

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TOOLKIT



DCCCA

With over 30 years of research, interventions that use the Social Development Strategy (SDS) have proven to have positive results, preventing potential behaviors such as violence, substance use, and incarceration from developing as youth age into adulthood. In prevention science, promoting healthy development and preventing problems requires addressing the predictors, Risk Factors (including Adverse Childhood Experiences), and Protective Factors.

The SDS is based on five factors, which, when used with the developmental level and interests of the youth in mind, can help youth gain long-lasting, healthy lifestyle habits. The Social Development Strategy fosters the success and health of young people from before birth through every stage of development. It provides a way of increasing the protective factors for the youth in your community.

The SDS states that when families, schools, and communities **Offer Opportunities**, **Build Skills**, and **Give Recognition** to youth, these can lay the foundation for **Bonding** and setting **Clear Standards**, all of which lead to healthy behaviors and beliefs.

OPPORTUNITIES

To help increase healthy behaviors among young people, the first thing you need to do is provide positive opportunities at home, at school, and within the community. Opportunities need to be challenging enough to be motivating but not so challenging that they become frustrating.

- **Opportunities must be developmentally appropriate** for the age, abilities, and interests of the young person. For example, it may not be appropriate to provide cooking classes on a hot stove to a 5-year-old, but opportunities to learn about and choose healthy snacks might be more age-appropriate.
- **Opportunities need to be meaningful** and match the young person's individual characteristics and interests. For example, engaging teens in a community coalition without providing them with a meaningful voice may not be motivating and may further alienate teens.
- **Examples of what you can do:**
 - Reading to your preschooler
 - Involving your child in decisions about chores
 - Volunteering with your teen
 - Engaging your teen in decisions about their curfew
 - Participating in sport, social, musical, and educational activities with your child



SKILLS

Skills help youth be successful in the opportunities provided. Whether providing a comprehensive program within a school or working with youth on an individual basis, there are several important practice considerations about teaching youth skills.

When teaching skills:

- **Be intentional and realistic**- Remember that youth learn skills at different ages and do not develop at the same rate.
- **Motivate the youth to want to learn**- Help them understand why this skill is great for them to have; reflect and reinforce their own statements about the value of the skill.
- **Start small**- Break the skill into small steps and teach one at a time.
- **Model the steps and practice together**- Demonstrate the skill being taught and create natural opportunities to practice. Continue to build on their success and provide new challenges as success occurs.

Many skills can be practiced, such as:

- Reading and writing together
- Budgeting and money management
- Problem solving
- Chores
- Cooking
- Cooperation

As their opportunities change, their need for new skills will too.



RECOGNITION

Offer consistent praise and acknowledgment for effort, improvement, and achievement.

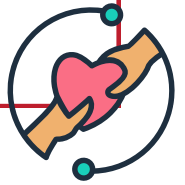
- Recognize the youth in a way they feel comfortable; not every kind of recognition needs to be in front of a crowd to be memorable.
- Recognizing and celebrating the effort youth put into new opportunities and skill development can be highly motivating and encourage persistence through challenging tasks.
- Acknowledging successes throughout the learning process helps build resilience, normalizes learning through mistakes, and reinforces positive social skills, which can reduce the likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors.
- Examples of verbal recognition can include:
 - I love that you tried a new way to solve that.
 - You worked really hard on that last assignment.
 - You are showing so much improvement.
 - That was a challenging moment, and I'm proud of how you handled it.



BONDING

Bonding is a sense of emotional closeness and attachment to those who provided those opportunities, skills, and recognition. This synergy of opportunities, skills, and recognition begins the process of bonding.

- Every day, when a child consistently experiences such moment-to-moment interactions, bonding is strengthened. That bond acts as a motivator to follow family, school, or community norms and values.
- Family and community bonding is a source of strength, and it may vary based on the cultural and racial background of the community. Such variations may need to be responsive to the individuals or communities being addressed.
- Youth who have strong family and or community bonds tend to think twice when making decisions that go against family/community norms, values, and rules.



CLEAR STANDARDS

It's essential that adults provide clear and consistent standards for youth. When youth feel a sense of attachment and commitment, they are more likely to abide by those clearly communicated standards.

- These standards can be provided in all areas in which children live: at home, in school, and within their community, and can act as “guardrails” that can give them the support they need to help them make good decisions in risky situations.
- A youth who has been allowed to participate in community events, has learned skills to allow them to be successful in these events, and has been recognized for their effort and perseverance along the way, will be less likely to push against or break standards that have been set by the adults in their lives, with whom they have bonded.



CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

As communities work to promote youth protection, it is important to understand and address issues of inequality that might constrain young people from feeling connected or bonded to positive adults. Be careful when considering the various types of recognition, bonding activities, opportunities, and necessary skills. As said before, youth are not a “one size fits all,” and programs or interventions using the SDS approach may need to be adapted to better fit within the cultural norms of the communities and families they are serving.

Check out The Science Behind the Program from the Center for Communities That Care:
<https://www.communitiesthatcare.net/prevention-science/>