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Developing a Protective Factors Framework for Youth in Care

A Webinar for the
National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections

February 29, 2012

The goal of YOUTHRIVE is

To examine how foster youth can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences.

Premises

- Adolescence can be a difficult stage, particularly for youth who have experienced adversity.

- Much can be learned about helping at-risk youth by understanding what healthy development entails for all youth.

- When a state removes a child from the home, it has an obligation to meet the developmental needs of the youth.

- As adolescence is a unique developmental period, youth need developmentally appropriate service delivery approaches.

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Premises (continued)

- Child welfare *alone* cannot address the social, emotional, cognitive and physical well being of youth.

- Advancing healthy development and well-being for youth must focus on increasing both protective and promotive factors and reducing risk factors.

- Such an approach must be adopted by multiple youth serving systems.

- Research in positive youth development, resiliency, neuroscience and the impact of trauma on brain development can inform policy and practice.

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Adolescents in Foster Care

❑ Approximately 44% of the children in care are over the age of 11

❑ 1 in 3 of the children who *enter* foster care are over 11 years old

❑ Last year, almost 30,000 youth exited foster care without a safe and permanent family

❑ Outcomes for Aging Out Youth:
  ▪ 24.4% of adolescents who aged out did not have high school diploma or GED compared to 7.3% of general population
  ▪ 52% were unemployed compared to 24.5% of the general population
  ▪ Only 57% had health insurance compared to 78% of the general population
  ▪ 30% of the young people reported homelessness for at least one day by age 24

Federal Mandate on Safety, Permanency and Well-Being

Safety:

- ❑ Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect
- ❑ Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate

Permanency:

- ❑ Children have permanency and stability in their living arrangements
- ❑ Continuity of family relationships and connections are preserved for children

Well-Being:

- ❑ Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- ❑ Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs
- ❑ Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs

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The Task

Scan the lifespan development research:

- What does healthy development and well-being look like across the lifespan?

- How is healthy development and well-being achieved across the lifespan?

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Two Results

- Document

  "Scan and Compilation of Research Addressing Developmental Issues across the Lifespan (0 – 25), with Special Attention to Adolescent Development"

- Evolving Protective and Promotive Factors Framework for Youth Development

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Document Outline

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Topics Uncovered via Scan that Informed Our Framework

- Contextual models of human development

- Adolescent brain development

- Impact of trauma and toxic stress

- Resiliency

- Trauma-informed care

- Positive youth development approach

- Risk, protective, and promotive factors

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Key Findings about Contextual Models of Human Development

- Development involves several processes: biological, psychological, cognitive, social

- Development influenced by total ecology/life situation in multiple contexts: family, school, neighborhood, cultural, socioeconomic status, sociopolitical, gender, cohort

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Contextual Models, (cont.)

- The person within the context; how person "makes meaning" out of their experiences

- The resources a person needs to develop successfully vary by age/stage

- Critical life events: turning points in lifespan

- The study of development must include data and theories from numerous academic fields

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Key Findings about Adolescent Brain Development

- Much evidence points to the central importance of prenatal and early postnatal (birth-3) brain development

- Early experiences affect the quality of brain architecture

- Brain development is life-long

- Adolescence is a time of profound change in brain structure and function

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Adolescent Brain Development, (cont.)

- Increased **prefrontal cortex** maturation begins and continues into adulthood

- Functions of the prefrontal cortex:
  - impulse control
  - setting priorities, organizing, and planning
  - decision making
  - sensitivity to feedback
  - self-control, self-regulation
  - initiating appropriate behavior
  - inhibiting inappropriate behavior

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Adolescent Brain Development, (cont.)

- Changes in limbic system, an area related to
  - emotionality and mood state
  - reward/pleasure seeking
  - processing social information

- Gap in timing of gradual prefrontal cortex maturation and more rapidly developing limbic system

- Positive experiences with and guidance from caring adults & institutions are essential in building complex adaptive brains

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Key Findings about Trauma and Toxic Stress

- Strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity **without adequate adult support**
  - ➢ violence
  - ➢ abuse, neglect, abandonment
  - ➢ betrayal of a trusted person or institution
- Disrupts brain development
- May induce hypersensitivity to stressors
- Increase risk for psychopathology and physical illness

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Complex trauma

"The dual problem of exposure to multiple traumatic events and the impact of this exposure on immediate and long-term development. For young adults in foster care, traumatic events might include poverty, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, separation from and loss of family, or multiple moves and relationship disruptions."

Ambiguous loss

"A loss in which there is no verification of death, no certainty that the person will come back, or no assurance that the person will return to the way she or he used to be. This form of loss lacks clear boundaries and has no clear ending. There are often no culturally or societally recognized rituals for grieving or even for acknowledging the loss."

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). *The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care.* St. Louis, Missouri

Trauma and Toxic Stress, (cont.)

- Impact of trauma and toxic stress
  - ➢ Problems with trust, autonomy, initiative
  - ➢ Difficulty with independence, intimacy, self-care
  - ➢ Patterns of intense, unstable relationships and interactions
  - ➢ Interferes with cognitive development
  - ➢ Difficulty interpreting and identifying emotional responses

Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence— from domestic violence to political terror.* St. Louis: Basic Books.

