

Finding Strength

I step outside into the bright, beautiful California winter morning and try to appreciate the positives. And yet, it's already been a long winter. All around me, emotional exhaustion once again feels high. It's easy to understand why. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued, and after two years, we are seeing catastrophic downstream effects amongst the children and families with whom we work. Meanwhile, mental health care organizations are struggling with retention, leading to serious workforce shortages and consequential increased workload on current providers. In fact, in late 2021, AACAP partnered with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health.¹ In my own life, things came to such a head recently that my friend announced that we would enroll in a happiness course² to combat our growing burnout. While I did immediately enroll in the course weeks ago to decrease my own burnout, I have of course been so busy with work that I have only made it through two days of the course material. And that's the problem, right? It can feel like prioritizing our own wellbeing simply delays the checking-off from the endless to-do list. While I know that I'm not doing this elusive wellness "balance" right, nor do I know how to do it right, I do know that talking about these realities helps me.

What else do I find helpful? Well, it turns out that in the two sessions of the happiness course I completed, I learned something. According to positive psychology, if you identify your own character strengths and intentionally and regularly engage in behaviors that draw on your individual strengths, your happiness can be boosted. When I completed my own character strength survey, guess what emerged as my number one strength? Love of learning. This resonates deeply with me and is why I love my work, which does not really feel like work when I'm learning, teaching, mentoring, and creating. One of the homework tasks from the happiness course was, after learning your character strengths, to find a way to

use your key strength intentionally every day. Though I have not necessarily done the homework as suggested (eg, recording my intentional actions in a journal daily), even having this framework in mind has been helpful. When I spend time reviewing a new article, preparing to teach new curriculum, researching a new topic – all things I have been doing for years – I now acknowledge to myself that these activities are true to my character strength, consistent with my love of learning. And then, this framework does seem to help my wellbeing.

Similarly, with *JAACAP Connect*, when I see all the amazing creativity and lifelong learning that accompanies these articles, I feel rejuvenated. As usual, I am so grateful for the opportunity to highlight the outstanding authorship in this issue. Drs. McClendon, Salem, Mallorca and I continue our Spotlight on Juvenile Justice series with an examination on the overlap between youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice system. Dr. Yuen provides guidance for clinicians around an important topic, how to best serve the children and families who have immigrated to the US while understanding the biological evidence for acculturation stress. Dr. Williams approaches the critical topic of the use of polypharmacy in children and adolescents with posttraumatic stress disorder in residential school settings by providing thoughtful and accessible considerations for the clinician aiming to avoid excessive polypharmacy. Drs. DiGiacomo and Cogswell ask the question, how does the way child psychiatrists introduce themselves (eg, by first name, by formal title) impact patient perception of competence and empathy? Dr. Kim and colleagues present findings from their research on gustatory over-responsivity in children with autism spectrum disorder, examining distinctions between parent-report and direct assessment methods. Dr. Nowrangi addresses the increasingly ubiquitous use of social media among children and adolescents, including a discussion of key findings on associated mental health concerns as well as potential benefits of social media to guide the clinician into

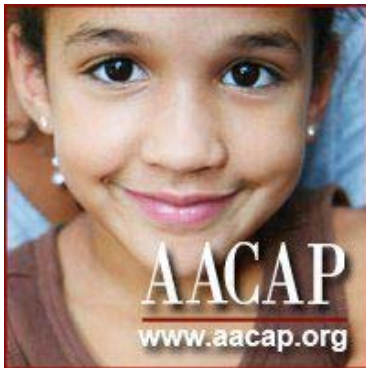
this brave new world. Finally, in a related media-themed piece, Dr. Harness discusses the Papageno effect – reference to Mozart’s 18th-century opera *The Magic Flute* – in relation to two media examples and the fails and triumphs of each.

I hope, as we all navigate our own strengths in this particularly challenging time, you all find as much rejuvenation and lifelong learning that I found in these wonderful pieces.

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References

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2. Santos, L. The Science of Well-Being. Available from: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>. Accessed February 13, 2022.



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