



Positive Youth Development 101

Takeaways: Principles of Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is a **research-based framework or approach that communities can use to help young people develop to their full potential.**

Key principles discussed in this module include:

- **Focus on positive outcomes:** We shift from preventing or fixing problems to creating positive outcomes such as competencies, connections and caring relationships, positive values and expectations, and meaningful participation.
- **Strength-based approach:** Resiliency research demonstrates that protective factors, including both internal and external strengths, buffer against the effects of risk factors. By helping youth identify and build on their strengths, we can help them meet life's challenges.
- **Services, supports, and opportunities:** Healthy development requires basic needs to be met; community services are necessary to ensure that all youth have food, shelter, education, and health care. Supportive relationships and safe, structured environments also help set the stage for healthy development, and can provide youth an essential sense of belonging. Youth also need opportunities to build on their strengths and passions as they prepare for independence.
- **Youth voice/engagement:** We work with young people, not for them. We engage young people as partners, create youth-adult partnerships, and listen to their expertise and perspective.
- **Community-based/collaborative:** Young people interact with a variety of social environments. In addition to youth-serving organizations, the involvement of community sectors such as businesses, faith communities, and civic organizations is key to the success of the PYD approach. Working collaboratively across sectors, a community can find ways to increase services, supports (including supportive relationships), and opportunities for all of its youth.

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Additionally, the PYD approach emphasizes:

- **Universality/inclusiveness:** As a community we need to provide support and opportunities to all young people, not just to the “high risk” priority groups or the high achieving group. Research tells us that universal strategies are often very effective for high risk or high need youth. At the same time, it is important to recognize that young people who face the steepest challenges may need additional support.
- **Long-term, developmentally appropriate involvement:** Young people need support from their communities throughout their development –about 20 years–and this support must adjust to their changing developmental needs. The developmental requirements of 12-year-olds differ from those of 16-year-olds. We also know that young people need extended exposure to programs and supportive adults to thrive; short-term programs and opportunities are not as effective.