

HOPE in Every Note

A Strengths-Based EMR
Documentation Checklist for Positive,
Patient-Centered Care



Introduction

Clinical notes can be a powerful tool to highlight what's going well and make visible patients' and families' resources, resilience, and progress across the care team. By intentionally documenting strengths, moments of joy, and protective factors, we strive to capture a more complete story of health and create a shared, hopeful language in the medical record.

The HOPE framework emphasizes positive childhood experiences (PCEs), protective factors, and strengths-based care. This approach presented here shifts the focus from deficits to possibilities, promoting conditions for families to flourish.

The Four Building Blocks of HOPE: Relationships, Environment, Engagement, and Emotional Growth, represent the key types of positive childhood experiences all children need to thrive. When written to intentionally align with the HOPE Framework, clinical notes can open doors to PCEs, strengthen continuity, and support person-centered care. Recording positive experiences alongside clinical needs transforms notes into a platform for building resilience, guiding treatment planning, and fostering meaningful patient engagement.

Goal

Promote positive experiences, resources, and strengths of patients and families in all clinical encounter documentation.



Intake & First Encounters:

Focus on uncovering strengths, resources & protective factors with the HOPE lens

1. Ask at least one joy-focused question:

- a. "Tell me about a recent moment that brought you or your family happiness."

2. Ask positively framed questions:

- a. Instead of "What's been difficult?" also ask "What has been going well for you lately?" or "What gives you hope?"

3. Document family strengths (skills, values, abilities):

- a. "What things have helped you before to manage this situation?"
 - i. Example Documentation: Parents consistently advocate for child's educational needs'

4. Document Achievements:

- a. "What small achievements have you had in managing your health that you would like to maintain?"
 - i. Example Documentation:
 - The family began regular evening walks, increasing physical activity together.
 - Family successfully relocated to stable housing within a safer neighborhood.
 - Improved communication between parents and adolescents through agreed "no phone at dinner" rule.

5. Record phrases that reflect the client and family's personal meaning and pride.

6. Ask questions about the Four Building Blocks of HOPE:

- a. Refer to the Well Child Visit Provider Prompt Resource



Progress Notes

Reinforce and track strengths over time

1. **Include at least one positive change or success since last visit.**
2. **Highlight resources used: community groups, cultural traditions, supportive friends/family**
3. **Most EMRs focus on deficits. Make space to record abilities, talents, and supports:**
 - a. Examples: Instead of only writing, “Frequent headaches” Add: “Has learned breathing and stretching exercises that help reduce pain. = “Struggling with depression” Add: “Plays guitar daily, finds music helpful for mood regulation.”
4. **Connect strengths to care goals. Ensure documented strengths can be used to guide care plans and follow-up:**
 - a. Examples:
 - i. “Enjoys swimming... recommend aquatic therapy to support mobility.”
 - ii. “Enjoys gardening, suggest it as part of a physical activity plan”.
5. **Improve care goals and strengthen care plan by incorporating the four Building blocks of HOPE into it:**
 - a. Before putting together a care plan, ask yourself the questions “how to promote access to each building block?”
 - b. How can my plans promote access to PCEs?”
 - c. Examples:
 - i. Relationships: Connect the family to mentoring programs or peer support groups.
 - ii. Environment: Setting up a quiet, organized space for studying and rest.
 - iii. Engagement: Encourage participation in volunteer or neighborhood events.
 - iv. Emotional Growth: Include counseling or emotional skills-building activities in the plan.



Progress Notes

Reinforce and track strengths over time (cont.)

6. Track growth over time: new skills, resilience in challenges:

a. Examples:

- i. Family adopted a consistent bedtime routine that supports better sleep.
- ii. Teen started using a planner to organize schoolwork and activities.
- iii. Child maintained school attendance despite a recent move.

7. Use EMR prompts creatively:

- a. Turn mandatory fields into opportunities for positive reflection.

Communication & Care team Visibility

Make strengths easy for the whole team to see and act on

1. Flag strengths in the patient summary or “snapshot” for easy visibility.

- a. Make strengths visible.
- b. Place positive notes in sections where other care team members will see them quickly.

2. Document efforts made by patient/family (even small steps).

3. Include positive anticipatory guidance:

- a. “Continue daily bedtime reading to support bonding.”

Implementation Tip:

Embed these examples into EMR note templates so prompts appear during documentation.

- *This makes HOPE-informed writing the default, not the exception.*