

YOUTH RESILIENCE

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOUTH THRIVE

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

YOUTH RESILIENCE: ACTION SHEET

Your role as a caseworker

Youth involved in the child welfare system have often experienced significant stress and trauma. How youth are able to handle challenges is key to their future success and ability to thrive. You can play a critical role in helping youth understand and learn from their past and bounce back from tough situations by doing the following:

- Adopt a positive and strengths-based approach
- Support youth as key decision-makers in their own case plan whenever possible
- Give youth opportunities to practice decision-making and other adult responsibilities (e.g., budgeting, dating)
- Encourage self-care and stress management through techniques such as meditation, acupuncture, massage, journal writing, music or healthy eating
- Encourage youth to talk about their own past experiences of trauma and help them understand how those experiences impact them in the present and future
- Validate and support good decisions

Questions to ask youth

- What helps you cope with everyday life? What and who helps you during tough times?
- Where do you draw your strength from?
- What worries and frustrations do you deal with during the day? How do you solve those problems?
- What do you do to take care of yourself when you are stressed?
- What goals do you have for your future? How can I help you to reach those goals?

What to look for

- Problem solving skills
- Ability to cope with stress
- Self-care strategies
- Help-seeking behavior
- Access and use of mental health, substance abuse or other services if needed

Activities to do with youth

- Have youth identify a stressful situation and make a plan for how they will manage that situation in the future
- Provide youth opportunities to practice decision-making and develop coping skills for when they confronted with challenges
- Ask youth to write down their self-care strategies and ensure that they take time for self-care each day
- Celebrate successes and accomplishments

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

In their search for identity, purpose and direction, youth need to feel connected to someone or something in order to thrive. Youth need people, inside and outside of their family, who care about them; who can be non-judgmental listeners; who they can turn to for well-informed guidance and advice; who they can call on for help in solving problems; who encourage them and promote high expectations; and who set developmentally appropriate limits, rules and monitoring.

Youth also need to be constructively engaged in social institutions—like schools, religious communities and recreational facilities—that are safe, stable and equitable. Social institutions provide support for youths' intellectual, social, emotional, moral and physical development, and provide opportunities to participate in organized activities like academic enrichment, sports, social clubs, support groups, volunteering and the labor force. Social institutions also offer opportunities for youth to “give back” to their community.

Social connections—people and institutions—help youth increase their knowledge and develop their skills, have a sense of belonging and find meaning in their lives.

Thus, the availability and quality of social connections are important considerations in the lives of all youth 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)
- spiritual support (e.g., providing affirmation, hope and encouragement)

When youth 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 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.

Close peer relationships are extremely important for healthy development during adolescence. The adolescent peer group provides a context for youth to achieve two essential, related 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), self-esteem (i.e., positive or negative feelings about oneself) and a sense of who one is (including gender, race, culture and socioeconomic status). A sense of independence includes:

- **emotional autonomy** - relinquishing primary dependence on parents and forging a more mature relationship with parents or other trusted adults

- **cognitive autonomy** - developing one's own values, opinions and beliefs
- **behavioral autonomy** - making and being responsible for personal decisions

Conversely, research shows a lack of close peer relationships is associated with a range of poor outcomes in adolescence and adulthood such as delinquency, poor academic performance, poor social skills and mental health problems. Also, in contrast to the commonly held belief that parents' influence is overshadowed by the adolescent peer group, **numerous research studies affirm the meaningful role that parents and other caring adults continue to play in the lives of young people; find that youth who feel close and attached to at least one caring adult are psychologically healthier than peers who feel detached; and demonstrate that being connected to a trusted adult serves as a buffer against many types of health risks including depression, early sexual activity, violence and alcohol and marijuana use.**

Studies have also found that in order for youth to have a sense of connectedness to a social institution, they must perceive the social institution as safe and believe that at least one adult associated with the institution is fair, cares about them both as a member of a group (e.g., student/team player/band member/ congregant) and as an individual, and wants them to succeed. Researchers found similar buffering effects from being connected to a social institution as being connected to other people. For example, the presence of and participation in an active, school-sanctioned support group was found to be correlated with lower rates of depression and suicide attempts in LGBT youth. Conversely, when young people feel isolated, socially excluded or disconnected from social institutions, they may experience a range of negative reactions from lack of self-confidence to increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts.

