

Scripted Curriculum Module:

Youth Thrive: A Protective Factors Approach for Older Youth

TIME	90 minutes
PURPOSE	To become familiar with the Youth Thrive framework of protective and promotive factors for youth.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES	Upon completion of this module, the participant will be familiar with: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The five protective and promotive factors in the Youth Thrive framework2. Strategies for working with older youth in ways that help them to build their protective and promotive factors3. Ways they may be able to use both the Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive frameworks in their work
INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD	Lecture
MATERIALS	One-page research briefs about the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors
ACTIVITY	n/a

Youth Thrive: A Protective Factors Approach for Older Youth

SHOW SLIDE 1



INTRODUCE: In addition to the Strengthening Families framework we've been learning about, the Center for the Study of Social Policy has a parallel framework of protective and promotive factors for youth and young adults, called Youth Thrive.

SHOW SLIDE 2

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module participants will be able to:

- Define and describe each of the five Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors
- Understand how they can use a protective and promotive factors approach with older children and youth in their work
- Identify ways to use both the Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive frameworks in their work

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A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: In this module we will focus on the five protective and promotive factors that make up the Youth Thrive framework, and how Youth Thrive can inform your work with youth and their families.

SHOW SLIDE 3



STATE: Youth Thrive is a companion framework to Strengthening Families. It focuses on older children through adolescents and into early adulthood, ages 9 -26 years old. And similar to Strengthening Families, Youth Thrive is based on current scientific research that supports building 5 protective and promotive factors in young people in order to reduce risk and enhancing healthy development and well-being. The teen years are a time of great physical and emotional change, new opportunities and many challenges – especially for youth who have experienced past traumas or whose families are under stress. If you are working with young people, it is vital that you pay special attention to the developmental needs of youth and incorporate activities that respond to their particular interests and abilities. There are lots of additional resource, tools and practical ideas about how to use Youth Thrive on CSSP's website.

SHOW SLIDE 4

Youth Thrive background

- Multi-year initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)
- Examined the research from:
 - resiliency
 - positive youth development
 - neuroscience
 - impact of trauma on brain development

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CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: To develop Youth Thrive, CSSP examined how foster youth can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences. CSSP staff synthesized the research from resiliency, positive youth development, and new neuroscience findings on the adolescent brain and the impact of traumatic stress, to understand what constitutes healthy adolescence. This information was used to establish a unifying set of principles that, in turn, translate into recommendations to guide policy makers and practitioners in their work with vulnerable youth.

SHOW SLIDE 5

Project Overview

- How all youth can be supported
 - healthy development and well-being
 - reducing the impact of negative life experiences including toxic stress and trauma
- Focus was on vulnerable youth, beginning with youth involved in the child welfare system
- Not only about limiting risk factors
 - Protective and promotive factors

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STATE: Youth Thrive is firmly situated in the context of adolescent development. Adolescence is a time of rapid change. During this important period of development, youth are working to:

- shape their sense of identity,
- adjust to physical changes they are experiencing,
- develop peer relationships and social ties with the greater community, and
- master critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for a meaningful and rewarding adulthood.

When provided with supportive guidance from competent and caring adults, youth are better able to make the transition to adulthood with fewer problems.

However, we know that a substantial portion of former foster youth have difficulties adjusting to life as independent adults. Issues include lack of employment and educational achievement, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy.

New research suggests that traumatic effects on brain development may play more of a role than previously understood in causing negative outcomes for youth. Established research on how to promote positive youth development and help youth grow into mature, successful adults, combined with insights from emerging research in neuroscience and brain development, provide an opportunity for fresh thinking on improved adult outcomes for youth who find themselves in high risk situations.

Over the last decade, as we've already discussed, there has been a growing conviction in communities, child welfare, and other child-serving fields as to the importance of practitioners addressing not only risk factors that jeopardize a child's prospects for a healthy life but also protective factors. The hope is that this research will be used to guide how all youth can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being while reducing the impact of negative life experiences including toxic stress and trauma.

