

# Are We Promoting Resilience?

## Ken Ginsburg, M.D.

### **At the very core of understanding resilience:**

Young people will be resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations. This implicitly recognizes that Young People live up ... or down to ...our expectations.

### **Other key concepts include:**

- Although one crucial adult is the minimal requirement, the more concentric circles of support the better. Families matter. Schools Matter. Youth serving professionals matter. Spiritual supports matter. Youth development and athletic programs matter. Communities matter. All adults matter!!! Other kids matter too.
- We cannot change the world for our young people, but we can prepare them to better deal with the realities they face.
- We must commit ourselves to recognizing and building on the strengths our young people possess. It is these strengths that will help them to overcome the difficult circumstances of life.
- Resilience does not equal invulnerability. No one should be expected to be invulnerable.
- Resilience is not a character trait. It is created by the supports offered to each young person and is affected by the circumstances each needs to navigate.
- We must constantly remind each other that the behavior we model is more important than the words we say.
- In supporting each and every youth, we set the tone not just for individual success, but also for the safety and vitality of our community.
- Youth must be viewed as a valued vital resource for the future, not as the source of today's problems.
- We must pay attention to the images portrayed of youth in the community, the media, even in well-intentioned intervention programs.
- Are youth seen as broken?
- Do we highlight the headline – “Youth in Crisis,” or do we notice most youth are okay?
- Do we allow youth to receive messages that heighten their misperception that most kids are trouble and turmoil, leading youth not engaged in risk behaviors to believe they are abnormal? Or, do we let them know most kids are making the right choices- so we can take advantage of youths' desire to be like “most” kids?
- Are we wise enough to recognize some groups of youth more consistently receive messages of low expectations- and are we bold enough to address that!?!?!?

## Setting the tone..... Approaching the Adolescent: Using a strength-based paradigm

*(This section is excerpted and edited from Ginsburg KR. Developing Our Future . . . Seeing and Expecting the Best in Youth. An invited commentary. Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health. 2003; 48 (3): 167-9.)*

Much effort has been targeted toward the avoidance or reduction of the specific risk behaviors we find most worrisome. These efforts have been effective in reducing some risk. However, it is time that we must ask ourselves whether the interventions are adequate. We must ask if they have made a difference in producing the quality of youth our nation needs to lead us into the future. We need to clarify our vision. Is our ultimate goal really to prevent adolescents from behaving in antisocial or dangerous manners? Or, is our vision to facilitate the development of individuals who are well prepared to be creative, responsible, and productive human beings?

There are serious consequences to consider when we choose to limit our clinical energies and societal resources to addressing adolescent risk behaviors. First, though youth advocates have succeeded at raising awareness of the problems of youth, we may have contributed to a dangerous shift in the perception of youth. Adults have such a heightened awareness of problems such as teen pregnancy, violence, and drug use that many mistrust teenagers, expect the worst from them, and create barriers that prevent honest communication. Karen Hein of the William T. Grant Foundation stated "Our job is to help adults reframe the issue of youth from viewing young people as the source of problems to youth as a resource to solve the problems that we adults have created." Second, we define success for youth in terms of behaviors they avoid, rather than who they are, or what we hope they might accomplish. Imagine if a 16 year old girl hoping to volunteer in your clinic was presented in this manner, "here's Beth, she's not pregnant, she's not drug addicted, she's not depressed, she's not engaged in violence or self-mutilation, and she's not sexually active! Can she work with you?" I would hope that you would ask, "who is she, what are her capabilities and strengths?" Karen Pittman of the International Youth Foundation succinctly states, "Problem-free is not fully prepared." Third, when we exclusively target risk, we convey our low expectations of adolescents. Make no mistake about it, teenagers live up to –or down to – our expectations. Affluent children attend schools equipped with the resources to educate them as tomorrow's leaders, they receive art and music lessons to foster creativity, and they participate in organized athletic activities that allow them to build strong bodies and vent stress. With these resources we communicate that we expect these youth to be successful, to be creative and to contribute to our society. What do we communicate to disenfranchised youth when we send them to under-resourced schools that have substandard educational materials and crowded classrooms, and then cut creative and physical outlets from their curriculum, but still offer drug prevention, violence prevention, and pregnancy prevention programs? I believe we send them an implicit message – we didn't think you could be successful anyway, and we do expect you to engage in these behaviors.

