

RESILIENCY & CONNECTEDNESS

Basic Overview

Resiliency (*the ability to bounce back from hardships*) **and** **"Connectedness"** (*being close, attached, supported, or bonded to others*) are qualities people need to thrive and cope with life, successfully. While the descriptions and examples are primarily for children and adolescents, the basic principles are cross-generational.

This basic overview covers:

- ◆ What is Resiliency, how to increase it, and how to measure it
- ◆ Increasing Resiliency & Connectedness *in Schools*
- ◆ Increasing Resiliency & Connectedness *in Community Settings*
- ◆ What are Life Skills, or SEL skills?
- ◆ What are Developmental Assets?
- ◆ What is Meaningful Youth Engagement?
- ◆ Tips for remaining Resilient

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What is Resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to “bounce-back” and successfully overcome life challenges and problems. People who are resilient have supportive family and friends, possess skills to cope with life successfully, and are engaged in activities that give their life meaning and purpose.

Increasing Resiliency

Resiliency is nurtured through supportive relationships and being involved in activities that:

1) have meaning and purpose; 2) teach and practice life skills and social competencies (*sometimes called Social Emotional/ Employability Skills*). Three factors contribute to resiliency:*

- **Connectedness** – This comes in two forms: connectedness to people and to “places”. Emotional support is provided by being close to, or attached to other people. Support provides assistance in working through problems, and guidance in taking on new challenges. Throughout the relationship, high expectations are maintained.
Connectedness also refers to a sense of “belonging” or identity” to a place or organization (i.e. feeling connected to school, a club, a team, a cause, or their culture.) Activities that increase supportive caring relationships and/or a sense of belonging to positive pro-social organizations, contribute to resiliency.
- **Meaningful Engagement** – Involvement in activities that give life meaning and purpose contribute to resiliency. Meaningful engagement efforts often include: helping others or improving local conditions (i.e. subsistence, or cultural activities, community service, education, organizing or advocacy efforts). Meaningful *Youth Engagement* focuses on involving youth in decision making and all phases of planning, organizing and evaluation of projects.
- **Life Skills and Social Competencies** - People who are resilient have the personal awareness, social and life skills to make positive choices, maintain healthy relationships, and succeed in life. (*Sometimes called Social, Emotional and Employability Skills.*)
 - ✓ **Life skills** include the ability to make decisions, solve problems, resolve conflicts, think critically, manage stress and make healthy decisions
 - ✓ **Social Competencies** include abilities to communicate, resolve conflict, get along with others, empathize, and be culturally sensitive.

* *Building Developmental Assets™ is another way to increase resiliency and connectedness.*

Measuring Resiliency and Connectedness

Resiliency can be measured by how much someone reports being supported, connected, meaningfully engaged and having the life skills and social competencies to maintain their health and wellness.

Short term outcomes related to resiliency:

1. Having positive supportive relationships
2. Feeling like I belong to ...*name of place, organization etc*
3. Being engaged in meaningful activities
4. Having life skills and social competencies

More information about increasing and measuring resiliency, connectedness, and positive school climates may be found through the National Research Council¹ or the author, Bonnie Bernard.²

1 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. J. Eccles & J. Goodman, eds. www.nap.edu/catalog/10022.html. This list is consistent with the Critical Elements of Successful Youth programs cited in the *Alaska Adolescent Health Plan 1995*.

2 B. Bernard. (2004) *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*. WestEd.

Evaluation Tools

Measuring Resiliency, Climate & Connectedness

There are several program evaluation tools that measure resiliency. National youth programs, such as Big Brothers and Sisters, Boys and Girls Club and 4-H measure positive youth development for their participants in addition to risk behaviors. The following evaluation tools are being used by schools and programs in Alaska. (*Program Quality* may be measured through the use of another set of assessments. Organizations assess the quality of their programs, often by using the principles outlined by the National Research Council in *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development 2002*.)