It may seem that increasing the number of people who could provide constructive social support to youth would be the “cure” for social isolation and feelings of disconnectedness. Providing opportunities for youth to create sustainable, positive social connections is necessary but alone is not sufficient. Youth can feel lonely and isolated even when surrounded by others if relationships lack emotional depth and genuine acceptance. What is essential is that these opportunities must support a sense of connectedness between the youth and at least one other person. New relationships should engender emotional, informational, instrumental or spiritual support so that meaningful discourse and healthy development may occur in a context of mutual trust and respect.

YOUTH THRIVE™

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: ACTION SHEET

Your role as a caseworker

Connections to people and places help youth access resources, gain skills, have a sense of belonging and find meaning in their lives. There are many ways you can help youth develop, expand and strengthen their social networks:

- Use the case management process as an opportunity to help youth develop stronger relationship skills and address ways to handle problematic relationships
- Help youth stay connected to siblings, extended birth family members, past foster parents and other important adults whenever possible
- Minimize placement moves that disrupt connections
- Connect youth to other young people with similar circumstances and backgrounds (e.g., Youth Advisory Boards, LGBTQ groups) and to youth development programs related to their interests
- Encourage youth and caregivers to address any issues that make it hard for youth to develop healthy connections (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Make sure youth, their family members and other supporters attend and participate in family team conferences
- Ensure youth can participate in the full range of “normal” adolescent activities (e.g. sleepovers, class trips, prom)
- Make sure all LGBTQ youth in foster care are in homes/placements that affirm their identity

Questions to ask youth

- Do you have friends or family members who... help you? you can talk with about how you're doing? give financial support? can give you a place to sleep? you can spend holidays with?
- How do you stay in touch with key people in your life? How often do you see them?
- Do you find it easy or hard to make friends? If it is hard, why do you think that is?
- Is there someone in your life you can talk to when you're feeling down or frustrated? Is there someone you can celebrate with when things are going well?
- Are you a member of any clubs, teams or other groups?
- Are you connected to people at school, in your neighborhood or at a place of worship?

What to look for

- At least one caring, competent, consistent adult in their life
- At least one positive friend their age
- People and places they can turn to for help in times of need and the ability to accept help
- Communication and other skills to establish and maintain relationships
- [Permanency Pact](#) with one or more adults if aging out of care

Activities to do with youth

- Work with youth to make an [EcoMap](#) showing the people and institutions that are sources of support and/or stress in his/her life
- Role play with youth to practice skills in approaching a peer to develop a friendship (e.g., starting a conversation, joining an activity, listening to a peer)
- Brainstorm with youth on how to manage relationships with people who are negative influences

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Having accurate knowledge of adolescent development is critically important because beliefs about youth influence perceptions and treatment of young people. For example, many parents believe all risk-taking is bad and will lead to undesirable, dangerous or deadly outcomes. Parents who hold this belief may discourage or try to prevent their youth from taking any risks. However, numerous studies distinguish between negative risk-taking (e.g., drinking and driving, having unprotected sex) and positive risk-taking (e.g., running for student council president, playing team sports). Behaviors that are considered to be positive risk-taking are risky because they involve the possibility of failure. Current research finds youth who challenge themselves by taking positive risks are more likely to avoid negative risks and to achieve healthy, favorable outcomes and thrive. Furthermore, positive risk-taking helps youth learn how to win and lose, supports identity development and boosts self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, positive risk-taking should not only be allowed, it should be encouraged.

Thus, parents, adults who work with youth and young people themselves can benefit from increasing their knowledge and understanding about adolescent development. Gaining more knowledge about adolescent development is particularly important given the recent advances in the fields of neuroscience and developmental psychology. Scientists in these fields have provided much evidence about the complex neurobiological changes that take place during the teenage years and into the mid-20s, as well as the structural and functional differences between adolescent and adult brains. Understanding the nature of adolescent brain development is essential in promoting healthy outcomes in youth.

Research has shown that the adolescent brain develops unevenly. Structures and functions that contribute to emotions—such as fear, anger and pleasure—develop in early adolescence, but abilities such as thinking ahead, balancing risks and rewards and controlling impulses are still evolving well into early adulthood. This developmental timing gap may explain why some youth choose to engage in sensation-seeking behaviors and to make decisions based on feelings rather than logic. In addition, some youth have developmental histories marked by poor relationships, environments that create toxic stress, involvement in institutions that are not aligned with their developmental needs or personal trauma. These circumstances and experiences negatively impact youths' innate developmental transitions and, therefore, impede the course of healthy development.