Certainly we should continue to address risk behaviors, and when we do we must do so in a manner that comprehensively assesses youth for worrisome behaviors, offers them appropriate health care to reduce the harm incurred by those behaviors, motivates them to consider changing their behaviors, and offers them needed skills to reduce their risks. And, certainly we need targeted prevention programs, but these programs must be infused with alternative positive activities or outlets. Proponents of the youth development and resiliency models are not blind to risk and do not suggest the elimination of categorical intervention programs, but we believe that a positive, strength –based approach not only will produce more successful adults, but deserves full consideration as a means to reduce risk. Our youth deserve the rigorous outcomes-based research necessary to explore what mix works best for youth from different circumstances.

Let's focus on the office setting by giving limited examples of how clinicians can make the shift. First, clinicians should consider how we conceptualize risk in the context of people's lives.

Typically, we obtain a history, listen for risk behaviors, and then tell adolescents what they are doing wrong. Think about how that feels. When a youth discloses personal behaviors, he/she takes an emotional risk. Further, teens usually share their behaviors in the context of the rest of their lives (“I get in fights because . . .”; “when I am really stressed out, I . . .”). When we focus only on the negative, a young person wonders “did she hear who I am, or what I’ve experienced? Why does she focus only on what I am doing wrong?” We must learn to listen more intently to youth by utilizing both our mind and our heart. With our mind we listen for the subject we may need to address and with our heart we listen for what makes this young person special, what tugs at us to make us really care for them. Then, rather than reflexively lecturing youth about what they are doing wrong we can put their behavior in context and even ask them for permission to address it. “I’ve really enjoyed listening to you (insert what is special about them, what you could see them accomplishing, why you recognize them as special) . . . pause, deep breath, . . . “but I’m feeling worried that (insert problem) may get in your way of your reaching your dreams, can we talk about this?”

Let’s take it a step further. When we interact with our patients, we tend to focus our clinical energies on helping them overcome those behaviors we consider antisocial or dangerous. We conceptualize their lives based on the negatives - they are using drugs, engaging in early-unprotected sex, affiliated with gangs, etc. Then we essentially tell young patients “stop that!” and proceed to give them several reasons why they should indeed stop it. The problem here is that people rarely change merely because someone else points out they are failing. Resilience theory holds that to overcome adversity a person needs first to develop confidence and a sense of competency. To help develop these resilient characteristics, we need to see our patients’ lives differently. We must listen also for what they are doing right; for example, a person who shares known negative behaviors is honest and has the ability to engage other people in his/her life, a person affiliated with gangs deeply understands loyalty, a drug-affected youth might have a deep sensitivity, and a girl hoping to become pregnant might have a tremendous capacity to nurture. We need to recognize these positive points of competency, help youth acknowledge their strengths, and guide them to build new capabilities based upon these strengths. As they recognize and build upon their existing competencies a ripple effect often follows and we see the patient’s need to engage in worrisome behaviors lessen as they experience more success in their lives.

I recall one 18-year-old homeless man whose mother demanded that he leave his home eight months prior to our first encounter. He silently entered the office with his eyes transfixed on the floor. I spoke to him for a few minutes, defining the zone of safety that makes a health care environment unique. I explained his rights to privacy, and how deeply I respected, rather than judged, young people who had survived the streets and were taking steps to improve their situation. He slowly opened up and began to share the hellish life he had endured, including adult exploitation and surviving through dealing drugs. He spoke of how badly it felt to have people always assume the worst of him, and even fear him. Showing only glimpses of emotion, he described how difficult it was to survive out there, constantly needing to run from the authorities, being vulnerable to street violence, and witnessing drug addicts destroying their lives. I listened intently as he told me how he hit his rock bottom when he watched a near stranger come close to death from an overdose. But, this girl did not die. Instead, my patient called 911 and stayed with her until he saw the rescue squad turn the corner. This was the point of intervention. I simply asked, “Tell me how a man who so many people feared managed to maintain his soul, and a sense of caring and responsibility?” When he was guided to acknowledge his own remaining strength, he cried deeply and opened up more fully. The shelter staff was able to move from this point, building upon his acknowledged humanity to develop a plan to shift his life direction.

We don’t need to wait to pick up the pieces of a troubled adolescence, how do we create a setting that expects all youth to be contributing members of society? We must start early in childhood by creating the concentric circles of loving support to surround every child with high expectations and the resources to allow them to realistically meet those expectations.

The American Academy of Pediatrics model of resilience describes the crucial 7 C's. If we build these ingredients of resilience in individuals' lives, they will be better equipped to overcome adversity.