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Key Findings Related to Resiliency

- The processes that enable youth to thrive even in the face of adversity

- Not an invulnerability to stress and adversity

- The promotion of resilience in youth related to
  - changing attitudes of adults in their lives
  - various internal characteristics
  - various external characteristics of families, schools, and communities
  - deliberate policies, practices, and interventions (e.g., trauma-informed care)

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Key Findings Related to Trauma-Informed Care

▪ Recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in a person's life

▪Paradigm shift from:

"What's wrong with you?"
to
"What has happened to you?"

National Center for Trauma-Informed Care. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Ad......n.
http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/

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Key Findings Related to Positive Youth Development Approach

- Youth must be understood in their own terms

- All youth have strengths

- Although challenges and adversities exist, youth development is more than overcoming deficits and risk

- Youth can overcome adversity and thrive, but they must have protective factors embedded in social institutions

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Key Findings Related to Risk, Protective and Promotive Factors

- **30+ Risk Factors** that threaten healthy youth development

- **100+ Protective and Promotive Factors** that buffer risk and aid in healthy youth development

- **75+ Dynamic Outcomes** that are considered to be characteristic of healthy youth development and well-being

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YOUTHRIVE™

PROTECTIVE **&** PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

INCREASE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

- Personal resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of youth development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social, emotional, behavioral, intellectual and moral competence in youth

REDUCE RISK FACTORS

- Psychological stressors
- Inadequate or negative relationships with family members, adults outside youth's family and peers
- Insufficient or inadequate opportunities for positive growth and development
- Unsafe, unstable, inequitable environments

DYNAMIC OUTCOMES
HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT & WELL-BEING FOR YOUTH

INDIVIDUAL
- Hopeful, optimistic, compassionate, curious, resilient identity
- Supportive family and social networks
- Ability to form and sustain caring, committed relationships
- Success in school and workplace
- Service to community or society

POPULATION
- Physically, emotionally and mentally healthy
- Supportive family and social networks
- Appropriate education to achieve goals
- Participation in school and community
- Safe and nurtured in communities
- Successful in school

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Individual Dynamic Outcomes

- Hopeful, optimistic, compassionate, curious, resilient identity

- Supportive family and social networks

- Ability to form and sustain caring, committed relationships

- Success in school and workplace

- Service to community or society

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Risk Factors

Risk factors: conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that increase the probability of poor outcomes.

Youth Thrive Risk Factors

- Psychological stressors
- Inadequate/negative relationships with adults or peers
- Insufficient or inadequate opportunities for positive growth and development
- Unsafe, unstable, inequitable environments

Protective and Promotive Factors

Protective factors: conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk.

➢ Healthy development and well-being cannot be explained simply as mitigating, coping with, or eliminating risk.

Promotive factors: conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that actively enhance well-being.

Protective + Promotive factors: Increase the probability of positive, adaptive, and resilient outcomes, even in the face of risk and adversity.

Youth Thrive Protective & Promotive Factors

- Interdependent factors that both mitigate risk and contribute to healthy development and well-being for youth

- Some are internal resources; others are external
  - Personal resilience
  - Social connections
  - Knowledge of youth development
  - Concrete support in times of need
  - Social, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, and moral competence

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Personal Resilience

- Positive identity, positive self-concept

- Self-worth

- Self-compassion

- Sense of competence and self-efficacy

- Sense of personal responsibility

- Autonomy

- Timely help-seeking

- Belief in the ability to influence environment positively

- Self-advocacy

- Healthy coping

Evolve from youths' positive or adverse life experiences.

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Social Connections

▪ Safe, stable, supportive environments including equitable schools, communities, and social institutions

▪ Healthy, supportive, caring relationships with family, other adults, & peers who provide positive advice; promote high expectations; set developmentally appropriate limits, rules, and monitoring

▪ Healthy, supportive, caring relationships with peers and intimate partners

▪ Opportunities for constructive engagement in family, school, community, and social institutions

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Knowledge of Youth Development

Youth and adults:

▪ have accurate information about youth biopsychosocial and cognitive development

▪ have accurate information about preventing negative outcomes for youth (e.g., substance abuse)

▪ recognize that all youth have strengths and capacities

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Concrete Support in Times of Need

▪ Opportunities for additional skill building (e.g., tutoring, counseling)

▪ Crisis assistance (e.g., mental health, intimate partner violence, workforce development, housing, legal)

▪ Psychoeducational assistance (e.g., cognitive, behavioral, academic assessments and services)

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Social, Emotional, Behavioral, Intellectual, & Moral Competence

- Exercising self-regulation and impulse control
- Building critical thinking, planning, decision-making, conflict resolution, and communication skills
- Displaying a sense of right and wrong
- Understanding one's personal developmental history and needs
- Committing to realistic goals, positive work habits, activities, values, and beliefs
- Experiencing positive emotions
- Demonstrating character strengths
- Identifying productive interests and seeking to excel
- Forming and sustaining healthy relationships
- Engaging in positive risk-taking
- Avoiding alcohol, drugs, and risky sexual activity
- Building essential life skills
- Deepening cultural knowledge
- Exploring spirituality
- Consuming nutritious foods; exercising within one's physical means

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We believe the *YOUTHRIVE* **framework**

Will contribute to an understanding of how all youth, in general, and foster youth, in particular, can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences.

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Work In-Progress

- Annotated bibliography of supporting research studies and other resources

- Digital interviews with youth

- Comprehensive research report

- Policy and practice recommendations for building the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors

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