But the adolescent brain is adaptable and shaped by experience. When youth have support and guidance from caring and encouraging adults, these experiences can help youth acquire the competencies needed for a healthy transition to adulthood.

Knowledge of other aspects of adolescent development is needed as well, including: signs indicating a youth may have a trauma history and needs special help; cultural factors that influence the perceptions of youth; and factors that promote or inhibit healthy youth outcomes. Furthermore, as youth prepare for the transition to adulthood, research studies demonstrate they need guidance about and experiences that enable them to:

- Adjust to and accept their changing body
- Make decisions about sexual behavior
- Engage in healthy behaviors such as exercising within one's physical means
- Engage in positive risk-taking and avoid negative risk-taking
- Build and sustain healthy relationships with peers and adults
- Develop abstract thinking and improved problem solving skills
- Forge a personally satisfying identity, including what and who one would like to become
- Gain independence from parents and other adults while maintaining strong connections with them
- Engage in socially responsible behavior such as volunteerism and community service
- Identify productive interests, develop realistic goals and seek to excel
- Develop mature values and behavioral controls used to assess acceptable and unacceptable behaviors
- Understand one's personal developmental history and needs
- Learn to manage stress, including learning from failure
- Deepen cultural knowledge
- Explore spirituality
- Learn essential life skills such as financial management and conflict resolution

Adolescence is a unique developmental period. It is essential to understand the science of adolescent development and to apply this knowledge when developing programs and policies that are designed to help youth acquire the competencies that set them on a path toward healthy outcomes in adulthood.

YOUTH THRIVE

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

KNOWLEDGE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: ACTION SHEET

Your role as a caseworker

In your work with youth and their family members and/or caregivers, help them build knowledge about youth development and the many complicated changes and challenges that happen during adolescence. You can:

- Share information about adolescent brain development including the effects of trauma
- Help youth identify opportunities to take positive risks (e.g., sports, adventures, performances, academic challenges, public speaking) and to build on their strengths and interests
- Ensure that youth are given age and developmentally appropriate information about sexuality and healthy relationships and have access to their preferred method of birth control
- Identify and refer youth to service providers that focus on and have expertise in working with youth in their specific situation (e.g., LGBTQ, expectant and/or parenting, involved in juvenile justice, undocumented, victim of domestic violence, developmental or physical disabilities, mental health needs)
- Ensure that youth are not unduly punished for behavior that is typical for this age

Questions to ask

- What helps you learn about yourself as a person? What do you have questions about or need more information about?
- What do you feel your greatest strengths are as a person?
- What areas do you think you need to work on? What would you like to try?

What to look for

- Understanding of their own development and the physical, emotional and social changes they are experiencing
- Caregivers understand and encourage healthy development
- Reliable source for developmental information when issues come up
- Developmental needs and any special needs are being met

Activities to do with youth

- Conduct an [Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment](#) (ACLSA) with the youth, then work with the youth to use the results to set goals and plan for the future
- Help youth practice relaxation techniques (e.g., meditation, breathing when confronted with painful memories or triggers from their past)
- Help youth sign up for activities that encourage positive risk taking
- Connect youth with necessary health, mental health, reproductive health information and services
- Provide youth with opportunities for taking on more responsibility, greater independence and develop new skills (e.g., transportation, finances, technology, laundry, cooking, shopping)

CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

All youth need help sometimes—help with homework, with figuring out the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, with considering their next steps after high school. But when youth are faced with very trying circumstances such as foster care, homelessness, substance abuse or trauma, they need access to concrete support and services that address their needs and help to minimize the stress caused by very difficult challenges and adversity. **Assisting youth to identify, find and receive concrete support in times of need helps to ensure they receive the basic necessities everyone deserves in order to grow and thrive (e.g., healthy food, a safe and protective environment), as well as specialized academic, psychoeducational, health, mental health, social, legal or employment services.**

When youth are faced with overwhelmingly stressful conditions they need to seek help, but for some youth asking for help is not an easy thing to do. It may be embarrassing because the services needed have a stigma associated with them such as special education programs, domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters or mental health clinics. Other youth may believe they do not have the right to ask for help, or that asking for help is a childish act, will put others in control of their lives or will cause more problems. Thus, youth-serving programs must clearly communicate that seeking help is not a shameful or immature act, nor does it mean completely relinquishing control. On the contrary. Asking for help is a form of **self-advocacy**; that is, speaking-up and taking responsibility for oneself and one's needs. Self-advocacy is a key characteristic of becoming an adult. **Seeking help, then, is a step toward improving one's circumstances and learning to better manage stress and function well—even when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma.** When youth ask for help and receive guidance about navigating the complex web of medical, mental health and social service systems, these are steps toward building resilience.

