

PROMOTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: A CRASH COURSE FOR YOUTH
MINISTERS

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Positive Youth Development: A Crash Course for Youth Ministers

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role religion can play in the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach to youth development. The relevant literature suggests there is a missing link between youth workers in religious institutions and training in youth development. The majority of youth workers (paid, volunteer, part- and full-time) in various religious institutions are not trained in youth development, particularly in the PYD approach due to lack of resources and availability. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide “a crash course for youth ministers” to gain an understanding of PYD and the role their programming and congregations can play in assisting adolescents to thrive in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

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DEDICATION

To my baby for the countless hours of quietly sitting on my lap reaching for the keyboard and bringing a smile to my face while I typed.

To my husband for all of the extra housework, stress-relief, and endless words of encouragement to keep me focused.

To my mommy for the days of babysitting to make this project possible, but more importantly for raising us to value education and to use our lives for something good.

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INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that many different factors play key roles in youth development including family relations, peer interactions, school participation, and religious involvement. The complex influence of religious involvement is consistently noted for its role as an agent of socialization in youth development throughout both childhood and adolescence (e. g. Abbott, Berry, & Meredith, 1990; Aranda, 2008; Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Cotton, Larkin, Hoopes, Cromer, & Rosenthal, 2005; King & Furrow, 2003; Regnerus, 2003b; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004; Smith, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Smith (2003) notes that over half of youth in America partake in religious activities during adolescence. Many studies and analyses have been and continue to be focused on the influence that religion can have on both the internal and external assets that promote positive youth development (e. g. Abbott et al., 1990; Atkiss, Moyer, Desai, & Roland, 2011; Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006; Furrow, King, & White, 2004; Regnerus, 2003b; Search Institute, 2006).

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a relatively new approach to the trifold realm of research, theory, and practice in youth development. Focused on youth as resources full of strengths and potential, PYD strives to be holistic for all youth rather than rehabilitation-centered for at-risk youth. Many experts in the field of youth development have participated in the process of bringing PYD to center stage and have contributed greatly to its own development. Search Institute, based in Minneapolis, MN, sparked the development of this new approach in the 1990s when they identified the 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2006). Then the 5 Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion) surfaced as an integral part of youth development literature through collaborative efforts of many researchers (Eccles &

Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 1995; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2002; Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2003).

When these PYD resources became available, research studies started to emerge on the influence religion would, should, and could have on youth development. Religion undoubtedly plays an integral role in the development of many youth. Since congregations are a driving force in the religious influence in youth development, it is necessary for researchers to examine how congregations are promoting positive youth development. Religious institutions can be partners for PYD if the youth workers within these institutions are aptly trained and provided with the information and resources. However, research shows that most youth workers in religious institutions are not trained to be youth workers (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995) and do not have the knowledge and understanding of the framework of PYD. This paper offers one solution to this problem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ultimate goal of youth development is adolescent thriving, which can be loosely defined as the successful transition through dependent adolescence into independent adulthood or personal autonomy. Throughout the years, youth development has shifted its focus from rehabilitation of problem youth to a prevention model of holistic improvement of all youth where they exhibit more indicators of thriving (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, Dowling, 2005). Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) discussed the presence of seven different indicators that a youth is thriving: success in school, leadership responsibilities and qualities, serving others, physical well-being, delayed gratification, valued diversity, and overcoming adversity. The presence of these indicators is influenced by the presence of developmental assets (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Home and school atmospheres and interactions are an integral part of developing autonomy (Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997). Particularly in the United States, autonomy is expected of individuals (Eccles et al., 1997; Larson, 2000). Although many youth development programs exist to help youth navigate through difficulties or problems, PYD incorporates the holistic vision of youth as active participants in their own development.

Positive Youth Development

PYD has taken center stage in recent decades as a new approach to research, theory, and practice in youth development. Prior to PYD, most approaches to youth development centered on rehabilitation from or prevention of specific risks or problems (Damon, 2004). Nixon (1997) explained that rehabilitation from one or two specific problems does not necessarily prepare youth for inclusive successful futures. Due to widespread media showcasing youth at-risk or laden with problems in rehabilitation programs these approaches often result in negativity and pessimism regarding youth by many in society (Leffert et al., 1998). In contrast to these

approaches that portray negativity, PYD has emerged as a strengths-based approach that focuses on the current and potential attributes each adolescent bears while instilling protective factors to prevent or reduce delinquent behavior and promoting or reinforcing positive behaviors (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). Another way of explaining the concept of PYD is to consider youth as bodies of potential or valuable resources in their community (Mariano & Going, 2011).

An important national, longitudinal study in the field of PYD was conducted through the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University in partnership with National 4-H Council by Lerner and colleagues (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2008; Lerner et al., 2011). This study started with wave 1 in 2002 with over 1700 fifth graders and their parents from 13 different states. Although the study was conducted in partnership with 4-H, the sample consisted of youth both involved and not involved with a 4-H program as well as youth involved in other extra-curricular activities as they chose for themselves. As this longitudinal study progressed with subsequent waves of data, the sample size grew and the data became more useful.