SHOW SLIDE 6

Two Goals of Youth Thrive

- To provide a way for child welfare agencies to translate the federal mandate for child well-being into actions
- To disseminate information about how we can support and promote healthy development for young people

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STATE: As you can see from our discussion so far, Youth Thrive has many goals. For the purposes of this training we want to focus on two of them:

1. To give child welfare agencies and their partners a way to translate the federal mandate for child well-being into actions that will secure the healthy development of youth in foster care. The synthesis of the research and the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors Framework will be shared with the field, and hopefully used to fashion policies, programs and interventions that promote health and well-being. CSSP anticipates creating tools and training, like this one, for practitioners working with youth who have been exposed to high risk situations include high levels of traumatic stress, and complex trauma.
2. To disseminate this information to parents, caregivers, families and communities so that they will better understand how they can prioritize support, and promote healthy development for young people to grow into successful, productive and caring members of society.

SHOW SLIDE 7

Looking back to the “big ideas”

1. A focus on protective and promotive factors
2. An approach, not a model
3. A changed relationship with youth
4. Alignment with developmental science

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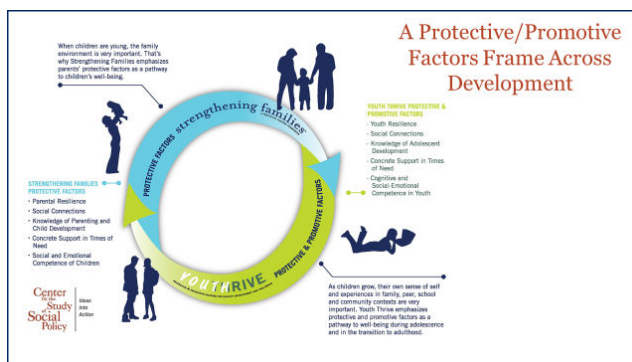
STATE: Earlier, we talked about the big ideas behind Strengthening Families. Those same ideas inform Youth Thrive.

1. The first big idea behind Strengthening Families was a focus on protective factors rather than risk. Youth Thrive also focuses on the characteristics that make young people more

likely to thrive. In the case of Youth Thrive we refer to those characteristics as “protective and promotive factors” because they protect against risk while also promoting positive outcomes. (The term “promotive factors” is regularly used in the field of youth development, which is why we emphasize it more here than in the Strengthening Families framework for early childhood.)

2. Youth Thrive is an approach, not a model – just like Strengthening Families. The framework is universal, meaning that it applies to all young people. It can be used in any setting where youth and their families are served.
3. The third big idea we talked about related to Strengthening Families was “a changed relationship with parents.” In the case of Youth Thrive, the framework pushes those who work with young people to change their relationship with youth – giving them greater influence over what happens to them, for example, in the child welfare system, and guiding them to make good decisions that impact their future, all through the lens of understanding their protective and promotive factors.
4. Finally, both frameworks are very much informed by the need to align our practice with developmental science. Youth Thrive was developed because there is a vast, and growing, body of knowledge about youth development, but many programs and services for young people work on an older model that does not align with that knowledge. Youth Thrive provides guidance for workers, programs, and organizations to align their practice and policies with what developmental science tells us.

SHOW SLIDE 8



STATE: You saw this image earlier when we talked about the focus on Strengthening Families' alignment with developmental science.

EXPLAIN: Taken together, the two frameworks help us to take a lifespan approach to protective and promotive factors. In early childhood, parental protective factors are critical to a child's well-being. With growing independence, moving into adolescence, our focus shifts more to a young person's own protective and promotive factors. For those young people who become parents, those protective factors nurtured in their childhood and youth will help them to promote their own children's well-being.

SHOW SLIDE 9

Youth Thrive
Protective and Promotive Factors Framework

- Knowledge of adolescent development
- Social connections
- Cognitive and social-emotional competencies
- Concrete support in times of need
- Promoting youth resilience

<http://www.cssp.org/media-center/video/youth-thrive>

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: The Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors should look familiar to you based on your knowledge of the Strengthening Families framework. We will go through each of these and what the research tells us about what they look like in young people's lives, challenges young people with experience in the child welfare may face, and implications for practice.

But first let's take a few minutes to watch a video created by CSSP featuring young people talking about the five protective and promotive factors.