READY (Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth)

Developed by the United Way of Rochester in partnership with the university and multiple NY local youth agencies to measure four outcomes: Basic Social Skills, Caring Adult Relationships, Decision Making, and Constructive Use of Time. <http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/July06.pdf>. For more information, contact: Premini Sabaratnam, University of Rochester, (585) 273-4616, Premini_Sabaratnam@urmc.rochester.edu

Assessing Outcomes in Child and Youth Programs: A Practical Handbook (2005)

Developed by the University of Connecticut, School of Family Studies, Center for Applied Research through OJJDP funding. This free document contains public domain questions in the following outcome areas: Youth Personal Adjustment, Youth Social Competencies, Relationships with Family, Adult/Youth Relationships, Youth/School Connections, Positive Youth/Peer Connections, Youth/Community Connections. www.ct.gov/opm/LIB/opm/CJPPD/CjJjyd/JjydPublications/ChildYouthOutcomeHandbook2005.pdf

Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE)

A Practical Guide for Program Assessment and Action Planning. This four-part inexpensive tool kit was developed by the University of Wisconsin & Cornell University.

Order directly from: www.actforyouth.net/?yalpe

PAAT -- Program and Activity Assessment tool

For programs focused on increasing positive youth development and resiliency. This tool measures the outcomes related to opportunities for meaningful involvement and supportive relationships.

YET -- Youth Engagement tool

For groups that use youth-adult partnerships, it assesses how much the organization *involves* youth members. YET measures group effectiveness, meaningful engagement (youth voice and opportunities) impact on knowledge, skills and activities.

ORG-YET -- Organizational support for youth engagement tool

For groups that use youth-adult partnerships, this tool evaluates how much the organization or program promotes and supports youth voice and decision making. ORG-YET measures the "decision-making" outcomes: degree of youth engagement, supports and infrastructure, impacts on the organization.

KID-PAAT for younger students; same as PAAT (above) written for participants under 12.

School Climate and Connectedness Survey

Developed by the American Institutes of Research, the SCCS is a school-based survey of 5-12 grade students, conducted annually. It is a tool to gauge and improve overall school climate, raise student achievement and assess community support for youth. The survey measures respectful school climate, caring adults, high expectations, peer climate and risk behaviors observed at school. Additionally SCCS contains *community-based* resiliency measures related to supportive adults, meaningful activities and social/emotional skills. For more information contact Lori Klein, 586-1083, lklein@asab.org or visit the Association of Alaska School Boards/Alaska ICE website at: <http://www.alaskaice.org/material.php?matID=529>.

School Connectedness

The Division of Behavioral Health has identified increasing school climate and connectedness as a key indicator in preventing adolescent substance use.

School connectedness refers to students' experiences, perceptions and feelings about school. School connectedness includes feelings of being:

- A part of the school
- Cared about by adults
- Close to people at school and have strong relationships
- Treated with respect consistently by teachers and staff
- And, that their learning matters and is a high priority

School climate refers to factors that contribute to the tone in and attitudes toward a school. A positive school climate is associated with:

- Feeling safe at school
- Well-managed classrooms and common areas
- High and clearly stated expectation concerning individual responsibility
- Teachers and staff that consistently acknowledge all students and fairly address their behavior.

School climate is related to school connectedness, because without a positive and welcoming school climate, students cannot experience connectedness. Climate can be thought of as external assets (things outside of students that predict, or promote connectedness) whereas connectedness can be thought of as internal assets (students' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs).

The 2003 Wingspread Declaration on School Connectedness is based upon a detailed review of research, empirical evidence and in-depth discussions among interdisciplinary leaders in education. The Declaration outlines the most effective strategies for increasing connectedness:

- 1) Ensure that every student feels close to at least one supportive adult at school;
- 2) Implement high standards and expectations and provide academic support to all students;
- 3) Apply fair and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon and fairly enforced;
- 4) Create trusting relationships among students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families;
- 5) Hire and support capable teachers skilled in content, teaching techniques, and classroom management to meet each learner's needs;
- 6) Foster high parent/family expectations for school performance and school completion.

