

Promoting Positive Youth Development

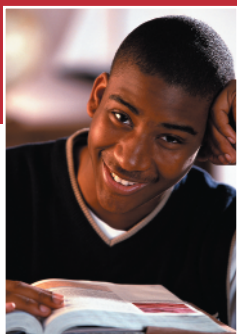


An Investment in
Youth & Communities



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families

Why Positive Youth Development?



Today, States, communities, organizations, and families are asking: “How can we better support young people, especially those growing up in difficult life situations?”

The fact is that even youth in the most challenging circumstances can succeed if they have the support of caring adults and access to the following:

- Chances to get involved in the community that provide them with new skills and a connection with others
- Prevention services that help them to make positive decisions and avoid risky behaviors, and
- Appropriate interventions when their behaviors put them or others at risk

Today, there is a resurgence of interest in a strategy designed to provide youth with opportunities, services, and support as they transition to adulthood: the Positive Youth Development approach.

What Is Positive Youth Development?



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) created the Positive Youth Development approach more than 30 years ago when researchers and practitioners identified what kept most young people on the right track:

- A sense of competence: being able to do something well (such as mastering job skills)
- A sense of usefulness: having something to contribute (such as volunteering for community projects)
- A sense of belonging: being part of a community (such as identifying with an ethnic or social group)
- A sense of power: having control over one's future (such as having access to education or training)

Positive Youth Development, therefore, requires a communitywide approach to ensure that all young people develop knowledge and skills, belong and contribute to a community, and plan for their future.



Who's Promoting Positive Youth Development?



The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), of HHS, is exploring how to promote the Positive Youth Development approach.

To that end, the ACF is working with numerous other Federal agencies, national organizations, and communities that believe this approach is the most cost-effective and ethical way to help young people become independent and engaged citizens.

These organizations and communities are providing young people with opportunities to learn and contribute that will assist them in focusing on the future.

In turn, young people's vision for their future helps prevent their involvement in problem behaviors and assists them in overcoming challenging situations.

When young people are provided with opportunities, they become positively involved in community life as employees, volunteers, and good neighbors.

What Do Youth Need to Develop Positively?

Involving youth in their communities is, in fact, one of the most important approaches to helping youth develop a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and power:

- Sense of competence: Mastering job skills through involvement in community projects
- Sense of usefulness: Taking responsibility for community projects and being asked for their perspectives and ideas
- Sense of belonging: Receiving support and guidance from caring adults and identifying with a neighborhood- or faith-based institution or an ethnic or social group
- Sense of power: Learning about their options in planning for a career and having access to more education or training

So what can you do to create an approach that helps youth develop positively?

Turn the page to find out.



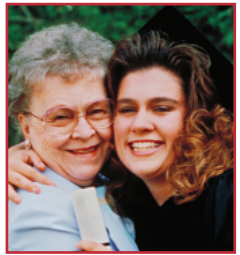


What Can You Do?

Everyone has a role to play in helping their community to rethink how to actively engage and support young people:

- Policymakers can explore with youth and others how legislative and policy decisions affect communities' ability to provide services and opportunities for all young people.
- Neighborhood leaders and community members can involve young people in assessing how the community supports youth, and then work with elected officials to ensure that youth have access to what they need.
- Business leaders can look for opportunities to teach young people the skills that they will need to succeed in the marketplace.
- Youth service organizations can examine whether they are working with young people through the Positive Youth Development approach.
- Media personnel can highlight young people's contributions to the community.

- Treatment providers can engage adolescent treatment recipients in service to others, which helps them gain a sense of belonging and usefulness while they are addressing the consequences of past challenges.
- Teachers and school administrators can examine policies, procedures, and teaching methods to ensure that they engage young people in ways that build on their strengths while teaching them how their behavior affects others.
- Faith-based institutions can encourage congregations to involve young people in community activities.
- Parents can learn more about the changes that accompany the adolescent lifestage and strive to engage their children in activities that help them feel competent, useful, part of a community, and in control of their futures



For more information, turn the page.





For more information on Positive Youth Development, please contact the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth:

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