PLAY VIDEO: <http://www.cssp.org/media-center/video/youth-thrive>

DISCUSS any reactions to the video

SHOW SLIDE 10

Adolescent development: A few key points

- Adolescence starts with biological changes of puberty
- Emotional, cognitive, social development as well
- Our knowledge and understanding has changed over time
 - Development of brain cortex and frontal lobe
 - "Templates" based on past experience used to interpret future experiences
 - "Pruning" of neural connections
 - Impact of trauma

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STATE: We have a better understanding of adolescent development – brain development in particular – now than we have ever had. We don't have time today to go into all the rich information that research tell us about adolescent development. Before we go into the protective and promotive factors in detail, we'll just highlight a few things we know about brain development that can be particularly helpful for youth and their parents, caregivers, teachers, youth workers and caseworkers to understand. We encourage you to seek out more in-depth training on youth development and adolescent brain development in particular if you work with this age group.

1. Brain development occurs at a faster rate in adolescence than at any other time other than the first three years of life. In a typical young person at the beginning of adolescence, the

cortex and frontal lobe are just beginning to develop, so behavior is primarily regulated by the limbic area of the brain. This means that youth are more emotionally reactive, more pleasure and thrill seeking, more likely to experiment with risky behavior, and more oriented to the 'immediate'. They are also less able to think through consequences for their actions or imagine long-term implications. As the cortex and frontal lobe develop, we see huge changes in executive function, cognitive development and reasoning skills – continuing through age 26. However, as anyone who has lived in close quarters with an adolescent has observed, these changes happen unevenly across domains. A young person may be mature in some areas and quite immature in others. Understanding all of this is helpful for young people themselves, who are sometimes bewildered by their own uneven responses, and for the adults who interact with them.

2. We also want to focus on two principles of brain development that are critical in this period. The first is the idea of templates. The way your brain comes to understand the world is by creating templates of experience. It uses these templates to help figure out how to respond to the environment. These templates help the brain create its 'wiring' (neurological connections and associations). If our template tells us that what we see is familiar or known as safe – our stress system is not activated. We stay in what we call the CALM, CONNECTED STATE. When we are confronted with something that we don't have a template to explain, we become suspicious. When we get suspicious we move from the CALM, CONNECTED STATE, up the activation scale to ALERT.
3. The next, related idea, is that of pruning. The connections in the brain that get used repeatedly are strengthened, while those that are not used are pruned away. This allows the brain to function more efficiently – but it also means that the templates that are formed and reinforced play a stronger and stronger role as we get older.
4. Both templates and pruning are important concepts to understand when we think about the development of children and youth who have experienced trauma or lived in highly stressful situations. We've talked about the impact of trauma on early brain development. On the next slide we will look at what implications this have for the many of the young people we see in the child welfare system.

SHOW SLIDE 11

In the child welfare system...

Young people who have lived in high-stress environments for long periods may:

- Not be able to easily return to the calm & connected state
- Respond with rejection, suspicion, aggression, or withdrawal
- Present greater development in lower brain areas than in higher functions
- Need repetitive positive experiences & opportunities to create new brain pathways

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A NATIONAL POLICY INITIATIVE

YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: With the young people we see in child welfare, their experiences may have influenced their brain development in ways that make it harder for them to get to the CALM, CONNECTED state. With each protective factor, in this module, we will consider some challenges we may see with the youth we encounter in the child welfare system, and implications for our practice. For now let's look at the brain development behind those responses.

STATE: The more a part of the brain is needed, the more resources it receives and the bigger it becomes. (This is called "use-dependent development.") Unfortunately, this takes resources away from other parts of the brain, which then don't become as developed. When young people live in stressful situations that cause them to be continuously activated to stay safe, their BRAIN STEM & MIDBRAIN becomes enlarged and their higher processing centers are relatively less developed. Another consequence is that these young people typically don't easily relax into the CALM, CONNECTED STATE. This means they are typically more reactive and more sensitive to incoming stimuli.

CONTINUE: A child whose relational templates are based on unpredictable, non-nurturing or abusive caregivers may not respond positively to our attempts to reach out to them. But they need repetitive experiences of positive interactions to build and reinforce new templates and new pathways in their brains.

