

Youth Engagement Toolkit



Positive Youth Development is an approach to engage youth in their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families through leadership and skill-building to promote positive outcomes for young people. Meaningful youth engagement emphasizes the capabilities of young people and recognizes their unique perspective, contributions, and potential.

This Youth Engagement Toolkit aims to offer guidance and resources for effectively engaging with youth to create opportunities, foster positive relationships, and provide the necessary support to further develop their strengths.

Benefits of Positive Youth Development

Youth programs offer significant advantages to teenagers and pre-teens. Researchers highlight the six core outcomes, known as the "6 C's", that these programs provide to young people:

1. *Competence* in academic, social, and vocational areas
2. *Confidence* or a positive self-identity
3. *Connections* to community, family, and peers
4. *Character* or positive values, integrity, and moral commitment
5. *Caring* and compassion
6. *Contribution*

Adding Positive Youth Development (PYD) program principles in youth-serving programs can have positive effects in young people's lives, including their physical and mental health, relationships, and academics. A PYD approach is also effective when working with vulnerable and underserved adolescents. Research shows that young people who are surrounded by a variety of opportunities for positive encounters engage in less risky behavior and ultimately show higher rates of successful transition into adulthood.

PYD programs are a way to ensure that young people have access to adequate positive opportunities. The available information suggests that PYD programs can prevent a variety of risk behaviors among young people and improve social and emotional outcomes.

Youth programs that apply the research in **Positive Youth Development** can be very effective in helping to build these 6 C's.

<https://www.rootsofaction.com/youth-programs/>

Positive Youth Development Concepts

- Social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence
- Self-efficacy
- Self-determination
- Clear and positive identity
- Belief in the future
- Positive social involvement
- Bonding
- Positive norms
- Engaging in culture and spirituality
- Resiliency
- Managing emotions
- Life satisfaction

Adapted from

<https://makingcents.com/blog-article/positive-youth-development-changing-the-way-we-do-youth-development/>

Positive Experiences

Positive Relationships

Positive Environments

Positive Youth Development Background

PYD programs aim to support the well-being and personal development of youth by encouraging qualities such as self-identity, optimism, self-discipline, and self-assurance. These programs also seek to enhance social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence in young people. A key emphasis of PYD is recognizing the potential in youth and acknowledging the significant impact that caring adults can have in guiding them towards positive outcomes. Rather than solely focusing on mitigating risky behaviors, these programs prioritize enhancing the positive attributes already present. Strategies encompass building on the strengths of the youth, empowering them to actively participate in decision-making processes.

Youth programs play an important role in keeping these promises to our youth.

<https://americaspromise.org/>

Engaging Youth

Active participation of youth in organizations and programs brings benefits to both parties. Collaboratively developed youth programs are more engaging and impactful, leading to better integration into daily life. Involving youth in decision-making processes increases the likelihood of embracing and adopting decisions. Empowering young people to address community needs fosters empathy and readiness for continued involvement in crucial efforts. Meaningful youth engagement involves considering youth as equal partners in decision-making, requiring full engagement and openness to change to create a shared vision for collaboration.

**A
HEALTHY
START**

**SAFE
PLACES**

**EFFECTIVE
EDUCATION**

**CARING
ADULTS**

**OPPORTUNITIES
TO HELP
OTHERS**

Research through
America's Promise suggest that
5 promises change kid's lives:

When connecting youth to positive experiences, programs should include the following principles:

Positive Youth Development

- *is an intentional process. It is about being proactive to promote protective factors in young people.
- *complements efforts to prevent risky behaviors and attitudes in youth and supports efforts that work to address negative behaviors.
- *acknowledges and further develops (or strengthens) youth assets. All youth have the capacity for positive growth and development.
- *enables youth to thrive and flourish and prepares them for healthy, happy, and safe adulthood.
- *involves youth as active agents. Youth are valued and encouraged to participate in the services' design, delivery, and evaluation.
- *instills leadership qualities in youth, but youth are not required to lead. Youth can attend, actively participate, contribute, and/or lead through PYD activities.
- *involves civic involvement and civic engagement; youth contribute to their schools and broader communities through service.
- *is an investment that the community makes in young people. Youth and adults work together to frame the solutions.

Source: <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/key-principles-positive-youth-development>

LEADERSHIP

PERSONAL

Youth collaborate with staff to create plans, receive assistance in problem-solving, and participate in a structured process moderated by staff to resolve disputes.

ORGANIZATIONAL

Youth are actively engaged in decision-making, program development, fundraising, mentoring, volunteering, leadership roles, and improving physical spaces. Alumni are also consulted for feedback and advice.

COMMUNITY

Youth actively participate as peer educators, serve on youth councils and committees in collaboration with schools and government, act as spokespersons, engage in community media initiatives, volunteer at other organizations, potentially access youth courts, and showcase their talents through art, writing, and athletics with support from the organization.

PYD programs should continually assess program processes and identify where changes need to be made.



Or follow this link to access this toolkit and other helpful resources:

ASSESSMENT TOOL EXAMPLE

Coming to this program has helped me . . .	Yes	Kind of	Not really
Academic Success			
Do better in school			
Try harder in school			
Attitudes and Behaviors Related to School	Yes	Kind of	Not really
Participate more in activities			
Become more interested in going to school			
Care more about my school			
Get along better with classmates			
Get along better with my teachers			
Community Involvement (community could include school?)	Yes	Kind of	Not really
Spend more time volunteering or helping others			
Spend more time looking for opportunities to help others			
Feel more important to my school/community			
Feel a stronger connection to my school/community			
Feel better about myself because I help others			
Cultural Competency	Yes	Kind of	Not really
I talk more with people who look or sound different than me			
I feel more comfortable being around people who look or sound different than me			
I understand that someone who looks or sounds different than me may not be that different at all			

Life Skills	Yes	Kind of	Not really
I get along better with other people my age			
I am better at making friends			
I am better about telling others about my ideas and feelings			
I am better at listening to other people			
I work better with others			
I make better decisions			
I am better at setting goals			
I am better at solving problems			
I am more of a leader			
Positive Core Values	Yes	Kind of	Not really
I care more about other people and their feelings			
I am better at standing up for what I believe			
I am better at speaking up for people who have been treated unfairly			

Resources:

Making Cents International

<https://makingcents.com/blog-article/positive-youth-development-changing-the-way-we-do-youth-development/>

DCCCA Youth Prevention Team Guide

<https://pro.ispringcloud.com/acc/HK-0mU41NTg1Mg/s/55852-s3QmB-C69DL-2aaeS?fv=2265>

Youth Involvement and Engagement Assessment Tool

https://youth.gov/docs/pyd_AssessmentTool.pdf

Best Practice Guide for Youth Engagement and Coalition Development

https://ctb.ku.edu/sites/default/files/chapter_files/best_practice_document_for_youth_engagement_and_coalition_development_-_pdf.pdf

