



**Youth
Thrive**
An initiative
of CSSP

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INTERACTIVE GUIDE

USING THE PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS TO SUPPORT YOUTH WELL-BEING





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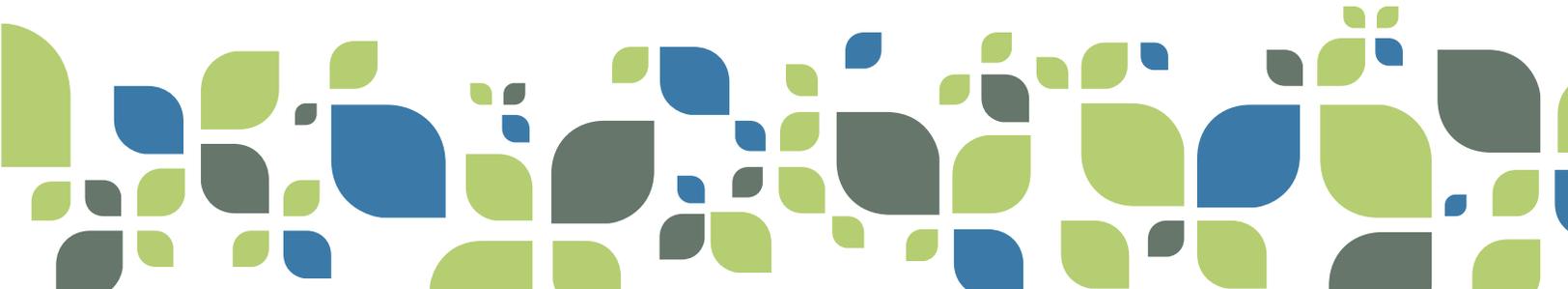
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ABOUT THE INTERACTIVE GUIDE

Developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), Youth Thrive™ is both a research-informed framework on youth well-being and an action agenda, based on that framework, designed to support healthy development and improved life outcomes for youth ages 9-26 across the country. Through a synthesis of the research on positive youth development, resiliency, neuroscience, and the impact of trauma on that development, Youth Thrive identifies and is based on five Protective and Promotive Factors that increase the likelihood that adolescents will develop into healthy, thriving adults.

The Five Protective and Promotive Factors

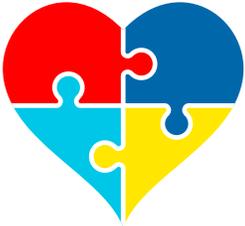
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The Youth Thrive Framework functions as a “lens” for assessing current efforts and for making changes to the policies, programs, trainings, services, partnerships, and systems that impact young people.

For more information on the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>.

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people—as well as youth themselves and their parents—with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors in a young person’s life, each of which help to reduce risk, increase the likelihood of positive outcomes, and support healthy development and well-being. Intended for agency workers, judges, lawyers, CASA workers, youth, and parents, the Guide starts with the premise that actively and intentionally building the Protective and Promotive Factors should be a primary focus of every interaction with a young person, and should occur routinely as part of any decision-making or case planning activity. Divided by role and keyed to the five Factors, the Guide offers areas to help young people pursue opportunities, experiences and interests; find support when challenges arise; and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

FOCUS ON WELL-BEING



In recent years, child welfare and juvenile justice systems have been urged to focus more intentionally on youth’s well-being, which involves attention not just to the youth’s safety, permanency, and basic needs, but also to their social, emotional, behavioral, physical, and spiritual health. This requires professionals who interact with youth to value youth’s hopes and aspirations and understand the impact of trauma, including from racism, the rejection of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, and other oppressive beliefs, policies, and practices that harm youth and families. The five Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors represent a pathway to well-being and helps professionals assist youth to take advantage of opportunities, pursue their interests, and find support when challenges arise. This Guide will also help the user identify key impediments and building blocks for youth well-being.

Youth Thrive—as part of CSSP—is committed to holding equity as a core value and uses [CSSP’s Anti-Racist Intersectional Frame](#) to examine the power held by institutions and systems as well as the oppression that Black, Latinx/e, and Native American youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Youth Thrive makes intentional efforts to understand and attempts to address the negative impact of institutional racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination based on culture, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Furthermore, Youth Thrive recognizes that young people are best supported by those who have respect for and understand their own culture, the culture of the youth served and their larger community, as well as the culture that is created within programs, organizations, and institutions.



THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN



To be effective advocates for youth, adults need to understand the fundamentals of what is going on during the period of adolescence and why adolescents act the way they do. Adolescence is a period of profound brain development and growth. The adolescent brain is adaptable and shaped by multiple experiences. This means that “adolescence is a time of great opportunity to help youth become responsible adults and to lay a foundation for youth that will help them make informed decisions” (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2012, p.4). Research has shown that important structures in the adolescent brain develop unevenly.

- The limbic system develops in early adolescence. Structures in the limbic system are related to emotions, pleasure-seeking, and processing social information.
- The prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until adulthood. Structures in the prefrontal cortex are related to impulse control, setting priorities and planning, decision-making, and self-regulation.
- Research suggests that the unevenness in the development of the rational prefrontal cortex and the emotional limbic system may explain why some youth engage in sensation-seeking, risky or reckless behaviors, and make decisions based on feelings rather than logic.
- Even though the rational prefrontal cortex develops later than the emotional limbic system, youth are still capable of planning, prioritizing, and making decisions; the difference is that these capabilities may be guided more by emotions than intellectual reasoning.
- The repercussions of traumatic events often become most apparent during adolescence when individuals face challenges regulating their emotions and actions, developing healthy relationships, and making decisions in respect to their futures (Langford & Badeau, 2013).
- Youth in the child welfare system are especially susceptible to these effects due to their potential exposure to numerous traumatic events (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2012).
- Toxic stress, characterized by intense, prolonged, and frequent negative experiences, such as abuse, racism, and rejection of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender expression, and identity, can negatively impact youth’s physical, social, and emotional development.
- Experiencing traumatic events can exacerbate the uneven development of the adolescent brain.

Youth involved in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems face a number of additional stressors, both before entering care and as a result of entering care, such as the trauma of being separated from family. Although stress and exposure to traumatic experiences can disrupt healthy development, these effects can be mitigated.

- Research indicates that there is a tremendous amount of brain growth that takes place during adolescence and into adulthood, making it a pivotal time to provide positive opportunities and experiences that help the brain to create new neural pathways (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).
- Supportive and nurturing adults, as well as positive peer relationships, play key roles in promoting the development of resilience, self-confidence and self-regulation, all essential characteristics/components of well-being. These relationships also guide youth through coping skills necessary to handle tolerable stress, such as living with an ill relative, to decrease their stress levels and feel a sense of mastery (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).

THE FIVE YOUTH THRIVE PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS



Youth Resilience

Managing stress and functioning well, when faced with stressors, challenges, or adversity; building on individual characteristics, strengths, and interests.

- While resilience is a goal, it is also a process. It is not absolute, nor is it a personality trait. Instead, it is something that can be shaped and strengthened through positive experiences.
- Youth who can build resilience are more likely to lead healthy and productive lives (Harper Browne, 2014).



