

# YOUTH RESILIENCE

## PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Adolescence can be a very happy and exciting developmental period. But it can also have its share of stress. The stress that youth experience, like the stress that individuals experience at any stage of development, is caused by the pressures (stressors) that are placed on them and can come from many sources:

- *typical events and life changes* (e.g., taking a drivers exam or physical changes)
- *unexpected events* (e.g., parents divorcing or being in a car accident)
- *individual factors* (e.g., substance abuse or the youth's trauma history)
- *interpersonal factors* (e.g., bullying at school, relationship problems or feelings of loneliness and isolation)
- *community, societal or environmental conditions* (e.g., school violence, racism, homophobia or being placed in foster care)

Numerous researchers have concluded that how youth respond to stressors is much more important than the stressor itself in determining their outcomes. Youth are more likely to achieve healthy, favorable outcomes and to thrive if they are resilient. **Resilience is the process of managing stress and functioning well even when faced with adversity and trauma.**

Some stressors youth face can be easily managed so that problems get resolved; for example, working with a tutor when additional help is needed to understand schoolwork. But some stressors cannot be easily resolved. Youth cannot "fix" their parents' broken relationship, erase the abuse they suffered or be able to move out of a crime-plagued neighborhood. **Rather, youth are resilient when they are able to call forth their inner strength to positively meet challenges, manage adversities, heal the effects of trauma and thrive given their unique characteristics, goals and circumstances.** Research studies show that youths' resilience is aided by a trusting relationship with a caring, encouraging and competent adult who provides positive guidance and promotes high expectations.

Demonstrating resilience increases youths' **self-efficacy** because they are able to see evidence of their ability to:

- face challenges competently
- make productive decisions about addressing challenges, including when and how to seek help
- think about and be accountable for their actions and the consequences of their actions
- influence their development and well-being in a positive direction

Furthermore, demonstrating resilience helps youth to internalize the belief that their lives are important and meaningful. Thus, they can envision and conscientiously work with purpose and optimism toward future possibilities for themselves.

Brain research shows that some experience in managing stress, including learning from failure, is important for healthy youth development and well-being. Youth who have never had to address challenges or have never experienced failure are not fully prepared for adulthood. But sometimes the pressures youth face are so overwhelming that their ability to manage stress is severely compromised. This is the case with youth who grow up in environments that create toxic stress; that is, youth who experience strong, frequent and prolonged adversity without the buffering protection of nurturing adult support. Toxic stress can disrupt brain development, and adolescence is the developmental period in which the long-term effects of earlier experiences of toxic stress become most evident—such as patterns of disconnected relationships, difficulty interpreting others' emotions and problems controlling one's thoughts and actions.

There is increasing evidence, however, that the effects of **toxic stress** can be mitigated by experiences that help to build youths' resilience. Experiences that:

- foster a consistent relationship with at least one safe, caring, reliable and competent adult who promotes high expectations and encourages self-improvement
- provide opportunities for productive decision-making and constructive engagement in their family, community, school and other social institutions
- encourage adolescent voice, choice and personal responsibility
- promote the development of self-regulation, self-reflection, self-confidence, self-compassion and character

Research studies show that in addition to helping youth who experienced toxic stress to manage responses to their histories of adversity, these experiences help to build all youths' resilience so that they are on a developmental trajectory toward healthy, positive outcomes.

**YOUTH THRIVE™**

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

# CSSP'S PROTECTIVE AND PROMOTIVE FACTORS

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) works to create new ideas and promote public policies that produce equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, especially those most often left behind. The foundation of all of CSSP's work is a child, family and community well-being framework that includes a focus on protective and promotive factors. Using an ecological perspective:

- **protective factors** are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that **mitigate or eliminate risk**
- **promotive factors** are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that **actively enhance well-being**

*Taken together, protective and promotive factors increase the probability of positive, adaptive and healthy outcomes, even in the face of risk and adversity.*

The **Strengthening Families™** and **Youth Thrive™** frameworks exemplify CSSP's commitment to identify, communicate and apply research-informed ideas that contribute to the healthy development and well-being of children, youth and families. As numerous studies affirm the importance of early childhood experiences in influencing adolescent and adult behavior, these frameworks provide a view of two interrelated phases of the lifespan developmental continuum: Strengthening Families focuses on families of young children (0-5 years old) and Youth Thrive on youth ages 11-26.

## The Strengthening Families Protective Factors

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social-Emotional Competence of Children

## The Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth

Parents, system administrators, program developers, service providers and policymakers can each benefit from learning about and using the Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive frameworks in their efforts to ensure that children, youth and families are on a path that leads to healthy development and well-being.