One consistent outcome with each wave of this study was the support of the significance of the 5 Cs of youth development: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2008; Lerner et al., 2011). These 5 Cs are discussed as important aspects of youth development, which instigate the development of a 6th C: contribution. When youth have established the desire or sense of need to contribute to society, Lerner et al. (2005) stated these youth are likely to have a lowered risk of problem behaviors. An underlying equation for PYD is that the strengths of a youth would combine with the resources from family, school, and community to provide the foundation for positive development (Lerner, Lerner, & Benson, 2011).

Atkiss et al. (2011) investigated the integration of Search Institute's Developmental Assets and the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) as it pertains to a pilot PYD program through the health education lens. Both of these approaches include internal and external factors that influence a youth's development. While the Developmental Assets focus on 40 specific internal and external assets, SEM focuses on the crossroads of a youth's relationships with the broader community on an individual and systemic level. The results of this study show that the youth established positive external assets through relationships that influenced internal growth, which defends the goal of both approaches to increase the number of indicators of thriving. Leffert et al. (1998) explored the relationship between the number of assets present and the indicators of thriving as well as the presence of risky behaviors. It was found that there is a direct relationship between the number of assets and the number of thriving indicators present while the number of assets is indirectly related to the presence of risky behaviors. This explains the significance of Search Institute's Developmental Assets.

Search Institute (2006) utilized research to identify the 40 Developmental Assets that are typically referenced in conjunction with PYD. These assets are the strengths or positive attributes both internal and external that are found to be essential in youth development. Benson (1997; 2003) is part of the Search Institute team and his work parallels the development of PYD as well as the 40 Developmental Assets, supporting the need for an approach that focuses on the strengths of each youth to further develop and build upon them while establishing protective factors that assist in the prevention of delinquent behaviors. These 40 Developmental Assets are divided into internal assets and external assets.

The Developmental Assets that are labeled as internal are broken down into four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity

(Search Institute, 2006). Due to the difficult nature of measuring these types of assets, there is far less research focused on the internal assets as there is on the external assets. However, one internal asset that has been of interest to religiously affiliated studies is the “sense of purpose” asset (Search Institute, 2006). Even after commenting on the lack of ample evidence, Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) investigated the significance of purpose throughout adolescence and determined that a sense of purpose is a precursor to not only positive development but also to a higher degree of religiosity; then also made an argument for the need for continued research to better understand how purpose relates to PYD in adolescence. Mariano and Going (2011) agreed that there is little evidence as the research efforts in youth purpose are just beginning, but note the progress that is being and has been made thus far to determine the significance of purpose to establish thriving indicators in youth development and the need for continued research.

External Developmental Assets are divided into support, empowerment, boundaries/expectations, and constructive use of time categories (Search Institute, 2006). However, the assets within these categories rarely exist without each other. For example, family, neighborhood or community, and school are all factors that can offer support, empowerment, and boundaries as well as opportunities for constructive use of time. Regardless of their interdependence, the assets that fall under the support category are based on different types of relationships that influence the youth. Kegler et al. (2005) addressed many of these relationships, particularly those present in neighborhoods and communities. These supportive and empowering non-parental relationships from within the community are evident as developmental assets for youth (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Kegler et al., 2005). Youth who are involved in service to others in their community consistently show more developmental assets and have higher levels of thriving indicators (Becker & Dhingra, 2001;

Smith, 2003; Youniess et al., 1999). While all assets are worth noting for their influence on PYD, the ones noted here are of significant importance because of their affiliation with the “constructive use of time” asset of religious community (Search Institute, 2006). Religion can have much more of an influence on youth development than simply being a constructive use of their time (King, 2008). Religious involvement can also assist a youth in the development of a sense of purpose and well-being (Furrow et al., 2004; McMahon, Singh, Garner, & Benhorin, 2004). The religious community provides numerous forms of relationships both with peers and non-parental adults, establishing a broader more intricately connected network of support (King & Furrow, 2008; Maton & Sto. Domingo, 2006). Religious beliefs and practices at home may provide families with more positive interactions and family life (Abbott et al., 1990). Religious involvement is diverse in the ways it impacts developmental assets and indicators of thriving, so it is apparent that religion can play a vital role in positive youth development.

Youth, Families, and Religion

Many studies have explored the nature of religion and its effect on adolescents and their families (Smith, 2003), but much more research must be done to understand the complexity of these effects (Snell, 2009). Although religious involvement is often forced upon children through early adolescence by parents, studies show that participation extends beyond these years for more than half of these youth (Dudley, 1993). There is evidence of the quantity of religiously active adolescents but little research that reviews how or why they have become or stayed religiously active past their forced involvement (Regnerus et al., 2004). Regardless of the reason for religious involvement, this participation is directly related to indicators for thriving.