- Confidence
- Competence
- Conconnectedness
- Character
- Contribution
- Coping
- locus of Control

This model is designed to be relatively simple in order to create a common language. There is wisdom and experience from a variety of models, The seven C's can be inclusive of these models.

One model with the greatest amount of research and community level assessment and evaluation comes from The Search Institute. It describes the 40 assets children and youth need to thrive. Another worthy model comes from The Penn Resilience Project which focuses on the unhealthy thinking patterns that can hamper resilience. The following pages present a synthesis of these models. Please see the appendix for reference information on how to explore these primary sources independently as well as other valuable resources with expertise and programming in building resilience at the individual, family, school, and community level.

# The Search Institute: 40 Critical Assets for Positive Youth Development

## What Are Developmental Assets?

Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets® are common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults.

<http://www.search-institute.org/assets/>

## EXTERNAL ASSETS

### SUPPORT

1. Family Support | Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. Caring Neighborhood | Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. Caring School Climate | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. Parent involvement in schooling | Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

### EMPOWERMENT

7. Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. Youth as Resources | Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. Service to Others | Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. Safety | Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

### BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

11. Family Boundaries | Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. School Boundaries | School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. Neighborhood Boundaries | Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. Adult Role Models | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. Positive Peer Influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. High Expectations | Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

### CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

17. Creative Activities | Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. Youth Programs | Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
19. Religious Community | Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. Time at Home | Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

## INTERNAL ASSETS

### COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

1. Achievement Motivation | Young person is motivated to do well in school.
2. School Engagement | Young person is actively engaged in learning.
3. Homework | Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
4. Bonding to School | Young person cares about her or his school.
5. Reading for Pleasure | Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

### POSITIVE VALUES

6. Caring | Young Person places high value on helping other people.
7. Equality and Social Justice | Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
8. Integrity | Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
9. Honesty | Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
10. Responsibility | Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
11. Restraint | Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

### SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

12. Planning and Decision Making | Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
13. Interpersonal Competence | Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
14. Cultural Competence | Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
15. Resistance Skills | Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
16. Peaceful Conflict Resolution | Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

### POSITIVE IDENTITY

17. Personal Power | Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
18. Self-Esteem | Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
19. Sense of Purpose | Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
20. Positive View of Personal Future | Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

## **The Penn Resilience Project**

Helps people reframe those negative thoughts that interfere with the healthy thinking patterns that enable people to move forward. It focuses on helping parents and communities raise children unfettered by negative thinking patterns.

Their work fits very nicely into at least three of the seven Cs. As I gain a better understanding of their work, we may find that it has even broader implications. At the least, it brings the potential of the AAP Seven Cs model to a new level in Confidence, Competence Development and Coping.

Confidence: People are often paralyzed from attaining happiness and success because they have thinking patterns that tell them they are not good enough or incapable.

Competence: It is a major skill to be able to realistically assess circumstances to learn how to focus energies on reality-based problems.

Coping: People can mistake “paper tigers” for real ones and have catastrophic thoughts that lead them to react to circumstances beyond their control, or to circumstances that do not pose a real threat (i.e., paper tigers). Healthy thought processes allow people to realistically assess stress and avoid entrance into the stress cycle unnecessarily. This avoids entrance into the negative cycle of quick-fix coping strategies. It is based largely on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, a proven therapy to address anxiety and depression.

[www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu)

## **Kids at Hope**

Kids at Hope is a youth development program and philosophy, they have comprehensive after school programs and are integrated with schools. “Kids at Hope empowers organizations to transform their cultures through professional, personal and volunteer development workshops, seminars, institutes and classes” “Kids at Hope was coined to reverse the stigma, abuse, and misuse of the damaging expression “youth at risk,” Kids at Hope has continued to explore the scientific literature to further understand how all children can succeed, NO EXCEPTIONS!

In 2000 Kids at Hope introduced a remarkable and powerful cultural strategy rather than a program-driven effort as the basis for a simple but powerful understanding of the first element required by all programs, curricula, or activities offered to children – a belief that all children can succeed, without exception. This commanding statement would replace the self-fulfilling prophecy suggested in the youth-at-risk paradigm.”

[www.kidsathope.org](http://www.kidsathope.org)

## **The Military Child Initiative**

“There are approximately 1.5 million children and youth today in US public schools whose parents are in the military. A high degree of mobility is demanded of these children and of their parents. Complicating relocation is the reality that significant numbers of these young people are separated from at least one parent due to overseas deployment. While these circumstances are unique, there are other populations of vulnerable and mobile youth whose lives are complicated by analogous factors.

