers Are Essential To Development

We look carefully at the needs and strengths of caregivers for a reason. These needs and strengths can strongly impact the health and development of their children. Health Homes take the caregivers’ needs into account when working collaboratively to identify needs in the plan of care.

Ratings Are Not Judgments

The Caregiver Domain is designed to encourage communication and collaboration about needs and strengths. Items are not judgment statements, but rather are a collaborative way to identify the caregiver’s actionable needs. Caregivers have many skills while still exhibiting needs. Caregiver needs (like all needs on the CANS-NY) should be viewed through the lens of action. Does a caregiver need/want help in a certain area? That calls for action!



Don’t Forget Intensity of Treatment

Although it is not part of the Caregiver Domain, the intensity of the child’s medical treatment needs (Item F in the Medical Health Module) can result in caregivers needing increased support. Consider carefully the intensity and complexity of the medical care, treatments, and equipment needed by the target child when you rate this item. What support is needed? Rate based on action.

Multiple Caregivers = Multiple Needs and Strengths

Every caregiver is unique and should be rated as such. Moms. Dads. Foster Parents. Kinship Foster Parents. Each caregiver who is relevant in the child’s life should be in the plan of care. Rate them all!

Try rating a few items:

Parenting Stress: Carlos is Julio’s foster parent. Carlos is very proud of his many years serving dozens of foster youth. Carlos considers himself a skilled foster parent, but admits to being caught off guard by Julio’s needs. Carlos has asked about respite services, something he has rarely ever done for previous foster placements.

Organization: Joey’s mom has always been on top of managing the school schedules for her three children as well as her own work schedule. Next week Joey moves to a new middle school with a later start time. Mom cannot change her work schedule and is not sure how she will be able to get him to school now.

Intensity of Treatment: Daisuke is 8-weeks old and has just been discharged home after a stay in the Pediatric ICU. He currently requires tube feeding for all nourishment. His parents received specialized training for delivering this intervention at home.

Rating suggestions available on page 2.

Selected Examples

(Note: These are select examples and do not include all Caregiver Strengths & Needs Domain items.)

Remember: Action is called for when a need is getting in the way of the caregiver's capacity to parent.

Physical Health	Consider whether the caregiver's physical health interferes with parenting.
Developmental	Does the caregiver have a developmental delay that impacts meeting the needs of the child?
Mental Health	Think of the caregiver's mental health in terms of how it interferes with their parenting. Think in terms of action. Is the caregiver utilizing support for mental health concerns? Does she/he want to?
Substance Use	Consider how a caregiver's substance use may or may not impact their parenting.
Partner Relationship	Is the caregiver in a committed relationship? Does that relationship provide caregiving support? Does it negatively impact the caregiver's parenting?
Legal	Is the caregiver dealing with criminal court, mental health court, drug court, or child welfare related charges? How is this impacting parenting?
Acculturation/Language	Can the caregiver communicate in the language of the dominant culture so as to meet the youth's needs? Does the caregiver have access to supportive resources, like translation services, in order to meet the child's needs?
Self-Care/Daily-Living	Can the caregiver adequately care for him or herself? If not, does the caregiver have supports or services in place for self-care in order to continue meeting the child's needs?
Organization	Consider how organizational skills can impact the caregiver's ability to meet the needs of the child. Remember, this goes beyond simply keeping a house in order. Medication management, appointment scheduling and many other factors should be considered.
Supervision	Consider how needs can differ from strengths. A caregiver can have many strengths, and have a specific need for help supervising her/his children.
Resourcefulness	Can the caregiver, on their own, find the help that he/she needs to parent? Think in terms of the action or help needed.
Decision-Making	Does the caregiver require support in order to think through options and arrive at a decision? Think about how the caregiver's decisions could be placing the child at risk.
Parenting Stress	Consider helping caregivers establish a baseline: "What is your stress level today? If your child wasn't exhibiting his/her current needs, what would your level of stress be?"
Informal Supports	Needs here can be very situationally specific. One caregiver could have only one or two very strong resources nearby (no need for action) while another caregiver has lots of family/friends but they are not reliable (this is more of a need).
Knowledge of Condition	Think in terms of capacity for parenting. Does the caregiver have knowledge to make informed decisions about the child's treatment? Is more information, knowledge, or support needed? Support is action!
Knowledge Congruence	Keep in mind that caregivers' don't need to know all of the professional terminology in use, but would they consider themselves to be "on the same page" as the professionals serving their child?
Intensity of Treatment	Consider the frequency and intensity of needed medical interventions.

Sample Question Suggested Ratings

Parenting Stress = 2 Carlos has many strengths, but is currently reporting parenting stress and asking for support in the form of respite services.

Organization = 2 Joey's mom needs support to develop a new morning routine in light of her child's change in schools.

Intensity of Treatment = 3 Daisuke's parents will be providing daily invasive interventions without which Daisuke's health and wellbeing would quickly deteriorate.