

## Building Friendships: Positive Strokes

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Describe the importance of positive strokes for one's self-esteem and for building relationships with other people.
2. Identify examples of positive strokes.
3. Experience the effects of giving and receiving positive strokes.

### HANDOUTS:

1. *Positive Strokes*
2. *What I Like About You*
3. *Take Home Message for This Session*

### ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Index Cards
- Scrapbooking materials
- Flipchart and markers
- Pencils and pens

### REVIEW HOMEWORK

Write down two or three questions to review what was covered in the last session.

*Before we begin today's session on building friendships, let's review your homework from last week.*

### GETTING STARTED: The Human Knot

Let's begin today's session with an activity to show how we are connected to each other and depend on each other for support. This activity will also show the importance of communicating with people to whom you are connected, particularly with regard to problem solving.

[Divide participants into groups of 6 to 8 participants plus a facilitator.]

Every person should get into a circle with the people in their group. Reach across and take the hands of two different people standing on the other side of the circle. Be sure that you do not hold hands with the person next to you.

Once everyone has grabbed hands, a human knot has been formed. The challenge is to untangle the knot without letting go of each others' hands. Be sure to take your time in untangling the knot, and make sure no one gets an arm twisted in a way that hurts.

[Note: It is possible to have two distinct circles result from one knot at the end of the activity.]

[Once the knot is untangled, ask the following questions.]

- How did it feel to be in the human knot?
- How did you talk to each other in order to untangle the human knot?
- How did you make sure nobody was hurt?
- Was it helpful to have other people offer suggestions on how to untangle?
- Did different people have different perspectives?
- What is an example in real life when everyone depends on each other to do their part?

*In real life, most of what we experience involves people affecting each other's lives. We can do that in a positive, helpful way or in a negative way. Let's talk about some ways we interact with others in positive ways.*

### ACTIVITY: Mini-Lecture on Positive Strokes

[Use the handout **Strokes** to define a stroke and discuss the different kinds of strokes humans give each other.]

*People of all ages have a "hunger" or desire to have their human psychological needs met. One human desire is the need to feel that others see the positive things in us. Each of us has positive characteristics.*

*Also, it has been found that the breakdown of a relationship is not always caused by too much "bad stuff." Instead, the relationship breaks up because of not enough positive things or "good stuff" in the relationship. Researchers have found that good relationships—especially good couple relationships—have five positive words or actions for every one negative one. What they find is that people who have lots of positives in their relationship, handle the negatives better.*

### ACTIVITY: Examples of Positive and Negative Strokes

*Sometimes, we just seem to get out of practice in giving others positive strokes—or maybe we never had really good examples of how to give others positive strokes.*

In pairs or small groups, we are going to complete the handout, **Examples of Strokes**. For Part I, identify whether the stroke is a positive one or a negative one. For Part II, brainstorm a list of strokes you give or have received from other people. Indicate whether the strokes are positive or negative. For the negative strokes, think of how it can be turned into a positive.

[You may need to remind participants that sometimes we can state things in a positive way but it can still be hurtful to another person. If their re-phrased statements look like this kind of negative stroke, discuss why it continues to be a negative stroke.]

### **ACTIVITY:** **Practicing Giving Positive Strokes**

Now take a few minutes to complete the handout **What I Like About You**. Think of someone (it can be your partner or a co-parent or relative) and fill in the blanks. When you are finished, share your list with your partner if he or she is with you. If not, then share the list with him or her later, if you feel comfortable doing so. You might want to only select one or two of the items to share with the other person. This may feel more comfortable for you.

[**Optional Activity Instructions:** Give out index cards to participants—one for their partner and several for their family members. This activity is simpler than the last one and may work better for co-parents who are not romantically involved with each other.]

Now we are going to build upon what you have learned so far in this lesson by doing another activity. Everyone has received some index cards. Write two positive strokes for your partner and/or your family members on these cards. Just a word or phrase is fine. Be sure to use only one card per person.

When thinking of positive strokes for these

people, here are some things to keep in mind:

- What is something you like about this person?
- What is something he/she does well?

### **ACTIVITY:** **Scrapbook Page for What I Like About You**

Have participants prepare a scrapbook page that reflects the information on the completed the handout, **What I Like About You**. In a sense, this page might be considered a valentine card, love letter or a friendship card, depending on the type of relationship they have with other person.

### **HOMEWORK:**

Have participants take a minute to complete the **Take-Home Message** for their magnet. The action step should focus on the positive strokes they will give to themselves or others. In addition, encourage participants to share what they wrote on the handout, **What I Like About You**, with the other person, if they feel comfortable doing so.

### **CLOSING:**

Today, we identified the importance of positive strokes in our relationships. We also learned that it is important to provide positive feelings to ourselves and other people in order to make us and other people feel valued. In the end, it is the surest way to build and maintain positive relationships.





# Strokes

Eric Berne points out in his book *Games People Play* that humans are “stroke hungry.” This means that in order to have a full and meaningful life, a person has to be acknowledged by others. **A stroke is defined as a unit of human recognition.**

As infants, we receive most of our strokes through touch; in fact, studies have shown that infants have died because of a lack of touch. Touch remains a stroke throughout life, but as we mature, words and various non-verbal ways of getting strokes are added. If we don't get enough strokes, we suffer from stroke hunger. It is important for us to understand that strokes are **NOT A LUXURY BUT A BASIC NECESSITY** for us to survive.

Strokes can be positive or negative. A simple hug is a positive stroke and usually makes the recipient feel good. This is the kind of strokes we like to receive. When people do not get positive strokes, they would rather have negative strokes than none at all. For example, a person can learn to survive being yelled at or ridiculed more easily than being ignored or treated with indifference. With negative strokes, at least the individual's presence is acknowledged.

# Strokes

## Examples of Strokes

### Part I: Positive or Negative Strokes?

By each sentence, put either a “+” for positive strokes and a “-” for negative strokes.

	You did a good job changing that diaper.
	Why can't you be like your brother and be smarter?
	You are a really interesting person.
	I love you.
	I love you when you give me a back rub.
	You're very special to me.
	Good job!
	You're doing that the wrong way.
	You're too fat.
	You're doing a good job practicing non-defensive listening.
	I like it when you give me positive strokes.
	You're very smart.
	You're a good person.



# Strokes

## Part II: Rate Your Own Strokes?

In small groups, think of a list of strokes you often get or give in your relationships. Then indicate whether they are positive or negative.

+ or -	Examples of Strokes

Remember for every negative stroke, you need five positive strokes to make up for it.

# What I Like About You

When we first met, what I immediately liked about you was:

.....  
.....

I feel really loved (or appreciated or supported) when you:

..... or .....

I appreciate:

.....  
.....

I'm really attracted to your:

.....  
.....

Your best character traits are:

.....  
.....

Here are some examples of when I've seen them:

.....  
.....

Now share your list with the other person you wrote about,  
if you are comfortable doing so.



# Take Home Message for This Session

**Directions:** Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**For every negative in a  
relationship, it takes five  
positives to counteract it.**

My Action Steps:

.....  
.....

The Next Session:

.....  
DATE  
.....  
TIME  
.....  
LOCATION

