Take Action!
Incorporating Positive Youth Development

How to Use?

This Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Action Guide was created in order to assist local MCH programs with developing their MCH plan. The *Positive Youth Development Action Guide* is intended to help local health agencies and community partners develop evidence-based Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-framed (SMART) goals and objectives for their work with youth. This guide identifies strategies and action steps to infuse positive youth development into your program, organizational strategies, and communities' culture.

MCH Action Guides are divided into four (4) sections:

- **"How to Use"** - includes special instructions;
- **"What's at Stake"** - contains background information & data;
- **"What Works"** - outlines best practices or promising strategies;
- **"Resources and Tools"** - lists resources and tools to enhance your positive youth development policies and practices and to write SMART objectives to ensure the fullest development of all youth.

MCH consultants are available to provide technical assistance to incorporate Action Guide information into local MCH operational plans and consult on specific content material. To contact an MCH consultant about this Action Guide, call Anne-Marie Braga at (303) 692-2946.

Tip!
Find local data and experts
Contact Your MCH Consultant Today!

What's At Stake?

Positive youth development (PYD) is a philosophy, not a program, that guides communities in the way they organize programs, opportunities, and supports so that young people are engaged and reach their full potential. In fact, PYD would reframe the question, "What's at stake?" to "Imagine the possibilities." Thus, PYD is characterized by the following principles:

1) **Strengths-Based** – An approach to health, education, social, vocation & civic outcomes that focuses on the assets, and not deficits, of individuals, families, and communities.
2) **Youth Engagement** – Youth authentically participate and are engaged in their families, schools and communities.
3) **Youth-Adult Partnerships** – youth work with adults for program planning, implementation & evaluation
4) **Culturally Responsive** – people recognize & respond proactively to variations in backgrounds/cultures to ensure inclusivity & equity
5) **Targets ALL youth,** not just youth "at-risk"
6) **Sustainability** – long-term planning through funding, capacity building, professional development, & evaluation for ongoing support of youth
7) **Collaboration** – private & public agencies, state & local agencies, communities and their families work together to support youth (Colorado Youth Development Team, 2008)

So, what does this have to do with prevention? Everything and then some. The goals of primary, universal prevention are consistent with those of the PYD approach. Both aim to reduce the number of new cases of an undesirable condition; however, PYD goes beyond aiming to prevent the negative to focus on increasing positive behaviors and engagement. In fact, the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, November 2006 Supplement, *Improving Public Health Through Youth Development,* describes how PYD can be employed to promote the health of youth as well as communities. To download the journal, go to http://www.health.state.ny.us/community/youth/development/journal_supplement.htm.

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Strategy #1: Leverage the Strengths and Assets of Partners

Everyone has a role to play in promoting positive youth development (PYD). In fact, PYD will always be evolving and expanding because there will always be more partners to engage. This type of inclusive approach brings multiple perspectives and assets to the table to initiate and sustain change through building collaborative solutions. You likely do not need to start from scratch. It is important to align yourself with an existing coalition in order to leverage your communities' strengths and assets! Here is a list of perspectives to be included:

• Youth (a cornerstone of PYD) • Parents/Families • Local Public Health • Nonprofit Organizations • Faith and Spiritual Communities	• Schools • Social Services Providers • Universities and Colleges • Housing and Development Organizations	• Cultural-Interest Groups • Community Leaders • Police and Fire Departments • Workforce Development • Health Care Professionals	• Media • Civic Organizations • Tribal Councils • Foundations • Policymakers

ACT!

✓ Promote the inclusion of diverse perspectives in your community coalition including those from various cultural backgrounds (e.g., racial/ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, age, etc.).
✓ Become a champion for PYD. Learn more about it, start using the positive language, and encourage others to embrace it as a tool for youth, organizational, and community improvement.
✓ Encourage and influence your coalition to embrace a strengths-based perspective. This doesn't mean ignore risk factors, but start with and highlight strengths. Identify and focus on increasing what you DO want to see in youth.
✓ Ensure that youth are represented on the coalition (see Strategy #2).
✓ Use the information and strategies in this MCH Action Guide to incorporate PYD into your organization's and programs' action plans' goals and S.M.A.R.T. objectives.

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Questions to Ask:
✓ *What is the value of working with a variety of partners?*
✓ *Who is missing in this partnership? How can we engage them meaningfully?*
✓ *What are the tangible results we are shooting for? What will it look like along the way and when we get there?*
✓ *What groups already exist that are working towards these goals and how can your collaboration support their existing work?*

Strategy #2: Engage Youth in Your Efforts

Ideas and input from youth are vital to the success of any program targeting youth. When programs targeting youth do not involve them in the development and decision-making process, they risk developing strategies that do not work or that do not reach as many youth as they could. This wastes valuable resources. Youth can play important roles in all aspects of program development and implementation from program design to evaluation of effectiveness. They are limited only by the willingness of adults to engage young voices on important issues and to support them in this process. Research demonstrates the value of youth involvement, not just for the youth, but also for the adults, organizations, and communities involved. Involving young people in program development, implementation and evaluation increases the potential for successful programs and strategies that support all youth.

ACT!

