

WHAT IS POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

“Positive youth development is an approach that guides communities in developing and implementing services, opportunities and supports so that young people can be engaged and reach their full potential.”¹ It is a conceptual and practical lens that can enhance prevention, intervention and treatment models. What makes this approach unique is that it “emphasizes the many positive attributes of young people and focuses on working to develop inherent strengths and assets in youth to promote healthy behavioral development.”² Positive youth development depicts youth and young adults as resources to cultivate, not problems to fix, by incorporating the following guiding principles into programs:

- 1. Strengths-Based** – The approach focuses on positive physical and mental health, education, social, vocational, creative, spiritual and civic outcomes.
- 2. Youth Engagement** – Youth have a positive sense of self and are connected to positive peers, adults and communities.
- 3. Youth-Adult Partnerships** – Youth work with adults to make decisions for program and policy planning, implementation and evaluation.
- 4. Culturally Responsive** – Adults and youth recognize and respond proactively to variations in backgrounds/ cultures including, but not limited to, ethnic, racial, linguistic, learning and physical abilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and geographic location, to ensure inclusivity and equity.
- 5. Inclusive of ALL youth** – The approach is inclusive, not solely focusing on youth in at-risk environments or exhibiting risk behaviors.
- 6. Collaboration** – Private and public agencies, state and local partners and the community, including families, work together to support youth.
- 7. Sustainability** – Long-term planning that includes funding, capacity-building, professional development and evaluation exists for ongoing support of youth.

Research demonstrates that youth with more developmental assets (e.g. positive family communication) have reduced morbidity and better health outcomes.³ In addition, key protective factors (connectedness to school) promote healthy youth behaviors and outcomes while diminishing the likelihood of negative health and social outcomes.⁴ Therefore, a dual strategy of risk reduction and promotion of protective factors through an intentional positive youth development approach holds the greatest promise as a public health strategy to improve outcomes for youth.⁵

WHAT IS THE COLORADO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TEAM?

The Colorado Youth Development Team is a statewide partnership of youth (ages 10–25 years) and adults from state and local agencies as well as from schools and community organizations. The team promotes positive youth development and works to integrate its principles and strategies into all programs, policies, organizations and community efforts that affect youth and young adults. The team envisions Colorado as a state where all people value and pursue respect, communication and understanding between youth and adults to achieve a unified, healthy and engaged community, so that both adults and youth reach their full potential and lead healthy lives. Participation is flexible and multi-modal, employing various forms of technology and communication to ensure statewide participation. To get connected and learn more about the Colorado Youth Development Team and its networks, please visit <http://coloradoyouthdevelopment.ning.com>.

- 1 National Research Council & Institute of Medicine. (2002). Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. J. Eccles & J. Gootman, eds. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences.
- 2 Birkhead, G.S., Riser, M., Mesler, K., Tallon, T. and Klein, S. (2006). Youth development is a public health approach. *Journal of Public Health Management Practice*, Nov (Suppl), S1–S3.
- 3 Pittman K. (2005) What's health got to do with it? Health and youth development: Connecting the dots. *Forum Focus*, 3(2), 1–4.
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health; Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health; National Adolescent Health Information Center, University of California, San Francisco. (2004). Improving the health of adolescents & young adults: A guide for states and communities. Atlanta, GA.
- 5 Kreipe, R. (2009, May). Youth development as a public health policy: How to make it work. Teleconference presentation sponsored by Leadership Education in Adolescent Health, The MCH (Maternal & Child Health) Training Grantee Network. <http://leah.mchtraining.net/teleconference.php>

To learn more about Positive Youth Development, visit www.healthyyouthcolorado.org