Social Connections

Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, institutions, the community, and a force greater than oneself that promote a sense of trust, belonging, and that one matters.

- Youth need at least one caring and consistent adult in their lives.
- Adult relationships are necessary for providing support, nurturance, and structure (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Brown & Larson, 2009; Steinberg, 2011).
- Peer relationships help youth to explore their individual identities apart from that of their families (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Brown & Larson, 2009; Steinberg, 2011).
- A connection to the community, such as to school or a faith-based institution, can aid youth in their cognitive and social development.
- A feeling of connection to an individual or an institution can lower the risk of negative behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse (Harper Browne, 2014).



Knowledge of Adolescent Development

Understanding the unique aspects of adolescent development, including information on adolescent brain development and the impact of trauma; implementing developmentally and contextually appropriate best practices.

- Adolescence is a unique developmental period. It is important that parents and adults who work with youth have current, accurate information about adolescent development and use this knowledge to develop programs and policies that are designed to help youth acquire the knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that contribute to healthy outcomes in adulthood (Harper Browne, 2014).
- It is also important that youth understand adolescent development because this helps them realize that many of their individual experiences are “normal”—that is, developmentally typical—experiences shared by other youth.
- This information should cover knowledge across all adolescent developmental domains: physical (e.g., brain development, changes that occur during puberty); cognitive (e.g., promoting abstract thinking

and improved problem-solving skills); social (e.g., building and sustaining healthy relationships with peers and adults; cultural knowledge); emotional (e.g., self-regulation, managing stressful situations); moral (e.g., developing mature values and behavioral controls used to assess acceptable and unacceptable behaviors); and identity (e.g., forging a healthy sexual orientation and gender identity, gaining independence from parents and other adults while maintaining strong connections with them).

- Those involved in the youth's life should take into account the structural racial inequities, which could have played a role in the youth's current circumstances.



Concrete Support in Times of Need

Understanding the importance of asking for help and advocating for oneself; receiving quality services (e.g., health care, housing, education) designed to preserve youths' dignity, provide opportunities for skill development, and promote healthy development. (Harper Browne, 2014).

- Although youth might at times be reluctant to seek help, self-advocacy is instrumental in building resilience.
- All youth should have both the tools and the opportunity to access:
 - Basic necessities, such as healthy food and a safe environment, and
 - Individualized services, such as academic, legal, mental and physical health when needed.
- The Youth Thrive framework emphasizes that the supports given to young people should be strengths-based and healing centered. Aiding the young person in restoring their sense of identity and agency, while also allowing for the time and space to build transformational relationships, are a few of the essential elements of healing centered youth services.*
- Administering concrete supports with a trauma-informed lens is necessary in order to integrate recent adolescent neurological, biological, social, and emotional research findings into practice.



Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

Acquiring skills and attitudes (e.g., executive functioning, character strength, future orientation, persistence, and positive emotions) that are essential for forming an independent identity and having a productive, responsible, and satisfying adulthood.

- The extent to which youth are able to successfully navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood is largely based upon their earlier developmental experiences that fostered their cognitive and social-emotional skills (Harper Browne, 2014).
- The Youth Thrive framework emphasizes the core competencies necessary for youth to successfully navigate their lives, specifically: self-regulation, executive functions, social cognition, and character strengths.

* Healing Centered Engagement is an asset-based and culturally-rooted approach to healing and well-being for young people of color and their adult allies. The term was coined by Dr. Shawn Ginwright in 2018 and is based on more than 30 years of research and practice with young people, schools, probation departments, and social workers. Learn more: <https://flourishagenda.com/healing-centered-engagement-certification/>.

GUIDE FOR JUDGES

This guide is designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors. The Protective and Promotive Factors, informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience, are proxies for young people's well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers Judges topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors, go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

Why is this important?

A youth's capacity to manage stress and adversity is critical in dealing with life's challenges and frustrations and overcoming traumatic history.

Application

- Consistent relationship with at least one safe, competent, and reliable adult
- Opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making about their lives
- Constructive engagement in family, school, and community
- Encouragement of youth voice, choice, and personal responsibility

Guiding Questions

- To what extent has the youth been provided with help/support in addressing trauma symptoms?
- Has anyone identified people in the young person's life who can help the young person make big, impactful life decisions? If not, what efforts are being made to help the young person secure people to fill that role?
- Is the youth productively managing challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? If not, what actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to help the youth better manage challenges or frustrations?
- Is the youth's voice heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, (c) with friends and family, and (d) in court? If not, what actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to help the youth's voice be heard?
- How can I identify and nurture a long-term relationship with a permanent adult connection?
- Have I considered the way that a youth's identity (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression) could be better affirmed?

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Why is this important?

Research shows that young people need social connections with at least one consistent and caring adult to help them:

- Increase knowledge and develop skills.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Find meaning in life.

Social connections also serve as a buffer against depression, early sexual activity, violence, and substance abuse.

Application

- Regular visits with siblings and family
- Connections that support development of identity in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
- Opportunities for engagement with peers inside and outside of school
- Opportunities for engagement in extracurricular/community activities
- Life-long connection to a consistent caring adult
- Reduction of placement moves

Guiding Questions

- Is there a lifelong caring adult in the youth’s life? Does the youth have siblings, peers, or adults to rely on? If not, what actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to help the youth secure these connections?
- If the youth is in placement, was the youth placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is the youth having regular visits with siblings and parents, and was the youth placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? What actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to provide the youth with a more appropriate placement?
- What family events does the youth have the opportunity to participate in? If needed, who can advocate for these opportunities?
- Is anyone talking to the youth about healthy relationships and sex? What extracurricular activities is the youth engaged in? What actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to encourage extracurricular activities where the youth can develop social connections?
- Is the youth volunteering in the community or at school? Would the youth like to? If so, what efforts are being made to offer the youth that opportunity?
- Does the youth have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? If not, what arrangements can be made for those opportunities to be made available to the youth?
- Is the youth placed in the least restrictive placement? Has every effort been made to eliminate placement moves?
- Does the young person have regular communication with adults and peers who affirm their identity (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression)?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Why is this important?

The adolescent brain develops unevenly, and adversity, trauma, and disrupted relationships can impact brain development.

- Structures of the brain that contribute to emotions (e.g. fear, anger, and pleasure) develop first.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the young person want information about their personal and family history and access to their record? What efforts are being made to secure that information?
- To what extent has the youth, family team and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? If not, what efforts are being made to secure that information for everyone?

Why is this important? (cont'd)

- By the mid-to-late twenties, areas of the brain responsible for thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards, and controlling impulses develop.
- The effect of this developmental gap is that adolescents are prone to make impulsive decisions, based more on feelings than logic and may engage in high-risk and dangerous behaviors.

Application

- Opportunities to discuss personal family history
- Opportunities for youth to understand why they act the way they do
- Opportunities to discuss recent advances in brain science and adolescent development

Guiding Questions (cont'd)

- To what extent has the youth, family team, and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? If not, what efforts are being made to secure that information for everyone?
- To what extent does the youth, family team, and professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can provide that information to everyone?
- Are people acknowledging the developmental appropriateness of the young person's behavior?
- Are the youth's strengths and the benefits of risk-taking behavior being acknowledged?

