

Positive Youth Development Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments = Positive Youth Development

Based on the literature, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, a collaboration of twelve federal departments and agencies that support youth, has created a definition of positive youth development: Positive youth development is an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youths' strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

Positive youth development has its origins in the field of prevention. In the past, prevention efforts typically focused on single problems before they surfaced in youth, such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. Over time, practitioners, policymakers, funders and researchers determined that promoting positive asset building and considering young people as resources were critical strategies. As a result, the youth development field began examining the role of resiliency—the protective factors in a young person's environment—and how these factors could influence one's ability to overcome adversity. Those factors included, but were not limited to: family support, caring adults, positive peer groups, strong sense of self and self-esteem, and engagement in school and community activities. Researchers and practitioners began to report that young people possessing a diverse set of protective factors can, in fact, experience more positive outcomes.

These findings encouraged the development of interventions and programs that reduced risks and also strengthened protective factors. These programs and interventions are strengthened when they involve and engage youth as equal partners, ultimately providing benefits both for the program and for the involved youth - See more at: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development#sthash.jYn2MjB.dpuf>

Key Principles of Positive Youth Development When connecting youth to positive experiences, programs should include the following principles:

- Positive youth development is an intentional process. It is about being proactive to promote protective factors in young people.
- Positive youth development complements efforts to prevent risky behaviors and attitudes in youth, and complements efforts that work to address negative behaviors. Youth assets are both acknowledged and employed through positive youth development. All youth have the capacity for positive growth and development.
- Positive youth development enables youth to thrive and flourish in their teen years, and prepares them for a healthy, happy and safe adulthood.
- Positive youth development involves youth as active agents. Adults may set the structure, but youth are not just the recipients of services. Youth are valued and are encouraged to bring their assets to the table. Adults and youth work in partnership.
- Youth leadership development is a part of positive youth development, but youth aren't required to lead. Youth can attend, actively participate, contribute, or lead through positive youth development activities.
- Positive youth development involves civic involvement and civic engagement—youth contribute through service to their communities.
- Positive youth development involves and engages every element of the community—schools, homes, community members, and others. Young people are valued through this process.
- Positive youth development is an investment that the community makes in young people. Youth and adults work together to frame the solutions. Learn more about engaging youth as active participants and partners.