What is the impact of improving school climate?

Research from *Alaska* schools indicates there is a direct correlation between student connectedness scores and their Standard Based Achievement scores in math, reading and writing. In addition observed risk behaviors were decreased in schools that increased their connectedness and positive climate scores (*School Climate/Connectedness survey data, see AASB website below*).

School connectedness is influenced through:

- Individuals (students and school staff)
- Environment (school climate & school bonding)
- The culture of the school (social needs and learning priorities)

Ten Tips to Increase School Connectedness

1. Brainstorm with students, faculty, staff, and parents simple changes that could make school a more pleasant place to be.
2. Create policies that are based on student, family, and neighborhood strengths and assets.
3. Turn mistakes into learning opportunities, rather than failures meriting punishment.
4. Acknowledge and honor accomplishments and all types of competencies, such as helpfulness, good citizenship, most improved performance, volunteerism, participation in decision making, and cessation of negative behavior.
5. Set high standards and challenge students to meet them.
6. Reinforce explicit expectations for positive behavior and academic success.
7. Encourage highly interactive teaching strategies.
8. Create a welcoming environment for all who come to the school.
9. Invite family and community members to take active ongoing roles in the daily operation of the school.
10. Create a common vision of success, and keep it simple!

References

- Abbott, RD, et al. (1998). Changing teaching practices to promote achievement and bonding to school. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68,
- Battin-Pearson, S et.al. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 568–582.
- Welsh, M., et.al. (2001). Linkages between children's social and academic competence: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39,
- Zins, J., Weissberg, R. P (et.a. Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?*
- National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' engagement and motivation to learn* Washington DC: The National Academies Press. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10421

Additional ideas: Association of Alaska School Boards: www.alaskaice.org/
National website: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/pdf/connectedness.pdf

Features of Positive Developmental Settings

Nurturing Resiliency, Positive Climates & Connections within youth groups and program settings

The features of positive developmental settings are identified in *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* by the National Academies of Sciences.¹ These features serve as principles for designing “best-practice” youth programs and services. The more these principles are incorporated, the more likely youth will increase resiliency, “connectedness” and positive development - resulting in decreases in multiple risk behaviors.

Creating Positive Climates

1. Assure Physical & Emotional Safety

The program “climate” needs to be positive and relaxed, playful, respectful, supportive. The setting is safe and health promoting; conflict is managed, resolution is modeled; youth who are different feel like part of the program.

2. Maintain Appropriate Program Structure

There are clear and consistent rules of behavior and consequences, developed with and agreed upon by youth. There is stability, limit setting and clear boundaries of appropriateness; control and monitoring as needed. Youth are engaged and participating in organized age-appropriate activities/projects. Activities based on youth interests.

3. Maintain Positive Norms & High Expectations

Youth know how they should act or not act within the program; understand responsibilities of participation; setting promotes positive values and morals, including the importance of giving back to the community. Staff has high expectations based on individual’s traits and talents.

Building Connections

4. Build and Maintain Supportive Relationships

Staff are caring, respectful, open, approachable, supportive, trusting, playful, and flexible; can relate to youth culture, provides guidance, is firm, helps youth learn from mistakes, will challenge as needed; has good communication skills, mediates conflict.

5. Provide Opportunities for Youth to Feel Like They Belong

Staff create a feeling of membership (team, family group identity); youth have “buy-in” to the projects/ activities; activities reflect the background and culture of participating youth. Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one’s gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability.

6. Integrate of Family, School and Community Efforts

Ongoing communication with parents and guardians; open communications with school staff, coordination and collaboration with other programs and agencies; provides referrals and resources for youth and families; participates in community wide events.

Increasing Meaningful Youth Engagement

7. Provide Ways for Youth to Make Meaningful Contributions

Youth-based projects/activities instill confidence, encourage responsibility and independence; provide meaningful challenges and work preparation. Youth have a variety of roles and activities to choose from (advising, designing, assessing, researching, planning, teaching, service, organizing, advocacy, evaluation, technology support) Activities/projects make a real difference in the community. Efforts focus on individual improvement. Meaningful engagement empowers youth and builds self efficacy.