SHOW SLIDE 12

Knowledge of adolescent development

- Youth understanding of:
 - The changes they are experiencing
 - The risks and opportunities of this phase of life
 - Reasons for their conflicting urges, mood swings, etc.
 - Strategies to improve their own well-being
- Adult (parent, caregiver, worker) understanding of:
 - Reasons for behaviors that can be challenging
 - The need for continued adult support and guidance
 - The need for opportunities to advance development

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STATE: After that quick peek into some of the new knowledge around adolescent development, let's turn our focus to why and how knowledge of adolescent development works as a protective and promotive factor. With this protective factor, we believe that both youth and the adults they interact with benefit from having this knowledge.

CONTINUE: For youth themselves, insight into their own development can help them understand that their experiences are within the normal range of experience. There are points in adolescence when a young person has the cognitive maturity to understand and process information about brain development and adolescent experiences – while their emotional maturity and hormonal surges are pushing them to take risks and make decisions that they themselves don't understand. Young people report that this knowledge helps them to understand what is happening so that they are more likely to step back in the moment and consider decisions differently.

STATE: For adults – parents, caregivers, and those who work with young people – there is much to be gained with a deeper understanding of adolescent development. Many parents misinterpret adolescent behaviors and either “clamp down” to protect their children from risks, or give up when they feel they are being pushed away, and think they no longer have any influence. With a more nuanced understanding of adolescent development, parents can give their children the opportunities they need for safe risk-taking, increasing responsibility and independence – while recognizing the continuing importance of parental nurturing and guidance.

CONTINUE: For those adults who work with youth, this knowledge is critical for how they approach their relationships with young people, how they structure the services and opportunities they offer, and in particular how they respond to young people who have experienced trauma.

SHOW SLIDE 13

**Knowledge of adolescent development:
In the child welfare system...**

- Majority of youth in the system have experienced trauma and will display the behaviors described earlier
- Out-of-home placements often restrict youth from having “normal” experiences of adolescence
- Youth may not receive support once they turn 18 – though we know their development is still in progress and their peers continue to have support of parents

CREATING THE CLIMATE FOR YOUTH WELL-BEING
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STATE: With the young people we see in child welfare, they and the adults who care for and work with them may need additional insights into adolescent development.

CONTINUE: Adolescents who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or multiple placements in the child welfare system are more likely to rely on lower brain functions, as described earlier. They have had to devote resources to survival rather than development of higher brain functions and they need additional support to stimulate development of those parts of the brain.

CONTINUE: In addition, these young people may be deprived of the normal experiences that other youth have – and in many cases, they have missed out on the normal experiences of childhood as well, either because of a chaotic home environment or because of long-term involvement in child welfare.

ADD: Finally, many of our systems stop supporting youth once they turn 18. Both caregivers and youth may have the impression that the young person is an adult now and can take care of themselves. However we know that brain development is still very active at that age and continues to be through age 26. Young people need continued family connections and concrete support as they continue to tackle the developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood.

SHOW SLIDE 14

Knowledge of adolescent development:
Implications

- Environments need to be emotionally & physically safe
- We need to be caring and nurturing:
 - Understand the meaning of behavior
 - Be aware of developmental needs – renegotiate roles
 - Value young people
 - Provide opportunities to explore, make choices, make mistakes & grow
 - Listen & seek to understand who the young person is
 - Opportunities for self-expression & voice
 - Affirm assets, skills, and competence

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ASK: So, what can we do in our work with youth to support positive development and to build their knowledge of adolescent development?

TAKE SOME RESPONSES from participants

STATE: We know that young people need environments that are emotionally and physically safe. This is fundamental because it lowers brain activation levels and increases the opportunity for learning. In safe environments we let down our defenses, open ourselves to experience, and activate our higher brain resources.

CONTINUE: Specifically, young people need interactions with caring, nurturing adults. Adults who understand the meaning of their behavior, are aware of their developmental needs, and who respond supportively. They need adults who value them, who provide opportunities to explore, make choices, make mistakes, and grow. Adults who listen and look beyond behavior to understand more fully who a young person is, what they feel, and what they seek. Adults who allow young people the opportunity to express themselves (youth voice) while affirming them for the skills and competence that they have achieved. Adults who see them in a positive light. Adults who stimulate brain development through interactions that promote new pathways and the strengthening of positive connections.

