

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

FACT SHEET

The Positive Youth Development approach suggests that helping young people to achieve their full potential is the best way to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors. Organizations and communities that promote Positive Youth Development give youth the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and get involved. The self-confidence, trust, and practical knowledge that young people gain from these opportunities help them grow into healthy, happy, self-sufficient adults.

Positive Thinking Leads to Positive Results

When community members and policymakers harness the positive energy and initiative of youth, good things happen:

- Youth believe they can be successful instead of internalizing the negative stereotypes about them that often appear in the media.
- Youth engage in productive activities that build job and life skills and reinforce community-mindedness.
- Youth grow comfortable questioning and exploring their roles as citizens in a participatory democracy.

In addition, adults who work closely with youth — and therefore see their dedication, responsibility, and willingness to learn — tend to view youth positively.

Positive Youth Development Takes Many Forms

Organizations and communities put Positive Youth Development into practice by allowing young people to help make important decisions about their own lives, the organizations that serve them, and their communities.

You can put Positive Youth Development into practice by:

- Recruiting young people to volunteer for local grassroots organizations
- Showing youth how to start their own newspapers or websites
- Asking high school students to co-teach classes with their teachers
- Teaching young people to conduct surveys on community and school resources
- Encouraging local businesses to sponsor job fairs and job-shadowing days
- Inviting youth to serve on the board of a local nonprofit organization
- Creating a youth board that advises state or local government on issues young people care about such as violence prevention, transportation, and after-school activities

Many local programs offer young people positive opportunities. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America, National 4-H Council, and YMCA of the USA, for example, are national organizations that promote the Positive Youth Development approach through their local program affiliates. Smaller organizations — such as local runaway shelters, after-school centers, mentoring programs, and job training sites — promote Positive Youth Development too.

The Evidence Is Growing

The nonpartisan National Academy of Sciences conducted a two-year study to find out how effective community-level programs are at helping youth. The resulting report, *Community Programs To Promote Youth Development* (2002), concluded that “adolescents who spend time in communities that are rich in developmental opportunities ... experience less risk and show evidence of higher rates of positive development.” The report also recommended that each community offer a variety of activities to accommodate the different interests and abilities of young people.

Research into Positive Youth Development’s efficacy continues at universities around the country and at organizations such as the Search Institute, Girl Scouts of the USA, and 4-H.

A Role for Everyone

Everyone has a role to play in helping his or her community promote Positive Youth Development:

- Neighborhood leaders and community members can involve young people in measuring how well the community supports youth, and then work together to improve services.
- Policymakers can engage youth in discussions about policies that affect them.
- Business leaders can teach young people the skills they will need for successful employment.
- Youth service organizations can encourage youth participation in every aspect of their work.
- Members of the media can help give young people outlets for expressing their views.
- Treatment providers can engage adolescent treatment recipients in service to others; for instance, as peer educators.
- Teachers and school administrators can ensure that school policies, procedures, and teaching methods engage young people fully.
- Faith-based institutions can involve young people in community activities.
- Parents can strive to engage their children in positive activities that nurture their talents, skills, and interests.

Source: *US Department of Health and Human Services*

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/positiveyouth/factsheet.htm>

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