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

Why is this important?

Youth need to feel comfortable asking for help and need to be provided with concrete support and services which:

- Minimize stress.
- Provide basic necessities needed to grow and thrive.

Application

- Support youth in navigating services
- Services must be:
 - Easily accessed
 - Coordinated
 - Culturally responsive
 - Affirming of intersecting identities
 - Respectful
 - Strengths-based
 - Healing centered
 - Developmentally appropriate
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26

Guiding Questions

- Has the young person had competent client-directed legal counsel at all stages of the case to assist with decision-making and to ensure the youth's due process rights are protected?
- What supports and services are being provided to the youth to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? What actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to assist the youth with stability in each of these areas?
- Has the youth identified someone, such as the parent or caretaker, who they can speak to when they have important questions? What efforts are being made to support the parent or caretaker or to identify someone else?
- Is the youth about to make any important life changes? Is there a caring person to help with those changes? What efforts are being made to identify someone (or a number of people) if not?
- Has someone reviewed transition/independent living resources (e.g., [The FosterClub Transition Toolkit](#)) with the youth?
- Does the youth's family have adequate housing and access to food?

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

Youth need an array of skills to successfully navigate the challenges of adulthood. To develop their cognitive and social-emotional competency, youth need access to experiences that allow them to:

- Explore their interests and try new experiences.
- Better understand their personal, gender, and cultural identity.
- Practice more independence and responsibility.

Application

- Opportunities to discuss the youth's goals
- Opportunities for youth to independently make decisions and demonstrate responsibility
- Stability in school and placement
- Use of healing centered engagement
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26

Guiding Questions

- What efforts am I making to ensure that the youth's voice is being heard in my courtroom?
- Have the youth's personal goals been identified? What efforts are being made to help the youth attain those goals?
- Is the youth functioning well at (a) home, and (b) work/school, in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to the family and work/ school community? If there are areas of dysfunction in these relationships, what efforts are being made to help them be more functional?
- How is the youth doing in school? Is the young person in the most appropriate school setting for the youth's academic needs? Does the youth have educational/ employment goals? Who is assisting the young person to reach those goals? What actions need to be taken, or orders can I make, to assist the youth in reaching those goals?
- Are there caring adults who support the youth's identity, and does the youth feel supported by those adults? In what ways are those adults supportive? Do the youth's parents and/or caregivers know and understand the youth's racial/ethnic identity and Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE)? Has the youth been supported in defining their identity and what gender pronoun to use (they/them/their, she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.)? If not, what efforts are being made to enlist adults who would support the youth's identity development?
- Have the youth's intersectional identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that the youth has received?



GUIDE FOR YOUTH

Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being (Guide) is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth’s well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers young people topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

What's the point of this?

You are the expert of your experiences, and your voice and participation in planning for your future is important. Below are suggested questions that can be used in planning for family court proceedings and in case planning. You can ask these questions to your lawyer, parent(s), guardian(s), caseworker, and even yourself to make sure that you have all of the resources you need to thrive.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

What is it?

The ability, tools, and skills to help me manage stress and live a productive life even after experiencing trauma and difficult times.

How

- Have the chances to speak my mind and make my own choices
- Have a relationship with at least one safe, reliable, and caring adult
- Be involved in activities with family, school, and community
- Be a part of making important decisions that involve me

Guiding Questions

- Do I have people in my life who help me make big decisions? If not, who can I ask to help me find people to fill that role?
- Do I know how to effectively deal with challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? If not, how do I get help and from whom?
- Do I get to weigh in on things that impact my life (a) where I live, (b) at work/school, (c) with friends and family, and (d) in court? If not, what efforts can I make to get my voice heard? Who can help me with this?
- How do I identify and support a long-term relationship for myself with a permanent adult connection? Who can help me with this?
- Do I have anyone in my life who provides me with help/support in difficult times?
- Do I feel like my racial, ethnic, and gender identities are affirmed?

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

What is it?

A close relationship with at least one consistent and caring adult and friends can help me feel like I belong, find meaning in life, and develop skills; these relationships can help me from becoming depressed, starting sexual activity before I'm ready, abusing drugs and alcohol, and taking part in violent activities.

How?

- Find spaces and people that I am comfortable being myself around
- Discuss my goals with others
- Make decisions on my own and show that I am responsible

Guiding Questions

- Do I have a lifelong caring adult in my life? Do I have siblings, peers, or adults I can rely on? If not, how can I find these connections? Who can help me with this?
- Was I placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not, do I have regular visits with my siblings and parents? If not, was I placed with a supportive caretaker? What steps can I take to advocate for this? Who can help me with this?
- What family events do I have the opportunity to participate in? If needed, how can I make sure I'm included in these events?
- Who can I talk with about healthy relationships, my sexual orientation, and gender identity, and about sex? Who can help me identify someone to talk with?
- What extracurricular activities do I participate in? How can I find extracurricular activities that fit my interests? Who can help me with this?
- Would I like to volunteer in my community or school? How can I go about this? Who can help me with this?
- Do I have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as other people my age who are not in placement? If not, what opportunities would I like to be made available to me, and who can I talk to about making those arrangements?
- Do I have regular communication with friends or family who affirm my racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender identities?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPEMENT

What is it?

Knowledge that my brain is not done developing, and that positive and negative things that happen to me can change the way my brain develops. An understanding that because my brain is developing, I sometimes rely on my emotions rather than reason to make decisions, which could lead to situations that aren't safe for me.

How?

- Learn about my family history, if possible
- Learn about brain science and adolescent development
- Get help to understand that my actions are sometimes a result of the natural way my brain is developing

Guiding Questions

- Do I have information about my personal history? Who can help me obtain this information?
- Do I, and does my family team and professional staff, know what happens developmentally during adolescence? What steps do I need to take to get this information? Who can help me with this?
- Do I, and does my family team and professional staff, understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can explain this to me?

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

What is it?

A connection to people, services, and help to make sure I am less stressed and that I have my basic necessities met. The ability to be comfortable asking for help when I need something.

How?

- Get help from someone to find services and programs that can help me
- Services should be:
 - Easy for me to find and get to
 - Coordinated and work together to help me
 - Culturally responsive
 - Affirming of my intersecting identities and respectful of who I am
 - Focused on my strengths
 - Staffed by people who understand my past and engage in healing centered activities
 - Right for and relevant to my age
- Make sure I am enrolled in Medicaid until I am 26

Guiding Questions

- What supports and services are being provided to help me continue in my (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? What additional help do I need in each of these things?
- Do I have someone to ask when I have important questions? If not, what steps can I take to identify someone? Who can help me identify someone?
- Am I about to make any important changes in my life? If so, do I have a caring person to help with those changes? If not, how do I identify someone (or a number of people) to help me with this?
- Have I reviewed transition/independent living resources (e.g., [The FosterClub Transition Toolkit](#))? Is there anyone that I want to review the resources with me?
- Am I comfortable asking for help and advocating for myself? If not, who can I ask to help advocate for/with me?
- Are my experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, who do I feel comfortable talking to about them?
- Are my medical, dental, and mental health needs being appropriately addressed? How can I advocate to ensure that my needs are addressed? Who can help me with this?
- Are my experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, who do I feel comfortable talking to about them?
- Do I feel comfortable advocating for treatment and about issues with medication and therapy? If not, who can advocate for/with me?
- Do I have access to food and shelter? if not, who can help me obtain them?



COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

What is it?

The skills I need to address the challenges of becoming an adult. Experiences that give me a chance to explore my interests and identity, to practice independence, and to take on more responsibility to maximize my well-being.

How?

- Discuss my goals with others
- Make decisions on my own and show that I am responsible



Guiding Questions

- Is my voice being heard in court proceedings and in the case planning process?
- What are my personal goals? How can I identify and attain those goals? Who can help me with this?
- Am I functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school, in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to my family and work/school community? If there are problems with these relationships, what efforts are being made to help them be more healthy?
- How am I doing in school? Have I been able to stay in my same school? Is my school meeting my academic needs? What are my educational/employment goals? Do I need help determining what they are? Do I need help reaching my educational/employment goals? Where can I find help with this?
- Who in my life supports all parts of who I am? Do they know and understand issues related to my sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) and how they relate to my development?
- Have my multiple identities, or the ways that my identities overlap (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that I have received? Who will help me make sure I receive appropriate support services, with respect to my multiple identities (the way that my identities overlap)?



GUIDE FOR CASA/ AGENCY WORKERS

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth's well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers CASA/Agency Workers topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

Why is this important?

A youth's capacity to manage stress and adversity is critical in dealing with life's challenges and frustrations and in overcoming traumatic history.

Application

- Consistent relationship with at least one safe, competent, and reliable adult
- Opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making about their lives
- Constructive engagement in family, school, and community
- Encouragement of youth voice, choice, and personal responsibility

Guiding Questions

- Has the youth been provided with help/support in addressing trauma symptoms?
- Who is available to help the youth make big decisions that impact the youth's life? What efforts can I make to help the youth secure someone to fill that role?
- In what ways does the youth productively manage challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? How can I assist the youth to better manage challenges/frustrations?
- In what ways is the young person's voice heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, and (c) with friends and family? If it is not, what can I do to make sure the youth's voice is heard?
- How can I identify and support a long-term relationship with a permanent adult connection?
- How have I affirmed the youth's racial, ethnic, and gender identities?

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Why is this important?

Research shows that young people need social connections with at least one consistent and caring adult and with peers to help them:

- Increase knowledge and develop skills.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Find meaning in life.

Social connections also serve as a buffer against depression, early sexual activity, violence, and substance abuse.

Application

- Regular visits with siblings and family
- Connections that support development of identity in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
- Opportunities for engagement with peers inside/outside of school
- Opportunities for engagement in extracurricular/community activities

Guiding Questions

- Is there a lifelong caring adult in the youth's life?
- If the youth is in placement, was the youth placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is the youth having regular visits with siblings and parents, and was the youth placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? If not, what efforts can I make to help provide the youth with a more appropriate placement?
- How can I help the youth secure appropriate and reliable connections with siblings, peers, or adults?
- What family events does the youth have the opportunity to participate in? How can I advocate for these opportunities?
- Who is talking to the youth about healthy relationships, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and about sex? How often is someone spending time talking to the youth about these things?
- What extracurricular activities is the youth engaged in? How can I encourage participation in extracurricular activities where the youth can develop social connections?
- Is the youth volunteering in the community or at school? What efforts can I make to help the youth secure those opportunities if desired?
- Does the youth have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? If not, what arrangements can be made for those opportunities to be made available to the youth?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPEMENT

Why is this important?

The adolescent brain develops unevenly, and adversity, trauma, and disrupted relationships can impact brain development.

- Structures of the brain that contribute to emotions (e.g. fear, anger, and pleasure) develop first.
- By the mid-to-late twenties, areas of the brain responsible for thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards, and controlling impulses develop.
- The effect of this developmental gap is that adolescents are prone to make impulsive decisions, based more on feelings than logic and may engage in high-risk and dangerous behaviors.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the young person want information about their personal and family history and access to their record? What efforts are being made to secure that information?
- To what extent has the youth, family team, and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? What efforts can I make to secure that information for everyone?
- To what extent does the youth, family team, and professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can provide that information to everyone?
- Are the young person's strengths and the benefits of risk-taking behavior being acknowledged?

Application

- Opportunities to discuss personal family history
- Opportunities for youth to understand why they act the way they do
- Opportunities to discuss recent advances in brain science and adolescent development



PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

Why is this important?

Youth need to feel comfortable asking for help and need to be provided with concrete support and services which:

- Minimize stress.
- Provide basic necessities needed to grow and thrive.

How?

- Support youth in navigating services
- Services must be:
 - Easily accessed
 - Culturally responsive
 - Respectful
 - Healing centered
 - Coordinated
 - Affirming of identities
 - Strengths-based
 - Developmentally appropriate
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26

Guiding Questions

- What supports and services are being provided to the youth to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? What else is needed? How can I advocate to make sure the youth is getting and maintaining appropriate services?
- Who can the youth go to with important questions? How can I help the youth identify someone?
- If the young person is about to make any important changes, who can assist the young person with that change? How can I help the young person to identify someone (or a number of people)?
- Have I reviewed emancipation planning resources with the youth?
- Are the young person's traumatic experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, what efforts are being made to ensure that someone that the young person is comfortable with is addressing this trauma?
- To what extent has the youth's medical, dental, and mental health needs been appropriately addressed? How can I advocate to ensure that these needs are addressed?
- Does the youth feel comfortable advocating for treatment and raising issues with medication and therapy? If not, what efforts can I make to advocate for the youth?
- Does the youth have access to housing and food? If not, how can I help identify those resources?



COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

To develop their cognitive and social-emotional competency, youth need access to experiences that allow them to:

- Explore their interests and try new experiences.
- Better understand their personal, gender, and cultural identity.
- Practice more independence and responsibility.

Application

- Engagement in discussion of youth's goals
- Opportunities to identify and pursue interests
- Opportunity to independently make decisions and demonstrate responsibility
- Safe and nurturing environment to express identity
- Stability in school and placement
- Use of healing centered engagement

Guiding Questions

- What efforts am I making to ensure that the youth's voice is being heard in court proceedings and in the case planning process?
- What are the youth's personal goals? How can I help the youth identify and attain those goals?
- Is the youth functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school, in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to the family and work/school community? If there are areas of dysfunction in these relationships, what efforts are being made to help them be more functional?
- How is the youth doing in school? Is the youth in the most appropriate school setting for the youth's academic needs? What are the youth's educational/employment goals? How can additional advocacy be used to help the youth reach those educational/employment goals?
- To what extent is the young person's identity development supported? Are there other caring adults who support the youth's identity development? In what ways are those adults supportive? Do the adults and/or caregivers know, understand, and affirm the youth's Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE)? Has anyone supported the youth in defining his/her/their identity and what gender pronoun to use (they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.?) If not, how can I help to enlist adults who would support the youth's identity development?
- Has the young person's intersectional identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that the youth has received?