8. Provide Experiences that Build Skills

Youth learn and practice new life skills through meaningful activities and intentional learning experiences (e.g. goal setting, problem solving, decision making, communication, team work, pre-employment, financial, technology and media skills.)

1. Adapted from National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. J. Eccles & J. Goodman, eds. National Academy Press. www.nap.edu/catalog/10022.html

. This list is consistent with the Critical Elements of Successful Youth programs cited in the *Alaska Adolescent Health Plan 1995*. Jan 2010

Features of Positive Developmental Settings

The features below were identified in *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* by the National Academies of Sciences. The features serve as best-practice principles. **The more these principles are incorporated, the more likely programs will increase connectedness, resiliency, assets and positive development - resulting in decreases in multiple risk behaviors.**

	Principles	Description of this Principle	What it <u>doesn't</u> look like!
Positive Climate	Physical & Emotional Safety	Program "climate" is positive and relaxed, playful, respectful, supportive; setting is safe and health promoting; conflict is managed, resolution is modeled; youth who are different feel like part of the program.	Safety hazards, unsanitary health conditions, lighting and temperature inadequate. Negative "climate", disrespectful, frequent put-downs, slurs and sarcasm; confrontations-physical, emotional or sexual harassment; unsafe place to be, or think differently.
	Appropriate Structure	Youth are engaged and participating in organized age-appropriate activities/projects. Activities based on youth interests. Clear and consistent rules of behavior and consequences, developed with and agreed upon by youth. There is stability, limit setting and clear boundaries of appropriateness; control and monitoring as needed.	Setting is chaotic, disorganized, lax; minimal activities (i.e. unstructured hangout place); high staff/youth ratio fosters negligence. Or, the structure is rigid; strict, over-controlled, harsh; run by well-meaning, autocratic adults.
	Positive Norms High Expectations	Youth know how to act (or not act) within the program; understand responsibilities of participation; setting promotes positive values and morals, including the importance of giving back to the community. Staff has high expectations based on individual's traits and talents.	Norms promote poor health (smoking, drinking etc.), anti-social behavior (violence, recklessness) or heavy consumerism. Staff has low expectations of youth.
Connections	Supportive Relationships	Staff are caring, respectful, open, approachable, supportive, trusting, playful, and flexible; can relate to youth culture, provides guidance, is firm, helps youth learn from mistakes, will challenge as needed; has good communication skills, mediates conflict.	Staff are cold, negative, neglecting or distant. Could be disrespectful, over-controlling, talkers-not listeners, untrustworthy; inattentive; focused on accomplishments or winning, overlooks peer confrontations.
	Opportunities to Belong	Staff create a feeling of membership (team, family group identity); youth have "buy-in" to the projects/activities; activities reflect the background and culture of participating youth. Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability.	No emphasis on camaraderie; cliques, inter-group conflicts, exclusion results; some youth withdrawal become isolated, disengaged; infrequent attendance, drop-ins. Activities/ projects decided by adults; are not relevant or interesting to youth.
	Integrate Family, School and Community Efforts	On going communication with parents and guardians; open communications with school staff, coordination and collaboration with other programs and agencies; provides referrals and resources for youth and families; participates in community wide events.	No communication with family members, schools, faith organizations, or employers. Program works in isolation from the rest of the community will not participate in partnerships
Increasing Meaningful Engagement	Meaningful Contributions	Efforts focus on individual improvement. Youth-based projects/activities provide meaningful challenges and work preparation. Activities/projects make a real difference in the community. Projects instill confidence, encourage responsibility and independence. Youth have a variety of roles and activities to choose from (e.g. assessing, planning, teaching, designing, organizing, advocacy, evaluation, and/or technology support).	Program content based mostly on youth problems or risk behaviors; emphasis on entertainment, hanging out or custodial care.
	Empowerment Efficacy		Activities are repetitious, unchallenging, minimal relevance; emphasis on information- based, passive learning strategies; practices that undermine motivation and desire to learn.
	Skill Building	Youth learn and practice new life skills through meaningful activities and intentional learning experiences (e.g. goal setting, problem solving, decision making, communication, team work, pre-employment, financial, technology and media skills.)	Youth don't have choices, program directed by well-meaning, but overly controlling adults; minimal decision making by youth, no youth input on planning, scheduling, or evaluation.