Given the recent advances in the fields of neuroscience and developmental psychology, service providers must be aware of and take into account the neurological, biological, social, emotional and psychological transitions that take place during the adolescent developmental period. In addition, service providers must be able to sensitively and competently address some of the “hard topics” associated with this developmental period such as gender identity and becoming sexually active.

Furthermore, when youth receive help, it should be provided in a manner that does not increase stress. Support and services should be coordinated, respectful, caring and strengths-based. Strengths-based practice with youth is grounded in the beliefs that:

- It is essential to forge a trusting relationship between youth and service providers so that youth feel physically and emotionally safe
- Regardless of the number or level of adverse conditions youth are experiencing, they have assets within and around them, their family or their community that can be called upon to help mitigate the impact of stressful conditions and to create needed change
- Youth have unrealized resources and competencies that must be identified, mobilized and appreciated
- Youth must be active participants in the change process and not passive recipients of services

In addition to addressing each youth's individual difficulties, strengths-based practitioners must understand—and work to change—the structural inequities and conditions that contribute to the young person's difficulties

Youth who experience a strengths-based approach when they seek help feel valued because they are acknowledged as knowledgeable and competent. They develop a sense of independence, self-confidence and self-efficacy because they have opportunities to build their skills, experience success and strive to reach their full potential. Thus, access to concrete support in times of need must be accompanied by a quality of service coordination and delivery that is designed to preserve youths' dignity; provide opportunities for skill development; and promote healthy development, resilience and the ability to advocate for and receive needed services and resources.

CONCRETE SUPPORT IN TIMES OF NEED: ACTION SHEET

Your role as a caseworker

Your role is to provide referrals to needed services and also to identify any barriers the youth and their family may have in accessing those services and help them overcome those barriers to ensure their concrete needs are met. As important, youth need to learn how to advocate for themselves by asking for help and recognizing that getting support is not a sign of weakness but rather is a sign of strength and resilience. You can:

- Work with youth to understand their past experience with service systems and any stigma they attach to certain services
- Help youth navigate complex systems by explaining eligibility requirements, filling out forms with them and making a “warm handoff” to an individual who can help them negotiate access to services
- Have youth practice ways to handle setbacks and frustration and plan to get what they need
- Ensure youth are connected to services that are affirming of their racial, cultural and ethnic identities and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE)
- Connect youth to services that are developmentally appropriate

Questions to ask

- What do you need to deal with a specific problem? (e.g., to get or stay on-track academically)
- What have you done to handle this problem so far? Has this worked?
- Are there community groups or local services that have helped or not helped in the past? What has been your experience accessing those services?
- Are there specific barriers that have made it difficult for you to access services in the past?

What to look for

- Open to accessing and utilizing services
- Has some positive experiences with services
- Ways to address specific barriers (e.g., literacy, language, lack of transportation) that make it difficult to access services
- Personal behavioral traits (e.g., punctuality, willingness to share necessary information)
- Required documents (e.g., birth certificate, social security card, photo identification, bank account)
- Can organize and maintain some predictable routines, structures and schedule

Activities to do with youth

- Ask youth to identify one concrete need that they want to address (e.g., reliable transportation to get to school on time, learning about scholarship options for college)
- Come up with a list of at least three possible ways to get that need met (e.g., agencies to approach, people to ask for help, ways to earn money)
- Prepare the youth for job and other future goals (e.g., role play interviews, prepare cover letter and resume, connect to college counselor, identify employment services)
- Identify and take immediate action on one concrete need (e.g., help youth get a driver’s license, make a doctor’s appointment)

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN YOUTH

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

Adolescence is a period marked by significant neurological, physical, emotional, social and cognitive developmental transitions. Youths' preparation for and success at navigating these transitions is influenced by their earlier developmental histories, experiences and perceptions as well as the nature and impact of their current relationships, contexts and circumstances. Youth need nurturing adult support, positive peer relationships and wholesome experiences to help them navigate these transitions, to develop cognitive and social-emotional competence and to thrive in life.