GUIDE FOR AGENCY ATTORNEYS

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth's well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers Agency Attorneys topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <http://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youth-thrive>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

Why is this important?

A youth's capacity to manage stress and adversity is critical in dealing with life's challenges and frustrations and in overcoming traumatic history.

Application

- Consistent relationship with at least one safe, competent, and reliable adult
- Opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making
- Constructive engagement in family, school, and community
- Encouragement of youth voice, choice, and personal responsibility

Guiding Questions

- To what extent has the youth been provided with help/support in addressing trauma symptoms?
- To what extent does the worker know whether there are people in the young person's life who help make big decisions? If not, what efforts can the worker make to help the young person secure people to fill that role?
- To what extent does the worker know whether the youth productively manages challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? How can the worker assist the youth to better manage challenges/frustrations?
- To what extent does the worker know whether the young person's voice is heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, and (c) with friends and family? If it is not, what efforts can the worker make to help the young person's voice be heard?
- How can I identify and nurture a long-term relationship with a permanent adult connection?

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Why is this important?

Research shows that young people need social connections with at least one consistent and caring adult and with peers to help them:

- Increase knowledge and develop skills.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Find meaning in life.

Social connections also serve as a buffer against depression, early sexual activity, violence, and substance abuse.

Application

- Regular visits with siblings and family
- Connections that support development of identity in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
- Opportunities for engagement with peers inside/outside of school
- Opportunities for engagement in extracurricular/community activities

Guiding Questions

- Is there a lifelong caring adult in the youth's life? To what extent does the worker know whether the youth has siblings, peers, or adults to rely on? If not, what efforts is the worker making to help the youth secure these connections?
- If the youth is in placement, was the youth placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is the youth having regular visits with siblings and parents, and was the youth placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? Is it necessary to provide a more appropriate placement?
- What family events does the youth have the opportunity to participate in? If needed, how can the worker advocate for these opportunities?
- To what extent does the worker know whether anyone is talking to the youth about healthy relationships and sex? Can the worker identify someone?
- To what extent does the worker know what extracurricular activities the youth is engaged in? How can the worker encourage participation in extracurricular activities where the youth can develop social connections?
- To what extent does the worker know whether the youth is volunteering in the community or at school? What efforts are being made to offer the youth opportunities?
- To what extent does the worker know whether the youth has the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? What efforts can the worker make to encourage that those opportunities are made available to the youth?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPEMENT

Why is this important?

The adolescent brain develops unevenly, and adversity, trauma, and disrupted relationships can impact brain development.

- Structures of the brain that contribute to emotions (e.g. fear, anger, and pleasure) develop first.
- By the mid-to-late twenties, areas of the brain responsible for thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards, and controlling impulses develop.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the worker know if the youth wants information about personal history and, if so, what efforts is the worker making to secure that information?
- To what extent has the worker provided the youth, family team, and professional staff with information about adolescent development? What efforts has the worker made to secure that information for everyone?

Why is this important? (cont'd)

- The effect of this developmental gap is that adolescents are prone to make impulsive decisions, based more on feelings than logic and may engage in high-risk and dangerous behaviors.

Application

- Opportunities to discuss personal family history
- Opportunities for youth to understand why they act the way they do
- Opportunities to discuss recent advances in brain science and adolescent development

Guiding Questions (cont'd)

- To what extent does the worker, the youth, family team, and other professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can provide that information to the worker and everyone else?

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

Why is this important?

Youth need to feel comfortable asking for help and need to be provided with concrete support and services which:

- Minimize stress.
- Provide basic necessities needed to grow and thrive.

How?

- Support youth in navigating services
- Services must be:
 - Easily accessed
 - Culturally responsive
 - Respectful
 - Healing centered
 - Coordinated
 - Affirming of identities
 - Strengths-based
 - Developmentally appropriate
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26

Guiding Questions

- What supports and services are being provided to the youth to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? What efforts is the worker making to assist the youth with stability in each of these areas?
- Does the worker know who the youth can go to with important questions? What efforts are being made to identify someone (or a number of people)?
- If the youth is about to make any important life changes, does the worker know whether there is a caring person to help with those changes? If not, what efforts is the worker making to identify someone?
- Has the worker reviewed transition/independent living resources (e.g., [The FosterClub Transition Toolkit](#)) with the youth?
- To what extent does the worker know whether the young person's traumatic experiences, pain, and feelings about the past are being appropriately addressed? What efforts is the worker making to ensure that someone that the youth is comfortable with is addressing that trauma?
- To what extent has the youth's medical, dental, and mental health needs been appropriately addressed? What efforts is the worker making to ensure that these needs are addressed?
- Does the worker know how comfortable the youth is in asking for help, advocating for treatment, and raising issues with medication and therapy? If not, what efforts are being made to advocate for the youth?

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

To develop their cognitive and social-emotional competency, youth need access to experiences that allow them to:

- Explore their interests and try new experiences.
- Better understand their personal, gender, and cultural identity.
- Practice more independence and responsibility.

Application

- Opportunities to discuss the youth’s goals
- Opportunities for youth to independently make decisions and demonstrate responsibility
- Easy re-enrollment of youth in school after placement
- Use of healing centered engagement

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the worker know whether the youth has personal goals? What efforts are being made to help the youth identify and attain those goals?
- To what extent does the worker know if the youth is functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school, in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to the family and work/school community? If there are areas of dysfunction in these relationships, what efforts are being made to help them be more functional?
- To what extent does the worker know how the youth is doing in school and whether or not he/she is in the most appropriate school setting for the youth’s academic needs? Does the worker know the young person’s educational/employment goals? How can the worker help the youth reach those goals?
- To what extent does the worker know whether there are caring adults who support the youth’s identity, and whether the youth feels supported by those adults? Does the worker know in what ways those adults are supportive? Do the youth’s parents and/or caregivers know and understand the youth’s Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE)? If not, what efforts is the worker making to enlist adults who would support the young person’s identity development?
- Have the youth’s intersectional identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that the youth has received?



GUIDE FOR GALs/ ATTORNEYS FOR YOUTH

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth's well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers GALs/Attorneys for Youth topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

Why is this important?

The effects of toxic stress can be mitigated by experiences that build a youth's capacity for resilience and help the youth manage stress and function well when faced with adversity and trauma.

Application

- Consistent relationship with at least one safe, competent, and reliable adult
- Opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making
- Constructive engagement in family, school, and community
- Encouragement of youth voice, choice, and personal responsibility

Guiding Questions

- To what extent has the youth been provided with help/support in addressing trauma symptoms?
- Who is available to help the youth make big decisions? What efforts can I make to help the youth secure people to fill that role?
- In what ways does the youth productively manage challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? How can I assist the young person to better manage challenges/frustrations?
- In what ways is the young person's voice heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, and (c) with friends and family? If none, what can I do to help the young person's voice be heard?
- How can I identify and support a long-term relationship for the youth with a permanent adult connection?