ADD: Many programs are now looking at ways they can make developmental information more accessible to teens. Early research is showing that they benefit from having a deeper understanding of their own development and are better prepared to deal with many of the challenges that they face.

SHOW SLIDE 15

Social Connections

- Emotional support
- Informational support
- Instrumental support
- Spiritual support

- Peer connections are especially important in adolescence
 - Identity – self-concept and sense of self
 - Independence – emotional, cognitive and behavioral autonomy

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INTRODUCE: One of the things we know about ourselves as humans is that we live in the world in connection with other people. We get these connections from relationships with other people. In our early lives we depend on others for our very survival. We cannot survive without the support of our primary caregivers who offer food, warmth, safety, stimulation, etc. As we grow and develop, we continue to receive important resources that support our growth and learning. Social connections and the things that they bring to us are critical in promoting resilience and thriving.

Social connections are important because they are anchoring forces that provide: emotional support (e.g. affirming good problem solving skills or being empathic); informational support (e.g. providing guidance about changes from puberty, applying to college or entering the workforce); instrumental support (e.g. providing transportation or financial assistance); and spiritual support (e.g. providing affirmation, hope, and encouragement). Spiritual support in our presentation today means connection to 'something larger than you'. Notice the remarkable range of things that young people are accessing through their relationships.

STATE: When young people have a sense of connectedness to peers and adults they feel loved, wanted and valued; they have people who care about them as individuals now and who care what happens to them in the future; they feel more secure and confident that they can share the joy, pain and uncertainties that come with being an adolescent; and they tend to seek timely assistance and resources from people they have learned to count on when faced with challenges. Research shows that when a young person feels connected to at least one caring adult they are more resilient and likely to do well. Multiple connections increase the likelihood that they will thrive.

EXPAND: Youth get a lot from their relationships with adults – but we need to recognize the importance of peer connections in particular. It is through relationships and interactions with their peers that young people tackle some of their important developmental tasks: develop and express independence and develop their own identity differentiated from their family. Identity includes a youth's self-concept (i.e. beliefs about oneself) and a sense of who one is (including gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status). A sense of independence includes: emotional autonomy – relinquishing primary dependence on parents and forging more mature relationships with parents and other trusted adults; cognitive autonomy – developing one's own values, opinions and beliefs; and behavior autonomy – making and being responsible for personal decisions.

SHOW SLIDE 16

**Social Connections:
In the child welfare system...**

Young people may:

- Avoid getting close as a protective measure
 - Avoiding contact, fading into the background
 - Anger, threats, insults, property destruction
- Have negative expectations of relationships
 - Abandonment, harsh judgment, uncaring, unable to understand
- Have had limited opportunity to engage with caring adults

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EXPLAIN: Many young people have had limited opportunity to be in relationships with caring adults who can model the process and help them learn how to engage in healthy relationships. Youth who have experienced high stress environments or trauma are often more activated and suspicious of our efforts to engage with them. This is due to their history of failed or toxic relationships, their expectation of disappointment, and their desire to protect themselves. Given this history, it is not surprising that young people in need of relationships and connections often resist them.

CONTINUE: Young people use a wide variety of strategies to manage relationships including avoiding contact, fading into the background, anger, threats, negating our importance, doing things they think will make us react negatively, destroying property, making insulting comments, etc.

EXPLAIN: All of these strategies are ways that young people are taking care of themselves by managing the danger and pain that relationships represent. Although they need relationships and connections, they are also well aware that they can be painful and dangerous.

SHOW SLIDE 17

Social Connections: Implications

- We can support the development and strengthening of social connections
- Pay special attention to:
 - “Testing” behavior
 - “Too quick” relationship development
 - Transitions

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STATE: Remember that in youth work we believe that, “Relationships are the intervention.” Everything we do with young people comes through our connection with them. Our work revolves around our relationships which are the hub of the wheel. While we build healthy relationships with

them – with appropriate professional boundaries – we can also support them in building and maintaining healthy relationships with peers and other adults.