Life Skills and Social Competencies

Social Emotional/Employability Skills

Increasing a young person's life skills and social competencies (also called social/employability skills) is a recognized protective factor against substance use and other risk behaviors. The Division of Behavioral Health cites it as one of ten key *Prevention Indicators*. Life skills and social competencies refer to the abilities that equip people to make positive choices, maintain healthy relationships and succeed in life.

Life Skills & Social Competencies

1. **Communication Skills:** the ability to communicate appropriately with people of different ages, backgrounds and status it includes listening skills.
2. **Cultural Competence:** the knowledge of and comfort shown with people of different cultural / racial / ethnic backgrounds.
3. **Conflict Resolution Skills:** the ability to manage and resolve conflicts in constructive non-violent ways.
4. **Empathy Skills:** the ability to be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others and to act in a caring way towards others.
5. **Resistance Skills:** the ability to resist negative peer pressures and thereby avoid possible dangerous situations.
6. **Life Skills:** the skills of problem solving, decision making, stress management and critical thinking.

Social, Emotional/Employability Skills

Social, Emotional/Employability Skills are used by many school districts, they *over lap* with life skills referenced above. The skills and *sample* standards for such skills include:

Self-Awareness: Knowing what one is feeling in the moment: having a realistic assessment of our own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

- Student demonstrates awareness of their emotions, external supports and personal traits/abilities
- Student has a sense of personal responsibility

Self-Management: Handling one's emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals; persevering in the face of setbacks and frustrations.

- Student demonstrates honesty, integrity and an ability to manage their emotions;
- Student demonstrates an ability to set & achieve goals, use effective decision making skills

Social Awareness: Understanding what others are feeling; being able to take their perspective; appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups.

- Student demonstrates an ability to read social cues
- Student demonstrates consideration for others and awareness of other people's emotions and perspectives
- Student demonstrates awareness of cultural issues and a respect for human dignity and differences

Social Management: Handling emotions in relationships effectively; establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation, resistance to inappropriate social pressure, negotiating solutions to conflict, and seeking help when needed.

- Student uses positive communications and social skills to interact effectively with others
- Student develops constructive relationships
- Student demonstrates the ability to prevent, manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways

Sources:

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH: Rutter, M. (1985); Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992); Garmazy, N. (1985). Hawkins J D, et al. (1992); Scales, P.C. & Leffert, N. (1999).

RESOURCES:

1. **National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.** Sponsored by US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.healthfinder.gov/orgs/HR3505.htm>
2. Payton, J.W. et.al.. Social and Emotional Learning: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Reducing Risk Behaviors in Children and Youth; . *Sc.I Hlth, May 2000, Vol 70. No. 5, pp. 179-185*
3. **University of Chicago, Illinois.** The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. CASEL <http://casel.org>
9. Anchorage School District, Standards and Benchmarks of Social, Emotional/Employability Skills. 2008. <http://www.asdk12.org/depts/SEL/>

Developmental Assets

Assets are the key *supportive strands* in young people's life that help them grow to be strong, caring and capable adults. The more Assets a young person has, the more likely they are to succeed in school and be helpful, healthy and productive citizens. At the same time, the more Assets youth have, the less likely they will become involved with drugs, alcohol or other risky behaviors.