Cognitive competence and social-emotional competence are essential developmental tasks in adolescence because they lay the foundation for forming an independent identity and having a productive, responsible and satisfying adulthood. The interrelated components of cognitive and social-emotional competence include:

- **Executive functioning:**
 - » **cognitive flexibility** - seeing alternate solutions to problems and being able to shift perspective
 - » **future orientation** - thinking about the potential consequences of one's behavior and choices
 - » **cognitive self-regulation** - exercising control over thinking
 - » **emotional self-regulation** - exercising control over feelings
 - » **behavioral self-regulation** - staying on task even in the face of distractions
 - » **planning** - having a goal and using reasoning to develop a strategy
 - » **working memory** - following instructions sequentially and holding information in mind while engaging in another activity
- **Self-awareness** - a growing understanding about one's developmental history and needs
- **Self-concept** - a stable positive identity
- **Self-esteem** - overall good feelings about oneself
- **Self-efficacy** - realistic beliefs about one's capabilities
- **Self-compassion** - being kind to oneself when confronted with personal failings and suffering
- **Self-improvement and mastery** - committing to and preparing to achieve productive goals
- **Personal agency** - taking responsibility for one's self and one's decisions and having confidence to overcome obstacles
- **Character strengths** (e.g., persistence, hard work, gratitude, respect, integrity)
- **Positive emotions** (e.g., joy, love, hope, optimism, trust, faith, compassion)

The primary role of adolescents is that of a student. Thus, in addition to the family, the school is a primary context for cultivating youths' cognitive and social-emotional competencies, for understanding how these competencies impact academic outcomes and for working with youth who have cognitive and social-emotional difficulties. Ideally, within nurturing and responsive family, school and community contexts, youth are afforded opportunities to tap into their interests; explore and come to grips with their personal, gender and cultural identity; seek more independence and responsibility; think more about values and morals; try new experiences; and strive to reach their full potential.

However, when youth have a history of early trauma or are in families, communities or schools that are unstable, dangerous or persistently under-resourced, they may not have these opportunities and may be at greater risk for poor school performance; impaired or negative social relations; anger, acting-out and aggressive behaviors; and mental health problems.

It should be noted that experiencing challenges and adversity does not necessarily predict poor outcomes for youth. There is increasing evidence that having experiences that promote cognitive and social-emotional competencies helps to reduce the likelihood of youth developing problems and increase the likelihood of good outcomes despite threats to healthy development.

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF YOUTH: ACTION SHEET

Your role as a caseworker

During adolescence, youth develop their own unique identity and how they think and feel about themselves and the world. To nurture a young person's cognitive and social-emotional development, you can:

- Provide concrete tips and resources to help them build social and emotional skills
- Connect youth to resources that support their development (e.g., tutoring, counseling)
- Explore with youth how past experiences may shape their current behavior and emotional responses and what they can do to overcome challenges posed by their trauma history
- Provide incentives and praise good decision making
- Give youth opportunities to have fun, spend time with peers and be part of activities they love
- Allow youth to coordinate and lead their team meetings with support as needed (e.g., choose the location, make phone calls, set the date)

Questions to ask

- How are things going at school? Ask about academics, behavior, social life, and extracurriculars.
- How do you feel when you're at home / with your foster family / in your group home?
- What are some situations that make you frustrated or angry? What are some ways you can respond the next time you're in that situation?
- What are your greatest strengths – at school and in general?
- What do you want to accomplish in your life? What can we do now to help you get there?
- What are your plans for when you transition out of care?

What to look for

- Ability to "name" their own emotions, strengths and challenges
- Expresses both positive and negative emotions
- Age-appropriate cognitive skills
- Able to meet academic demands and appropriately challenged in school
- Demonstrates character strengths like gratitude, integrity and persistence
- Beginning to plan for the future and have people in their life who set high expectations
- Has a positive sense of themselves and is not overly judgmental towards themselves and others
- Can delay or defer gratification

Activities to do with youth

- Identify at least one strength or personal asset and positive activity that youth is excited about and participating in; connect youth to an organization and an adult mentor who will support pursuit of this activity into adulthood
- Help youth identify a goal they care about and set priorities, action steps, motivation and their own agency needed to accomplish the goal
- Provide youth and caregivers with access to classes, tests and other activities required for college or other post-secondary options
- Encourage youth to identify and participate in leadership opportunities (e.g., student organizations, Youth Advisory Boards, mentoring younger children)