STATE: Relationally damaged youth often test and retest situations and need frequent reassurance. Based on past experience they tend to distrust their ability to 'really know' what is going on in a relationship. An established track record of 'getting it right' goes a long way toward remediating this. Practitioners can be helpful in pointing out successes.

STATE: At the same time, some young people who are relationally 'starved' tend to form relationships too quickly with little time to explore before engaging. These typically show a pattern of 'too quick' engagement followed by disappointment, anger, and disengagement when they discover that the other person is not who they thought they were. These youth can be encouraged to go slowly and explore carefully while engaging. This is more successful in establishing enduring relationships and models a process of relationship building that is healthy and safer.

STATE: Finally, we need to pay close attention to transitions and providing youth with opportunities to maintain important relationships even as they leave a placement or program. Previously, it was widely held that professional relationships end when clients are no longer receiving services. Many young people living in out-of-home care experienced a long succession of terminated relationships that left them damaged and unable to form normal relationships with others. How relationships are handled when services end is a very important issue that must be addressed intentionally in youth work. Most people use existing relationships heavily during transitions to provide stability and nurturance as they move from the 'known' into the 'unknown'. Over time, as the individual becomes more connected in the new situation, this dependence diminishes.

ASK: When a young person is leaving us, what can we do so that they continue to feel connected and supported? *[Answers might include:]*

- Allow them to call or visit (or maybe visit them) after they have left.
- Help the young person imagine what it will be like: what are the good things that could happen? How can you grow in this new situation?
- Offer reassurances that they will find others who will 'be there for them' and help them think through and practice what they can do to encourage this to happen.
- Remind them of their successes and growth.

SHOW SLIDE 18

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth

- Essential developmental tasks in adolescence
- Lay the foundation for forming independent identity
- Promote productive, responsible, and satisfying adulthood
- Many experiences we provide for young people focus on either cognitive or social-emotional development – we need to focus on the “whole person”

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INTRODUCE: The next protective and promotive factor we'll focus on is actually a cluster of competencies – cognitive, social and emotional competence in youth. In early childhood, we focused on the social and emotional development of children. The foundation laid in early childhood is built upon in adolescence, as young people move toward forming independent identity and continue to develop the competencies that will allow them to live productive, responsible and satisfying adulthoods.

STATE: High quality programming takes into consideration the overall goal of supporting young people as 'whole' people in need of opportunities to develop both cognitive and social-emotional competencies. It isn't 'either/or', they require both. Because these competencies are inter-related, it is important for us to provide environments that support cognitive as well as social-emotional development.

EXPAND: The exciting thing is that adolescent brains are 'primed' for cognitive and social emotional development. Throughout adolescence the brain's ability to process cognitive and social-emotional experiences is expanding rapidly. Not only is there more information available, but the ability to process the information in more complex ways is also evolving. Ability to understand others as different from ourselves and socially interact with them in more complex ways is also advancing. Although adolescence begins with limited cognitive and social emotional abilities, by the end of adolescence most young people will have vastly improved abilities and competence.

SHOW SLIDE 19

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth: In the child welfare system...

Young people may not have had opportunities to:

- Explore their own interests
- Explore personal, gender, and cultural identity
- Seek more independence and responsibility
- Think about values and morals
- Try new experiences
- Strive to reach full potential

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EXPLAIN: Studies show that youth who have a history of early trauma, who live in unstable communities or schools, or who live in dangerous or persistently under-resourced environments have increased risk for poor academic performance, impaired or negative social relationships, anger, acting out, aggression, and mental health problems. They may have missed out on the type of competency-building opportunities listed on this slide.

EXPAND: For these youth we have learned that it is important that we offer additional supports. These supports need to start with safe environments which reduce high activation and increase access to higher brain resources. You can go a long way in supporting young people by simply attending to physical and emotional safety. We know that when youth are focusing on self-protection, they are not in the learning zone and will not learn as easily.