Type & Definition	
External Assets	<p>Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Family Support</u> - Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. <u>Positive family communication</u> - Youth is willing to seek advice & counsel from parents & extended family. 3. <u>Other adult relationships</u> - Youth receives support from several non-parent adults. 4. <u>Caring neighborhood/community</u> - Youth experiences caring neighborhood and community. 5. <u>Caring school climate</u> - School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. <u>Parent involvement in school</u> - Parents are actively involved in helping youth succeed in school.
	<p>Empowerment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. <u>Community values youth</u> - Youth believes that community adults value young people. 8. <u>Youth given useful roles</u> - Youth are taught and given useful roles in community. 9. <u>Youth volunteers in the community</u> - Youth gives one or more hour per week to serving the community. 10. <u>Safety</u> - Youth feels safe in home, school, and neighborhood.
	<p>Boundaries and expectations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. <u>Family boundaries</u> - Family is clear about rules and consequences for youth. 12. <u>School boundaries</u> - School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. <u>Neighborhood boundaries</u> - Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring youth. 14. <u>Adult role models</u> - Parents, Elders, and other adults model positive behavior. 15. <u>Positive peer influence</u> - Youth's close friends model responsible behavior. 16. <u>High expectations</u> - Parents and teachers encourage youth to do well.
	<p>Constructive use of time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. <u>Creative and cultural activities</u> - Youth is involved in 3 or more hours per week in creative or cultural activities. 18. <u>Youth programs</u> - Youth spends 1 or more hours each week in sports, clubs, or other school or community organizations. 19. <u>Religious community</u> - Youth is involved in 1 or more hours a week in religious services or spiritual activities. 20. <u>Time at home</u> - Youth is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
	<p>Commitment to learning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. <u>Achievement motivation</u> - Youth is motivated to do well in school. 22. <u>School engagement</u> - Youth is actively engaged in learning. 23. <u>Homework</u> - Youth reports doing one or more hours of homework per day. 24. <u>Bonding to school</u> - Youth cares about his or her school. 25. <u>Reading for pleasure</u> - Youth reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
Internal Assets	<p>Positive Values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. <u>Caring</u> - Youth places high value on freely helping other people. 27. <u>Equality and social justice</u> - Youth places high value on promoting equality & reducing hunger & poverty. 28. <u>Integrity</u> - Youth acts on convictions and stands up for beliefs. 29. <u>Honesty</u> - Youth tells the truth even when it is not easy. 30. <u>Responsibility</u> - Youth accepts and takes personal responsibility for his or her actions. 31. <u>Restraint</u> - Youth believes it is important not to be sexually active or use alcohol or drugs.
	<p>Social skills:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. <u>Planning and decision-making</u> - Youth has skills to plan ahead and make responsible choices. 33. <u>Interpersonal skills</u> - Youth has empathy, sensitivity, communication and friendship skills. 34. <u>Cultural competence</u> - Youth knows and is comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. 35. <u>Resistance skills</u> - Youth can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous community influences. 36. <u>Peaceful conflict resolution</u> - Youth seeks to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.
	<p>Positive Identity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 37. <u>Personal power</u> - Youth feels in control over "many things that happen to me." 38. <u>Self-esteem</u> - Youth reports having high self-esteem. 39. <u>Sense of purpose</u> - Youth reports that "my life has a purpose." 40. <u>Positive view of personal future</u> - Youth is optimistic about his or her personal future.

The 20 external and 20 internal Assets are described in the book: *Helping Kids Succeed ~Alaska Style* (contact: the Association of Alaska School Boards, 907. 586.1083 www.alaskaice.org.) This framework has been adapted, with permission, by Search Institute®. www.search-institute.org

Meaningful Youth Engagement

Youth need a range of roles to get involved in ~ at school and in the community

Youth Activism

Projects (activities, programs and services) are provided by or done by youth *with adult support* (not: to youth).

- Youth provide the leadership & direction *within* programs;
- Youth decide the rules, plan the activities, conduct the projects, evaluate progress.

