

Positive Youth Environments are Affirming

Positive Youth Environments are Affirming. Individuals and communities hold high expectations and inherent beliefs in the value and talents of young people and provide opportunities to enhance their skills and to succeed. The value of young people is reinforced by actively engaging them in civic activities that affect their communities and by praising and recognizing their achievements. Valuable opportunities for youth exist to interact with adults who are positive role models and have meaningful connections to young people.

- A majority of adults do not believe that young people have “as strong a sense of right and wrong as they did” as youths (*Bostrom, 2001*).

A majority of adolescents are involved in positive activities such as volunteering, church involvement, and cultural events (*Bostrom, 2001*).

- Public opinion suggests a belief that parents are less involved today with their children than in previous generations (*Bostrom, 2001*).

Most parents have open, trusting relationships and a solid bond with their teenage children (*Bostrom, 2001*). **Youths who feel secure in their relationships with parents also tend to have positive school attitudes and good relationships with teachers** (*Advocates for Youth, 1999*).

- For a variety of reasons, some youths receive unstable and inadequate parental involvement and family support. Adolescents constitute nearly 30% of youths in foster care (*Child Welfare League of America, 1998*).

Mentoring is a viable means of creating positive adult connections and can affect adolescent health and well-being (*Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitnaly, Zansky, & Bontempo, 2000*).

Youths who feel more connected with their school and their family are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors (*Ewalt, Freeman, & Poole, 1998*).

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- Stereotypes about adolescents perpetuated in media images suggest that adolescence is inherently problematic and that young people are materialistic and self absorbed. **Youth volunteering has increased 12% over the past decade** (*Youth Service America, 2001*) **with nearly 70% of young people ages 15 to 21 having participated in activities important to their community** (*Bostrom, 2001*).
- Often, youth policy and programs reflect an emphasis on pathology and deficit models. **Programs and interventions based on assets and strengths can foster resilience, leading to improved outcomes for youths.**

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Community Checklist

- Active and tailored outreach programs that involve parents/caretakers in school-related activities
- School and community recognition programs that highlight a variety of talents and skills
- Designated forums for youth expression and communication
- Volunteer opportunities for youths in the community
- Options for participation in programs that encourage and enhance a variety of talents such as music, arts, mechanics, and drama
- Viable mentoring programs
- Preparatory programs that include college as well as vocational training
- Organized mechanisms for youth input on relevant policies and programs
- Media that depict youths as assets and highlight positive attributes
- Resources and financial supports for youths to pursue interests and talents
- Youth policies and programs that focus on positive youth development
- “Rites of Passage,” faith-based, or other programs that focus on recognition of positive youth development

Tips on Things You Can Do

- Organize a fund for assistance to youths who would otherwise not be able to pay for specialized training or classes (for example, dance class, or sponsorship for competitions).
- Generate media stories about youth achievements in your community.
- Host community “chat sessions” or town hall meetings where youths have opportunities to talk about relevant issues.
- Develop, in conjunction with youths, school/service setting-sponsored and monitored Web sites, newsletters, or magazines.
- Become involved in campaigns focused on encouraging parent–child communication.
- Work to increase awareness.
- Conduct workshops with colleagues on positive youth development and an assets-based approach.
- Help to establish youth task forces to provide a voice for young people on community policy and programming decisions.
- Infuse local policy dialogues with perspectives on positive youth development.