SHOW SLIDE 20

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth: Implications

- Need for safe environments to reduce brain activation and expand brain resources
- Change takes time
- Access to experiences that support competence building
- Adults acknowledge competence and successes
- Validate the experience of failure and its feelings
- Reframing success

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ASK: Since safety is such an important issue in helping these young people engage and receive supports, what are some of the ways that you or the programs you are currently working with communicate to youth that the programs is emotionally and physically safe?

TAKE ANSWERS and ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

STATE: One thing that is important to recognize is that developmental change takes time and adjust our expectations to better fit the developing capabilities of the young people in our programs. We know that high stress environments can slow the developmental process. Many of

the youth with whom we work will show delayed development of critical competences. We need to be patient and forgiving while we are persistent in supporting our young people's development. They need high expectations that are tempered with compassion and understanding.

CONTINUE: We also need to be intentional about providing access to a wide range of experiences that support competence building. Young people will come to us with widely differing experiences, interests and developmental needs. We must be able to draw on a wide range of opportunities, targeted to their specific needs and interests.

STATE: Young people need adults in their worlds who are tuned in to how they are developing, who understand the development process, and who are able to see the many small steps as they unfold. Adults who reflect back to young people the competence and successes they are achieving with a sense of shared pride in their accomplishments, and adults who can validate their feelings and stand with them when they fail or stumble.

STATE: Finally, we need to carefully tailor our expectations based on where each individual young person is in the developmental process. What may be seen as backsliding for one youth may, in fact, be progress for another youth.

SHOW SLIDE 21

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- ...those things that we can count on when we are in need of extra help or resources
- ...can make it easier to get through a hard time or to address a specific issue

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A PROTECTIVE FACTORS APPROACH

YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

INTRODUCE: Just as we talked about parents' need for concrete support in the Strengthening Families framework, concrete support in times of need is also a protective factor for youth. Having access to people, resources, or programs does a number of things for us at any age. It help us address issues, not feel isolated, and can even help build relationships with others – which in turn supports the development of resiliency skills.

CONTINUE: This need for support and help is especially true for young people as they navigate the challenges and transitions that occur during adolescence. However, it can be difficult for a young person to realize that help is even needed. Whether they are looking for assistance with homework, searching for a first job, navigating a first relationship, or struggling with depression, it may be very difficult for a young person to ask for help, thinking they should be able to figure this out on their own.

SHOW SLIDE 22

**Concrete Support in Times of Need:
In the child welfare system...**

Young people may:

- Have few natural supports to call on
- Have difficulty asking for help
- Think they should be able to figure this out on their own
- Have had limited access to competent caring adults
- Have missed opportunities to learn and practice important skills

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

INTRODUCE: We've already discussed that many of the young people in our care have a history of trauma or adversity. They often have had limited access to competent caring adults to teach and support them, and have missed opportunities to learn and practice important skills that can serve them as when facing a difficult time. When young people are faced with such overwhelming stress, they need to be able to seek help.

SHOW SLIDE 23

**Concrete Support in Times of Need:
Implications**

- Promote help seeking
- Provide/refer to services that are individually focused, culturally responsive, grounded in respect and trust
- Provide a different experience to build trust
- Engage youth as helpers in mutual support networks
- Be flexible and available to respond to youth needs

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: Providing concrete supports for young people is more complicated than simply giving them a list of resources we think are helpful. When we take on the role of "resource expert" or place complicated demands on youth we run the risk of turning them away from the important supports they need.

EXPAND: When young people are experiencing highly stressful or uncertain situations (i.e., living in foster care, experiencing homelessness, transitioning between placements or out of care), it may be difficult to identify that they need support, don't have all the answers, or need assistance. Their experience with "helpers" has meant they had to give up control over their lives, help comes with strings attached (what do I have to do, prove or say before I deserve the right to access the service), or ends up making things worse. We need to offer services that allow young people to take responsibility for their lives and do not add to the stress they are already experiencing.

CONTINUE: English essayist A. C. Benson once said 'people seldom refuse help if one offers it in the right way'. Research suggests we can promote help seeking behavior by providing coordinated

support and services that are individually-focused, culturally responsive, and grounded in respect and trust. While there will never be one way to offer services, let's look at some things we can keep in mind that may increase the chance that young people will view our services as helpful.