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Why is this important?

Research shows that young people need social connections with at least one consistent and caring adult and with peers to help them:

- Increase knowledge and develop skills.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Find meaning in life.

Social connections also serve as a buffer against depression, early sexual activity, violence, and substance abuse.

Application

- Regular visits with siblings and family
- Connections that support development of identity in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
- Opportunities for engagement with peers inside/outside of school
- Opportunities for engagement in extracurricular/community activities

Guiding Questions

- Is there a lifelong caring adult in the young person's life?
- If the youth is in placement, was the youth placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is the youth having regular visits with siblings and parents, and was the youth placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? If not, what additional advocacy is necessary to provide the youth with a more appropriate placement?
- How can I help the youth secure appropriate and reliable connections with siblings, peers, or adults?
- What family events does the youth have the opportunity to participate in? How can I advocate for these opportunities?
- Who is talking to the youth about healthy intimate relationships? How often is someone spending time talking to the youth about healthy relationships and about sex? How can I help make that connection for the youth?
- What extracurricular activities is the youth engaged in? How can I encourage participation in extracurricular activities where the youth can develop social connections?
- What volunteer activities is the youth engaged in in the community or at school? What efforts can I make to help the youth secure those opportunities?
- Does the youth have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? If not, what arrangements can be made for those opportunities to be made available to the youth?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Why is this important?

The adolescent brain develops unevenly, and adversity, trauma, and disrupted relationships can impact brain development.

- Structures of the brain that contribute to emotions (e.g. fear, anger, and pleasure) develop first.
- By the mid-to-late twenties, areas of the brain responsible for thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards, and controlling impulses develop.
- The effect of this developmental gap is that adolescents are prone to make impulsive decisions, based more on feelings than logic and may engage in high-risk and dangerous behaviors.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the youth want information about personal history and, if the youth wants more information, to what extent has that been provided? What efforts can I make to secure that information?
- To what extent has the youth, family team, and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? What efforts can I make to secure that information for everyone?
- To what extent does the youth, family team, and professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can provide that information to everyone?

Application

- Opportunities to discuss personal family history
- Opportunities for youth to understand why they act the way they do
- Opportunities to discuss recent advances in brain science and adolescent development



PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

Why is this important?

Youth need to feel comfortable asking for help and need to be provided with concrete support and services which:

- Minimize stress.
- Provide basic necessities needed to grow and thrive.

How?

- Support youth in navigating services
- Services must be:
 - Easily accessed
 - Culturally responsive
 - Respectful
 - Healing centered
 - Coordinated
 - Affirming of identities
 - Strengths-based
 - Developmentally appropriate
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26



Guiding Questions

- Are there any special circumstances about the youth's placement or treatment history that create a current risk of harm, or is there past trauma that needs to be addressed? Is the young person currently in a situation that might subject the youth to the use of restraints, psychotropic medications, or dangerous placement conditions?
- What supports and services are being provided to the youth to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? What else is needed? How can I advocate to make sure the youth is getting and maintaining appropriate services?
- Who can the youth go to with important questions? How can I help the youth identify someone?
- If the youth is about to make any important life changes, who can assist the youth with those?
- How can I help the youth to identify someone (or a number of people)?
- Have I reviewed emancipation planning resources with the youth?
- Are the youth's traumatic experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, what efforts are being made to ensure that someone with whom the youth is comfortable is addressing the youth's trauma?
- To what extent has the youth's medical, dental, and mental health needs been appropriately addressed? How can I advocate to ensure that these needs are addressed?
- Does the youth feel comfortable advocating for treatment and raising issues with medication and therapy? If not, what efforts can I make to advocate for the youth?

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

To develop their cognitive and social-emotional competency, youth need access to experiences that allow them to:

- Explore their interests and try new experiences.
- Better understand their personal, gender, and cultural identity.
- Practice more independence and responsibility.

Application

- Engagement in discussion of youth's goals
- Opportunities to identify and pursue interests
- Opportunity to independently make decisions and demonstrate responsibility
- Safe and nurturing environment to express identity
- Stability in school and placement
- Use of healing centered engagement

Guiding Questions

- What efforts am I making to ensure that the youth's voice is being heard in court proceedings and in the case planning process?
- What are the youth's personal goals? How can I help the youth identify and attain those goals?
- Is the youth functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to the family and work/school community? If there are areas of dysfunction in these relationships, what efforts are being made to help them be more functional?
- How is the youth doing in school? Is the youth in the most appropriate school setting for the youth's academic needs? What are the youth's educational/employment goals? How can additional advocacy be used to help the youth reach those educational/employment goals?
- Are there caring adults who support the youth's identity, and does the youth feel supported by those adults? In what ways are those adults supportive?
- Do the youth's parents and/or caregivers know and understand the youth's Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE)? If not, how can I help to enlist adults who would support his/her identity development?
- Have the youth's intersectional identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that the youth has received? Has the youth been supported in defining his/her/their identity and what gender pronoun they want to use (they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.)?



GUIDE FOR PARENT ATTORNEYS

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth's well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers Parent Attorneys for Youth topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

Why is this important?

The effects of toxic stress can be mitigated by experiences that build a youth's capacity for resilience and help the youth manage stress and function well when faced with adversity and trauma.

Application

- Consistent relationship with at least one safe, competent, and reliable adult
- Opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making
- Constructive engagement in family, school, and community
- Encouragement of youth voice, choice, and personal responsibility

Guiding Questions

- Has the youth been provided with help/support in addressing trauma symptoms?
- Are there people in the young person's life who help make big decisions? If not, what efforts can my client or others make to help the youth secure people to fill that role?
- Does the youth productively manage challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? How can my client or others assist the youth to better manage challenges/frustrations?
- Is the youth's voice heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, and (c) with friends and family? What efforts can my client or others make to help the youth's voice be heard?



COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

Research shows that young people need social connections with at least one consistent and caring adult and with peers to help them:

- Increase knowledge and develop skills.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Find meaning in life.

Social connections also serve as a buffer against depression, early sexual activity, violence, and substance abuse.

Application

- Regular visits with siblings and family
- Connections that support development of identity in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
- Opportunities for engagement with peers inside/outside of school
- Opportunities for engagement in extracurricular/community activities

Guiding Questions

- Is there a lifelong caring adult in the young person's life?
- If the youth is in placement, was the youth placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is the youth having regular visits with siblings and parents, and was the youth placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? Is additional advocacy necessary to provide the youth with a more appropriate placement?
- Does the youth have siblings, peers, or adults to rely on? If not, how can my client or others help the youth secure these connections?
- What family events does the youth have the opportunity to participate in? If needed, how can I, my client, or others advocate for these opportunities?
- Is anyone talking to the youth about healthy relationships, sexual orientation and gender identity, and about sex? Is my client prepared to play that role or can my client identify someone who is?
- What extracurricular activities is the youth engaged in? How can my client or others encourage participation in extracurricular activities where the youth can develop social connections?
- Is the youth volunteering in the community or at school? Would the youth like to? If so, how can my client or others make that a possibility for the youth?
- Does the youth have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? If not, what arrangements can my client make for those opportunities to be made available to the youth?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Why is this important?