✓ Avoid making decisions for youth and start making decisions **with** youth.
✓ Create meaningful roles for youth in your organization, coalitions, and initiatives and set aside time to support and mentor them as they learn this new role.
✓ Involve youth from the beginning as part of your team; **listen** to them and fully engage them in the decision-making processes for the programs and policies that target them.
✓ Engage youth in research and evaluation to assess community issues and programs.
✓ Be flexible with time, dates, locations, and communication mechanisms of work opportunities so that youth are able to participate.

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Questions to Ask:
✓ *What does meaningful youth engagement look like? What would it look like in our organization?*
✓ *What barriers are preventing you from involving youth <u>in a meaningful way</u> in your program or initiative? How can you remove, or get around, those barriers?*
✓ *Who do you know that can be a champion and provide expertise in this area?*
✓ *How can **you** be a champion to support authentic youth engagement in decision-making?*

Take Action! *(continued)*
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Strategy #3: Encourage and Support Parents'/Family Members' Protective Role

A common thread among youth who do well socially and academically, and stay healthy is that they have close relationships with their caregivers. Surveys of teens show that they want and expect their parents to play a key role in their lives. They appreciate them, listen to them and remember their advice, even when it seems that they are not paying attention. We must encourage caregivers to recognize this and help support their protective role. We can do this by facilitating their connections with other caregivers and giving them positive feedback while also providing them with resources, such as "Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens" available at www.theAntiDrug.com.

ACT!
- ✓ Include and support caregivers in participating in your coalitions and initiatives.
- ✓ Develop policies and practices that involve parents and families in your program.
- ✓ Encourage caregivers to really listen, respect, monitor and guide their teens and support them in developing these skills as their child begins to develop into a young adult.
- ✓ Help parents understand adolescent development, including the more recent brain research.

Questions to Ask:
- ✓ How can you reach out to caregivers and get them involved in your efforts?
- ✓ What is the value in caregivers' <u>active</u> participation?
- ✓ How can you be a better resource to caregivers in navigating how to best support their adolescent?

Strategy #4: Develop Policies and Practices that Reflect Positive Youth Development Principles

All organizations have policies that guide their workplace operations and practices. PYD principles need to be infused throughout organizations' policies and practices. Policies guide decision-making andcan help ensure lasting impact. Begin developing strategies to advocate for more PYD-oriented policies that sustain these principles in your organization's practice and culture. For example:
1. Develop an organizational policy stating that youth must be part of the interview process when hiring new staff
2. Make it mandatory that youth review and provide feedback into program planning, implementation and evalution.
3. Change staff job descriptions to include principles of positive youth development.

ACT!
- ✓ Start with identifying policies that can be easily changed.
- ✓ Determine key individuals that can be advocates and partners.
- ✓ Plant seeds of positive youth development at every opportunity possible and be sure to use positive youth development language – *youth-respectful*, *culturally inclusive* and *strengths-based*.
- ✓ Recognize that you are advocating for a paradigm shift and that change is often very slow. So start small; celebrate small successes; and partner for the sustainability of your efforts. But, at the same time, keep your vision big!

Questions to Ask:
- ✓ What level of readiness and commitment exists for incorporating PYD principles into program policies and practices?
- ✓ What policies exist that can be changed to reflect the PYD principles?
- ✓ What skills, information, or relationship do you need to better advocate for PYD at the policy-level?

Resources and Tools
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Fact Sheets & Toolkits

- Community Youth Connection Issue Briefs (2005)
  http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES Issue Brief.pdf
  http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/ENGAGEMENT%20Issue%20Brief.pdf

- National League of Cities: Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
  Tools and resources to increase youth participation in city planning and how to create youth councils for cities and organizations. http://www.nlc.org/IYEF/youthdevelopment/youth_participation/resources.aspx

- The University of Connecticut Center for Applied Research and the Office of Policy and Management's *Assessing Outcomes in Child and Youth Programs: A Practical Handbook* (2005) provides plans for simple program PYD evaluations and offers a clearly defined set of PYD outcomes and indicators and instruments for measuring those outcomes.
  http://www.ct.gov/opm/LIB/opm/CJPPD/CjJjyd/JjydPublications/ChildYouthOutcomeHandbook2005.pdf

Reviews & Reports

- Child Trends' What Works
  Multiple databases that synthesize evaluations of various programs for children and adolescents to demonstrate what works.
  http://www.childtrends.org/_catdisp_page.cfm?LID=CD56B3D7-2F05-4F8E-BCC99B05A4CAEA04

- The Finance Project's *Understanding the State of Knowledge of Youth Engagement Financing and Sustainability* (2008) builds the knowledge base about the variety, effects, and effectiveness of existing youth engagement approaches and uncovers what is known about their costs, financing, and sustainability.
  http://www.financeproject.org/publications/YouthEngagementReport.pdf

Data Resources

- Child Trends Data Bank
  Contains over 100 indicators of child and youth well being, links to state, local, and international estimates, and key research briefs as well as the ability to generate your own report.
  www.childtrendsdatabank.org

Technical Assistance

- **ACT for Youth: Upstate Center for Excellence's *Positive Youth Development Resource Manual* (2008)**
  Includes training activities with lesson plans/facilitation tips, handouts, brief power point presentations and references to other resources.
  http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/YD Manual Complete web 9-6-06.pdf

- National Youth Development Learning Network outlines youth worker competencies.
  http://www.nydic.org/nydic/documents/Competencies.pdf

- To develop goals and S.M.A.R.T. objectives, visit this interactive website:
  http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dashoet/writing_good_goals/page002.html

SMART!
Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time- framed