ADD: Young people also need opportunities to provide needed support to others. Engaging youth in mutual support networks with each other helps them become better at accepting help as they gain experience being on the "giving" side as well.

SHOW SLIDE 24

Youth Resilience

- The process of managing stress and functioning well even when faced with adversity or trauma
- Resilient young people:
 - Have close, supportive connections with trusted adults
 - View themselves in a positive light
 - Are aware of their emotional responses, can modulate their arousal and manage impulses
 - Possess strong communication skills
 - Have confidence in their ability to solve their own problems – but can ask for help when needed

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

EXPLAIN: Again, our definition of resilience here is very similar to parental resilience in the Strengthening Families framework. Resilience is important because it helps young people increase their self-efficacy and allows them to:

- face challenges competently,
- make productive decisions; including when and how to seek help,
- think about results of their actions and take responsibility for them, and
- positively influence their development and well-being.

SHOW SLIDE 25

**Youth Resilience:
In the child welfare system...**

Young people who have lived in high-stress environments for long periods:

- May not have had practice and support to develop their resilience
- Need trusting, supportive relationships with caring adults
 - guidance
 - encouragement
 - high expectations

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

INTRODUCE: We often hear 'Oh, kids are naturally resilient!' However, we all have experiences with young people who appear to struggle to "bounce back" from difficulties in their lives. We also know that youth may appear to have it all together; have completed our program or are doing

well in school or work, yet report feeling disconnected from others, have a difficult time trusting and struggle to form and maintain healthy supportive relationships.

CONTINUE: It is important for us to remember that while everyone may have the capacity for resilience, becoming resilient is an ongoing process and takes time, effort and support, especially if the young person has a history of trauma or adversity. In fact, the skills required to be resilient develop best when supported and nurtured. Research shows that trusting, supportive relationships with caring adults who provide guidance and encourage high expectations help youth to develop their personal resilience.

EXPLAIN: Often the young people who access our programs and utilize our services are those that have experienced chronic adversity and toxic traumatic stress. Not only have they had these experiences during critical developmental periods, but they may not have had access to caring, supportive, competent adults to help develop the resiliency skills necessary to function effectively during stressful times. It becomes our task to provide the best opportunities for young people to learn the skills necessary for them to face current stressors and help them to grow into healthy adults.

SHOW SLIDE 26

Youth Resilience: Implications

- Youth need adults who will help them to:
 - face challenges competently
 - make productive decisions, including when and how to seek help
 - think about results of their actions and take responsibility for them
 - positively influence their development and well-being

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STATE: We need to make sure to provide experiences and opportunities that:

- Foster a consistent relationship with at least one safe, caring, competent adult, who promotes high expectations and encourages self-improvement,
- Provide real opportunities for productive decision making and constructive engagement in their family, community, school, and the services and programs with which they are involved,
- Encourage adolescent voice, choice, and personal responsibility, and
- Promote the development of self-regulation, self-reflection, self-confidence, self-compassion, and character.

SHOW SLIDE 27

Applying Youth Thrive and Strengthening Families together

- Working across age ranges of children and youth in your caseload
- Supporting young parents who need support for their adolescent development at the same time as they need support in their parenting role
- Other thoughts?

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YOUTH THRIVE
PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

STATE: Now that you are familiar with the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors Framework, let's think about how this knowledge can help you better serve the families in your caseload. This slide lists the two primary ways that CSSP thinks you might use both frameworks together:

- First, how many of you have caseloads that include both young children and adolescents? If you serve a lot of adolescents, I encourage you to seek out more training on adolescent development and the more information about Youth Thrive. But even if our caseloads are primarily made up of younger children, most of us serve some older children and youth. Understanding what protective and promotive factors look like for older children and youth will help you to make the appropriate shifts in your practice.
- Second, how many of you work with parents who fall in the “adolescent or young adult” range – where they are still in the midst of their own adolescent development? An understanding of both Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive can help us to better serve these parents, helping them to be the best parents they can be while also helping to meet their own developmental needs.

ASK: What other ideas do you have for how you will use Youth Thrive along with your implementation of Strengthening Families?

DISCUSS.

THANK participants for their attention and **EXPLAIN** any instructions for break, when the training will continue, etc.