EXAMPLES

- Peer helpers
- Peer outreach workers
- Peer educators, cross-age teachers
- Tutors
- Cross-age mentors
- Youth as judges, attorneys (youth courts)
- Youth artists and actors (theater)
- Youth organizers of specific events/ projects for other students
- Youth in service
- Youth news reporters
- Youth created videos, PSAs, posters
- Youth researchers
- Youth-run businesses

Youth in Organizational Decision-Making

Youth *with adults*, are involved in a range of decision-making roles for the organization. This is distinguished from youth involvement in specific projects and activities at the organization.

Decision-making roles range from having influence to voting on decisions that effect the entire organization itself or its services.

EXAMPLES

Youth Voice - one time efforts

- Youth opinions about the organization and its programs/services/projects solicited through focus groups, youth conducted surveys etc.
- Youth serve on hiring committees

Youth Consultants/Advisors - ongoing

- Youth are “consultants” provide input, plan & evaluate programs, provide recommendations to the organization.
- Advisory groups, to Boards of Directors, local government, or school boards.

Youth in Governance - ongoing Shared Leadership & Decision-making

- Participation and vote on major organizational committees
- “Youth philanthropy” (youth help make funding decisions)
- Youth serve on a board, *but not able to vote*
- Youth serve on board with voting responsibilities; involved in strategic planning, organizational policy setting. (e.g. youth on Boards of Directors, Municipal Commissions, Tribal Councils with voting responsibilities)

Youth as Community Change Agents

Young people with the *assistance of supportive adults* address community conditions. (Activity usually done as a group, not individually.)

- Youth identify issues that are important to them and their community.
- Youth research and analyze the causes and solutions
- Youth learn community organizing strategies
- Youth develop and carry out action plans to effect change in their community.

EXAMPLES

- Youth Voice: Youth identify the issues problems and solutions through “speak-out”, forums, focus groups, youth conducted surveys.
- “Youth-Adult Partnerships” organized to improve community conditions.
- Youth group performs service activities to improve the community.
- Youth group advocates for “youth-friendly” settings & businesses.
- Advocates for social justice issues: (e.g. prevent drinking and driving, clean air /tobacco-free policies in public places, pesticide right to know campaigns)
- Participates in “public affairs” through forums; contacting public officials, talk shows or media; signing petitions; attending/organizing boycotts/protests to improve the community
- Participates in elections, legislation, or campaigns or political parties
- Votes in elections or is involved in voter registration/advocacy

Remaining Resilient in the Face of Adversity

Many people have learned how to deal with some very serious disasters (9-11, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and bombings). Maintaining your sanity during the dark times can be a difficult challenge!

To keep your perspective remember the following:

This, too, shall pass: If you've been around for a little while, you've survived losses, earthquakes, fires, floods and perhaps even the death of a loved one. In time, you will feel whole again - different, but whole.

Everything changes: What you are going through also will change. The discomfort and sadness will end, and you will be able to take a deep breath once again. Trust that.

Feeling fear and anxiety is natural: Those emotions exist to help you save your life and lives of those you love. Once you're out of survival mode, you'll be able to calm down and focus on the tasks of daily living.

You will grow because of this: There's an old saying, "If you lose at life, don't lose the lesson." Learn from this difficulty, and it will make your life better down the road.

Look for your strength within: Reach down to the depths of your soul and find it. If you have done it before, you can do it again. If you've never done it, there may not be a better time than right now.

Embrace your spiritual side: Choosing to focus on the spiritual part of your life if you are alone or sharing it with a loving mate, family and close friends is emotionally supportive. The strength that you can gather from that connection may be just what the doctor ordered.

Keep your emotions in balance: If you can stay cool under pressure, it will help you make the right decisions and keep your sanity whether it comes to your heart, health, or home.

Believe in yourself: I have no doubt that, with time and patience, we can accomplish virtually anything. Even if it hurts now, knowing who you are and that you can do it will get you through the pain and to the next level.

Treasure the moment: All we really have is the here and now, so don't waste time and energy on yesterday or tomorrow. Today is a gift, which is why we call it the present.

Adapted from: *Pieces of advice help you survive adversity*
By Barton Goldsmith, Scripps Howard News Service (2005)