The adolescent brain develops unevenly, and adversity, trauma, and disrupted relationships can impact brain development.

- Structures of the brain that contribute to emotions (e.g. fear, anger, and pleasure) develop first.
- By the mid-to-late twenties, areas of the brain responsible for thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards, and controlling impulses develop.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does the youth want personal history information, and what efforts are being made to secure that information? If none, how can I assist my client in providing that information to the youth? Who else can help with this?
- To what extent has the youth, family team, and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? If not, how can I assist my client in providing that information to the youth and everyone else? Who else can help with this?

Why is this important? (cont'd)

- The effect of this developmental gap is that adolescents are prone to make impulsive decisions, based more on feelings than logic and may engage in high-risk and dangerous behaviors.

Application

- Opportunities to discuss personal family history
- Opportunities for youth to understand why they act the way they do
- Opportunities to discuss recent advances in brain science and adolescent development

Guiding Questions (cont'd)

- To what extent does the youth, family team, and professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? If not, who can provide that information to everyone?
- Are the young person's strengths and the benefits of risk-taking behavior being acknowledged?

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

Why is this important?

Youth need to feel comfortable asking for help and need to be provided with concrete support and services which:

- Minimize stress.
- Provide basic necessities needed to grow and thrive.

Application

- Support youth in navigating services
- Services must be:
 - Easily accessed
 - Culturally responsive
 - Respectful
 - Healing centered
 - Coordinated
 - Affirming of identities
 - Strengths-based
 - Developmentally appropriate
- Enrollment in Medicaid to age 26

Guiding Questions

- What supports and services are being provided to the youth to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) education, and (c) extracurricular activities? How can I advocate to make sure the youth is getting and maintaining appropriate services?
- Does the youth have someone to go to with important questions? Is it my client? If not, how can I help my client play this role and, if my client can't, how can I help my client identify someone who can?
- Is the youth about to make any important life changes? If so, will the youth turn to my client to help with those changes? If not, how can I help my client identify someone (or a number of people) who can?
- Are the youth's traumatic experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, what efforts can my client make to ensure that someone with whom the youth is comfortable is addressing that trauma?
- To what extent has the youth's medical, dental, and mental health needs been appropriately addressed? How can I advocate to ensure that these needs are addressed?
- Does the youth feel comfortable advocating for treatment and raising issues with medication and therapy? If not, what efforts can I make to ensure that someone is advocating for the youth?

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Why is this important?

To develop their cognitive and social-emotional competency, youth need access to experiences that allow them to:

- Explore their interests and try new experiences.
- Better understand their personal, gender, and cultural identity.
- Practice more independence and responsibility.

Application

- Opportunities for youth to independently make decisions and demonstrate responsibility
- Stability in school and placement
- Use of healing centered engagement

Guiding Questions

- Does the youth have personal goals? How can my client or others help the youth identify and attain those goals?
- Is the youth functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school in terms of maintaining functional relationships, fulfilling responsibilities, and making positive contributions to the family and work/school community? If there are areas of dysfunction in these relationships, what efforts can I, my client, or others make to help them be more functional?
- How is the youth doing in school? Is the youth in the most appropriate school setting for the youth's academic needs? Does the youth have educational/employment goals? Is additional advocacy necessary to help reach the youth's educational/employment goals?
- Does my client support the youth's identity, or are there other caring adults who support the youth's identity? Does the youth feel supported by my client or those adults? In what ways are they supportive? Does my client and/or the youth's caregiver know and understand the youth's Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE)? Has the youth been supported in defining his/her/their identity and what gender pronoun to use (they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.)? If not, what efforts are being made to enlist adults who would support the youth's identity development?
- Have the youth's intersectional identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.) been explored and considered in all assessments and/or services that the youth has received?



GUIDE FOR PARENTS

"Using the Protective and Promotive Factors to Support Youth Well-Being" is an interactive guide designed to provide those working with young people with questions that stimulate and enrich conversations about the presence of the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors—informed by research on resilience, positive youth development, and neuroscience—that address youth’s well-being. Keyed to the Protective and Promotive Factors, this Guide offers Parents topics to explore that help youth take advantage of opportunities and experiences, pursue their interests, find support when challenges arise, and identify key building blocks for their evolving well-being.

For more information about the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors go to: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#framework>. To learn more about adolescent brain development, refer to Appendix A. For more information on youth well-being, refer to Appendix B.

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

YOUTH RESILIENCE

What is it?

The ability, tools, and skills to help my child manage stress and live a productive life even after experiencing disruption and difficult times.

How?

Opportunities for my child to:

- Speak their mind
- Have a relationship with at least one safe, reliable, and wise adult
- Become involved in activities within the family, school, and community
- Be a part of making important decisions

Guiding Questions

- Am I available to help my child make big decisions? If not, do I need help finding others to fill in?
- In what ways does my child productively manage challenges or frustrations (a poor grade at school, a fight with a friend or relative)? How can I help my child better manage challenges/frustrations? If I can't play that role, how do I find others to fill in?
- In what ways is my child's voice heard (a) at home, (b) at work/school, (c) with friends and family, and (d) in court? How can I help my child's voice be heard?
- Does my child have anyone to provide help/support in difficult times?



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

What is it?

A close relationship with at least one consistent and caring adult and friends who can help my child feel a sense of belonging, find meaning in life, and develop skills; these relationships can help my child from becoming depressed, starting sexual activity before my child is ready, abusing drugs and alcohol, and taking part in violent activities.

How?

Opportunities for my child to:

- Find comfortable spaces and people
- Discuss goals with me and others
- Make decisions
- Have opportunities to demonstrate responsibility

Guiding Questions

- If my child is in placement, is my child placed with siblings, relatives, or family friends? If not placed with family members, is my child having regular visits with me and/or with siblings, and was my child placed in the most appropriate placement and/or with a supportive caretaker? If not, what can I do?
- How can I help my child secure appropriate and reliable connections with siblings, peers, or adults?
- What family events does my child have the opportunity to participate in? If needed, how can I advocate for these opportunities?
- How often am I spending time talking to my child about healthy relationships, my child's sexual orientation and gender identity, and about sex? Should someone else my child trusts play that role? How can I help address this?
- What extracurricular activities is my child engaged in? How can I encourage participation in extracurricular activities where my child can develop healthy social connections and who can assist me?
- What volunteering activities is my child engaged in in school or the community? What efforts can I make to offer my child those opportunities and who can assist me?
- Does my child have the same opportunities for connecting with friends as a young person who is not in placement? If not, what arrangements can I make for those opportunities to be made available to my child?
- Do I affirm my child's racial, ethnic, and gender identities? Does my child have other social connections who affirm these identities?

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

What is it?

Knowledge that my child's brain is not done developing, and that positive and negative things that happen to my child can change the way my child's brain develops. Because of when and how the brain develops, adults are better able to use reason to make decisions, and young people tend to rely more on feelings to make decisions, so sometimes young people end up involved in dangerous activities.