There has been a generation of research that has identified the highly protective role schools can play in moderating the academic, social and health behavior risks of youth. Johns Hopkins University researchers have been studying school climate, academic expectations, student connectedness and school, family and community partnerships for more than 20 years. We have worked in school-based violence prevention, pregnancy prevention and drug use prevention.

The Military Child Initiative is based on the empirical research evidence of what works for these populations of young people. Our goal is to move research-based practical approaches into schools and school districts so that all children and youth can thrive, especially those who are most socially mobile and emotionally vulnerable.”

<http://www.jhsph.edu/mci/>

## **Communities That Care**

“Communities That Care is a system developed by J. David Hawkins and Richard F. Catalano that empowers communities to use advances from prevention science to guide their prevention efforts. . .

The CTC Prevention Strategies Guide lists fifty-six tested and effective prevention programs and policies shown to increase protective factors, reduce risk factors and reduce adolescent problem behaviors in well controlled studies. These are the preventive interventions recommended in the Communities That Care system.

The Communities That Care Youth Survey, is a reliable and valid instrument to measure the incidence and prevalence of substance use, delinquency and related problem behaviors and the risk and protective factors that predict those problems in your community.”

Note that this strategy is recommended by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (SAMHSA)

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/features/ctc/resources.aspx>

## **Mostofus.org**

This is a social marketing organization that uses positive depictions of youth to set the standard that most kids are doing the right thing. In other words, instead of stating 17% of youth are in dire crisis, it states 83% of youth are doing the right thing. It also combats misperceptions that make kids believe to be normal, they must do a negative behavior to fit in. For example, youth might believe binge drinking or early sexual activity is the norm, when it is not.

<http://mostofus.org/>

## The Seven C's Model Inclusive of Wisdom and Experience from other Models

### Confidence

Confidence is Critical Because:

Confidence is the starting point for positive behavior. If a young person lacks confidence, he can't imagine taking the steps necessary to make wise decisions, follow his own values or think outside the box. Confidence is rooted in the knowledge that you are doing something right already (competence)

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we see the best in our youth, so that they can see the best in themselves?
- Do we clearly express that we expect the best in them?
- Do we help them to recognize what they have done right? Confidence comes from knowing that one has competence.
- Do we help them understand that they have authentic survival skills?
- Do we treat them as incapable children or young adults learning to navigate a difficult world?
- Do we praise? Do we understand that overpraise – praise not tied to real effort or an authentic display of competence may backfire?
- Do we catch them when they are doing the right thing? Or, did we forget that technique as they grew?
- Do we encourage them to strive just a little bit further, because we believe they can succeed?
- Do we avoid instilling shame?

Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Confidence":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of confidence:

Family Support | Family life provides high levels of love and support.

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

Caring School Climate | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

Caring Neighborhood | Young person experiences caring neighbors.

Caring School Climate | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

High Expectations | Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Creative Activities | Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. (Because youth need varied opportunities to discover where they excel)

Integrity | Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

Personal Power | Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

Self-Esteem | Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

Sense of Purpose | Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

Positive View of Personal Future | Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

The Penn Resilience Project

People are often paralyzed from attaining happiness and success because they have thinking patterns that tell them they are not good enough or incapable.

Kids at Hope

Rejects fully the idea that any youth deserves anything other than full success.

## Competence

Competence is Critical Because:

Young people need to have a full understanding of their strengths and skill sets in order to build upon them.

They also need to possess competencies in order to avoid risks and recover from stressors.

Adults can support competency development, but they also can undermine it. They must learn to communicate in ways that consider cognitive development so they can position youth to arrive at their own conclusions. They must avoid disempowering youth by throwing information at them and refusing to allow them to learn their own lessons. They should offer the social skills that position them to avoid risky behaviors in the face of temptation.

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we see what a young person has done right? Or, do we focus on their mistakes?
- Do we help our youth recognize what they have going for themselves?
- Do we help them focus on those strengths and build upon them?
- Are we helping to build the authentic skills that make them competent in the real world?
  - Educational Skills
  - Interview Skills
  - Anger Management Skills
  - Refusal skills
  - Work Skills
  - Interview Skills
  - Stress Reduction Skills
- Do we communicate in a way that empowers them to make their own decisions – or do we undermine their sense of competence by lecturing them or giving them information in a style they cannot grasp?
- Do we let them make safe mistakes so they have the opportunity to right himself or herself . . . or do we protect them from every skinned knee?
- Do we offer fixes that are unintentionally linked to the message – I didn't think you could do this on your own.

## Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Competence":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of competence:

Youth as Resources | Young people are given useful roles in the community.

High Expectations | Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Creative Activities | Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.

Achievement Motivation | Young person is motivated to do well in school.

School Engagement | Young person is actively engaged in learning.

Homework | Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.

Reading for Pleasure | Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Planning and Decision Making | Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

Interpersonal Competence | Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.

Cultural Competence | Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Resistance Skills | Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution | Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

The Penn Resilience Project

It is a major skill to be able to realistically assess circumstances to learn how to focus energies on reality-based problems.

## **Connection**

Connection is Critical Because:

Much of the research on resilience can be summed up in one statement: Young people will be resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations.

Connection is the bottom line of resilience. Youth need concentric circles of connection. Connections matter on the family, school, community, and cultural level (ethnic group, spiritual group, even military culture).

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we recognize that an adult believing in a young person – and holding them to high expectations – is the single most important factor determining whether they will be able to overcome challenging circumstances?
- Do we build a sense of safe community?
- Do we encourage young people to take pride in the various ethnic, religions or cultural groups they belong to?
- Do we do everything we can to restore family relations, unless those relations have been clearly toxic or dangerous to the young person?
- Do we recognize that for many of our most troubled youth, the firm attachment to a stable family might be missing? Further, do we know that our role as stable caring adults takes on an even greater importance?
- Do we have a TV and self-contained entertainment system in every room, or do we create a common space so people share time together?

Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Connection":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of connection:

Family Support | Family life provides high levels of love and support.

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

Caring Neighborhood | Young person experiences caring neighbors.

Caring School Climate | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

Parent involvement in schooling | Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

Caring Neighborhood | Young person experiences caring neighbors.

Caring School Climate | School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

Adult Role Models | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

Positive Peer Influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.

Youth Programs | Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.

Religious Community | Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.

Time at Home | Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

Bonding to School | Young person cares about her or his school.

Youth as Resources | Young people are given useful roles in the community.

Kids at Hope

Recognizes that kids need to be surrounded by adults with absolute positive belief in their potential.

## Character

Character is Critical Because:

Confidence, Competence and Connection alone can be protective, but those traits alone can also be used by a gang member. It is character that assures one's "assets" will be used for the social good.

Children who have a good sense of themselves, respect for others and an appreciation for the bigger world around them are on their way to becoming stable, responsible adults.

People who don't learn to stand for something, fall for anything.

Moral behavior may be intrinsic, but it is also learned through observation of modeled behavior..

We must ask ourselves:

- Are we helping them to recognize themselves as caring people?
- Do we allow them to clarify their own values?
- Do we allow them to consider right versus wrong and to look beyond immediate survival?
- Do we help them to understand how their behavior impacts on others?
- Do we help them to develop a sense of spirituality that fits into their own (not our) belief system?
- Do we value them so clearly that we model for them how important it is to care for others?
- Do we value each other so clearly that we demonstrate the importance of community?

Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Character":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of character:

Family Support | Family life provides high levels of love and support.

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Service to Others | Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.

Adult Role Models | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

Positive Peer Influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.

Religious Community | Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.

Caring | Young Person places high value on helping other people.

Equality and Social Justice | Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

Integrity | Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

Honesty | Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy.

Responsibility | Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

Restraint | Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Interpersonal Competence | Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.

Cultural Competence | Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution | Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Sense of Purpose | Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

Service to Others | Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.

## Contribution

Contribution is Critical Because:

Adolescents who experience the rewards of service tend to feel better about themselves. They also may be more comfortable asking for help themselves (the ultimate act of resilience) because they learn firsthand that those who serve get pleasure from service.

Teens so often hear that they're the source of today's problems, but they are more likely to see themselves as part of the solution if they are surrounded by people who express gratitude for their contribution. Youth surrounded by "thank you's" will want to earn them and will understand people expect the best from them.

When youth are involved in promoting a functioning community, they learn leadership skills. When youth intervention programs are informed by youth wisdom, there is less to rebel against and the likelihood of success is enhanced.

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we make clear that we believe our youth can make the world a better place?
- Do we create opportunities for each youth to contribute to the Covenant House Community?
- Do we share how important a value it is to us to serve others?
- Do we help our young people to recognize that precisely because they have come through difficult times they are positioned to guide others how to improve their lives?
- Do we search in each person's life for another individual for whom they might serve as a role model? Do we use this to encourage them to be the best person they can possibly be? Do we help them to understand that if they have messed up in their past – their recovery serves as a model?

Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Contribution":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of contribution:

Community Values Youth | Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

Youth as Resources | Young people are given useful roles in the community.

Service to Others | Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.

Caring | Young Person places high value on helping other people.

Equality and Social Justice | Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

Integrity | Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

Sense of Purpose | Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

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## **Coping**

Coping is Critical Because:

Youth with a wide repertoire of positive coping strategies will be less likely to turn to the easy quick fixes we fear.

They need to be exposed to these strategies at home and resources must exist in the community that allows them to access these strategies (e.g. sports facilities, opportunities for artistic expression).

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we recognize that so many of the risk behaviors youth engage in are attempts at reducing the stress/pain in their lives?
- Do we condemn young people for their behaviors? Do we increase their sense of shame and therefore drive them toward those behaviors?
- Do we believe that telling youth to “just stop!” the negative behaviors will do any good?
- Do we guide youth to develop positive, effective coping strategies?
- Do we model positive coping strategies on a daily basis?
- Do we encourage caring for our bodies through exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep?
- Do we encourage creative expression?
- Do we create an environment where talking, listening, and sharing is safe and productive?
- Do we model relaxation techniques?
- As we struggle to compose ourselves so we can make the fairest, wisest decisions, do we model how we take control rather than respond impulsively.

## Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Coping":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of appropriate coping strategies:

Positive Family Communication | Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.

Other Adult Relationships | Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.

Adult Role Models | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

Positive Peer Influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.

Creative Activities | Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.

Youth Programs | Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.

Religious Community | Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.

Reading for Pleasure | Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Planning and Decision Making | Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

Resistance Skills | Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution | Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

### The Penn Resilience Project

The AAP plan is focused on practical strategies to manage stress. It acknowledges the strong connection between the body and mind. It hopes to develop a repertoire of positive strategies in youth that help them avoid the quick-fix negative coping strategies that ultimately magnify the problem and/or add to the cycle of stress. However, it is limited in helping people reassess stressful situations. People can mistake "paper tigers" for real ones and have catastrophic thoughts that lead them to react to circumstances beyond their control, or to circumstances that do not pose a real threat (i.e., paper tigers). The work of the Penn Resilience Project and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy offers an important part of the solution.

## **Control**

Control is Critical Because:

A child needs to learn to follow inner control, as opposed to merely responding to what others influence them to do. They need to have a sense that they can control their destinies and circumstances.

Control (or self efficacy simplistically defined as the belief in ones own competency to avoid risky behaviors in the face of temptation) is largely influenced by Parenting Style and Discipline.

Children rely on parents and communities ability to promote and model appropriate behaviors. Actions speak louder than words: Sometimes our actions speak so loudly that children can not hear what we are saying.

We must ask ourselves:

- Do we help young people to understand that life is not purely random?
- Do we help them, on the other hand, to understand that they are not responsible for many of the bad circumstances that may have plagued them?
- Do we help them think about the future, but take one step at a time? Do we help them recognize their mini-successes so they can experience the knowledge that they can succeed?
- Do we help youth understand that while no one can control all his/her circumstances each person can shift the odds by choosing positive or protective behaviors?
- Do we understand that youth who have been traumatized repeatedly think they have no control and therefore have no reason to take positive action?
- Do we understand that discipline is about teaching not punishing or controlling. Do we use discipline as a means to help someone understand that their actions produce consequences? (i.e., life is not random)

## Other Models' Wisdom incorporated within "Control":

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets that are essential to the development of appropriate coping strategies:

Family Support | Family life provides high levels of love and support.

Safety | Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

Family Boundaries | Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.

School Boundaries | School provides clear rules and consequences.

Neighborhood Boundaries | Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.

Adult Role Models | Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

Positive Peer Influence | Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.

Personal Power | Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

Sense of Purpose | Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

Positive View of Personal Future | Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

## Resources

- The Search Institute: <http://www.search-institute.org/>
- Communities That Care <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/features/ctc/resources.aspx>
- Kids at Hope [www.kidsathope.org](http://www.kidsathope.org)
- The Penn Resilience Project: <http://www.pennproject.org/>
- Military Child Initiative (The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships <http://www.jhsph.edu/mci/>)
- Military Child Education Coalition <http://www.militarychild.org/>
- The AAP Stress Reduction Plan: [www.aap.org/stress](http://www.aap.org/stress)
- Most of Us: <http://mostofus.org/>