

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?