Guiding Questions

- To what extent does my child want access to information about our family's history and, if my child wants more information, to what extent has that been provided? What efforts can I make to provide or secure that information?
- To what extent has my child, the family team, and professional staff been provided with information about adolescent development? What efforts can I make to secure that information? Who can help me with this?

Application

Opportunities for my child to:

- Learn about our family history, if possible
- Learn about brain science and adolescent development
- Get help to understand why young peoples' actions can be a result of the natural way their brain is developing

Guiding Questions (cont'd)

- To what extent do I, my child, the family team, and professional staff understand the link between risk-taking behaviors and adolescent development? Who can provide that information to me, my child, and everyone else?
- Do I understand my child's strengths and the benefits that come from this developmental stage?

PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

CONCRETE SUPPORTS IN TIMES OF NEED

What is it?

The ability and comfort level my child has in asking for help. A connection to services and help to make sure that my child is less stressed and that my child's basic needs are met.

How?

Opportunities for my child to:

- Get help from someone to find services and programs that can help my child
- Find services that:
 - Are easy to find and get to
 - Are coordinated and work together to help
 - Are culturally responsive
 - Affirm my child's identities
 - Respect my child
 - Focus on my child's strengths
 - Have staff who are able to understand and address my child's trauma
 - Right for my child's age
- Be automatically enrolled in Medicaid until age 26

Guiding Questions

- What supports and services are being provided to my child to maintain stability in (a) placement, (b) school, and (c) extracurricular activities? What efforts am I making to assist my child in each of these areas? Who can help me with this?
- Who does my child go to with important questions? To what extent can I play that role? What efforts can I make to help identify someone or obtain an advocate to play that role and teach my child how to do this?
- If my child is about to make any important life changes, to what extent can I help with those changes? If necessary, what efforts can I make to help identify other people (or a number of people) who can help?
- Are my child's experiences, pain, and feelings about the past being appropriately addressed? If not, what efforts can I make to ensure that someone with whom my child is comfortable is addressing them?
- To what extent have my child's medical, dental, and mental health needs been appropriately addressed? How can I advocate to ensure that these needs are addressed?
- Does my child feel comfortable advocating for treatment and raising issues with medication and therapy? If not, what efforts can I make to ensure that someone is advocating for/with my child?
- Do I have access to food and housing? If not, where can I go to access them?



COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

What is it?

Experiences that give young people a chance to explore interests and identity, to practice independence, and to take on more responsibilities to maximize well-being.

Application

- Opportunities for my child to:
 - Discuss goals with me and others
 - Make independent decisions
 - Have opportunities to show responsibility

Guiding Questions

- What are my child’s personal goals? What efforts am I making to help my child identify and attain those goals? Who can help me with this?
- Is my child functioning well at (a) home and (b) work/school? Is my child fulfilling responsibilities and making positive contributions to the family/work/school community? What efforts can I or others make to help my child be more successful?
- How is my child doing in school? Is my child in the most appropriate school setting? What are my child’s educational/employment goals? How can I help my child reach those goals? Who can help me with this?
- To what extent do I and/or my child’s caregivers know, understand, and are able to affirm my child’s identities? Do we know and understand issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and how they relate to my child’s development? What gender pronoun does my child want to use (they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his, etc.)? What other adults support my child’s identity development?
- Have my child and I discussed the ways that identities overlap (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.)? Who can help me address potential mistreatment of my child resulting from my child’s intersectional identities, such as treatment during court proceedings, or any impact on sentencing or services?



APPENDIX A

FOCUS ON WELL-BEING



In recent years, child welfare and juvenile justice systems have been urged to focus more intentionally on youth’s well-being, which involves attention not just to the youth’s safety, permanency, and basic needs, but also to their social, emotional, behavioral, physical, and spiritual health. This requires professionals who interact with youth to value youth’s hopes and aspirations and understand the impact of trauma, including from racism, the rejection of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, and other oppressive beliefs, policies, and practices that harm youth and families. The five Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive factors represent a pathway to well-being and helps professionals assist youth to take advantage of opportunities, pursue their interests, and find support when challenges arise. This Guide will also help the user identify key impediments and building blocks for youth well-being.

Youth Thrive—as part of CSSP—is committed to holding equity as a core value and uses [CSSP’s Anti-Racist Intersectional Frame](#) to examine the power held by institutions and systems as well as the oppression faced by Black, Latinx/e, and Native American youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Youth Thrive makes intentional efforts to understand and attempts to address the negative impact of institutional racism, implicit bias, and other forms of discrimination based on culture, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Furthermore, Youth Thrive recognizes that young people are best supported by those who have respect for and understand their own culture, the culture of the youth served and their larger community, as well as the culture that is created within programs, organizations, and institutions.

APPENDIX B

THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN



To be effective advocates for youth, adults need to understand the fundamentals of what is going on during the period of adolescence and why adolescents act the way they do. Adolescence is a period of profound brain development and growth. The adolescent brain is adaptable and shaped by multiple experiences. This means that “adolescence is a time of great opportunity to help youth become responsible adults and to lay a foundation for youth that will help them make informed decisions” (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2012, p.4). Research has shown that important structures in the adolescent brain develop unevenly.

- The limbic system develops in early adolescence. Structures in the limbic system are related to emotions, pleasure-seeking, and processing social information.
- The prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until adulthood. Structures in the prefrontal cortex are related to impulse control, setting priorities and planning, decision-making, and self-regulation.
- Research suggests that the unevenness in the development of the rational prefrontal cortex and the emotional limbic system may explain why some youth engage in sensation-seeking, risky, or reckless behaviors and make decisions based on feelings rather than logic.
- Even though the rational prefrontal cortex develops later than the emotional limbic system, youth are still capable of planning, prioritizing, and making decisions; the difference is that these capabilities may be guided more by emotions than intellectual reasoning.
- The repercussions of traumatic events often become most apparent during adolescence when individuals face challenges regulating their emotions and actions, developing healthy relationships, and making decisions in respect to their futures (Langford & Badeau, 2013).
- Youth in the child welfare system are especially susceptible to these effects due to their potential exposure to numerous traumatic events (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2012).
- Toxic stress, characterized by intense, prolonged and frequent negative experiences, such as abuse, racism, and rejection of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender expression, and identity, can negatively impact youth’s physical, social, and emotional development.
- Experiencing traumatic events can exacerbate the uneven development of the adolescent brain.

Youth involved in the child welfare system face a number of additional stressors, both before entering care and as a result of entering care, such as the trauma of being separated from family. Although stress and exposure to traumatic experiences can disrupt healthy development, these effects can be mitigated.

- Research indicates that there is a tremendous amount of brain growth that takes place during adolescence and into adulthood, making it a pivotal time to provide positive opportunities and experiences that help the brain to create new neural pathways (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).
- Supportive and nurturing adults, as well as positive peer relationships, play key roles in promoting the development of resilience, self-confidence, and self-regulation, all essential characteristics/ components of well-being. These relationships also guide youth through coping skills necessary to handle tolerable stress, such as living with an ill relative, to decrease their stress levels, and to feel a sense of mastery (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

RESOURCES

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