Petts (2009) analyzed patterns of participation of youth and young adults in religious activities as well as how families influence religious participation utilizing a life course

approach. Six patterns of religious participation were found: non-attenders, early declining attenders, late declining attenders, gradual declining attenders, occasional attenders and frequent attenders. It was found that the majority of youth declined in religious participation during adolescence and into adulthood, including early, late, and gradual declining attenders. Both religious institution and family characteristics were identified as factors for this decline.

Parents and families play the most important role in youth participation in religious activities as well as spiritual development. Families that spend quality time together often contain fewer adolescent delinquents (Regnerus, 2003a; Smith, 2003). The relationships within families are also directly linked to the religiosity of youth and indirectly linked to presence of risky behaviors of youth (Regnerus & Burdette, 2006). Both mothers and fathers are known to influence their child's religious beliefs, experiences, and habits (Clark, Worthington Jr., & Danser, 1988; Regnerus et al., 2004) while fathers are noted being especially influential through transmission of their beliefs (King, 2003). Consistent attendance in worship and at activities is one way in which parents influence their child's religious beliefs by providing experiences with other families intending to develop the same beliefs (Lee, Rice, & Gillespie, 1997). Erickson (1992) discussed the presence of "mandatory" religious involvement for children and youth. While this type of involvement can be negative in nature, it can also be an extremely positive socializing agent. Eggebeen and Dew (2009) explained the denominational affiliation, church attendance, and religious fervor as factors in how adolescents develop beliefs for their future family formation. These explanations provide an understanding of how their parental figures influenced the roles they will play as they develop intimate relationships and become parents. Youth who experience religious involvement together with their families could be expected to

develop many of the internal developmental assets more easily as many religions promote these assets in their teachings.

Aside from influencing many of the internal assets such as many of the positive values (Hardy, Walker, Rackham, & Olsen, 2012), the religious involvement of youth can have positive effects on each of the four different categories of external assets (Search Institute, 2006). Assets affiliated with support in PYD develop through relationships with the other congregation members. This support could be informal or formal through mentoring relationships in a religious setting (Beam et al., 2002; Rhodes & Chan, 2008). “Empowerment” assets are encompassed in the congregation’s commitment to teach and encourage youth to serve others (Becker & Dhingra, 2001). “Boundaries and expectations” assets are seen through the adult role models who are present in the congregation. Involvement in religious activities for at least one hour per week promotes “constructive use of time” assets for youth (Search Institute, 2006). As religious involvement can intertwine itself in positive ways through all of the external categories of the Development Assets, it is apparent that religion can play an extremely important role in PYD.

Consistent religious involvement for adolescents contributes to many aspects of well-being. Adolescents who are involved with religious activity typically report lower levels of risky behavior, fewer mental health issues, and better physical health (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Cotton et al., 2006; Regnerus, 2003b). Delinquency appears to be lessened as religiosity increases (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Regnerus, 2003b). Depression is found to be less frequent for adolescents more consistently involved in religious activities (Cotton et al., 2005) and overall psychological well-being is also associated with higher levels of religious involvement (Aranda, 2008). Drug use is also prevalent at a much lower rate for adolescents with higher rates of

religious involvement (Amoateng & Bahr, 1986). A frequently discussed topic in many youth programs is sexual activity and prevention of teenage pregnancy (Brewster, Cooksey, Guilkey, & Rindfuss, 1998) as participation in religiously affiliated programs has been associated with delayed sexual activity (Burdette & Hill, 2009).

The potential influence of religious involvement in youth development is undeniable with the evidence that has been found. As more research ensues, the case for religion's part in PYD will likely become more prominent. However, many congregations are unaware of the overall effect they could have on adolescents if their programs were research-based. Therefore it is becoming increasingly important for congregations to have trained youth workers who can establish youth programming that is based on best practices and utilizes a PYD approach by applying research to the program design and implementation.

Youth Workers in Religious Institutions

Although 90% of congregations in the United States offer special types of programming or activities for youth (Dudley & Roozen, 2001), only 20% of the staff who coordinate, direct, or supervise these youth ministries are paid workers (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). This statistic explains that the majority of congregations support youth programming with volunteer workers. In a study by Search Institute, Roehlkepartain and Scales (1995) found that approximately 66% of the youth workers in religious institutions work only part time. These part time workers account for 32% of the paid workers and 90% of the volunteer workers (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). Of these paid and unpaid positions are four main types of youth workers: clergy, educators, professional youth workers, and volunteers. This study also addressed the amount of training each of these youth workers report. More than half of the volunteers reported having no training as a youth worker (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). The multi-disciplinary knowledge that is

needed to be a successful youth worker is amplified in religious institutions, due to the necessary knowledge in religious doctrine and spiritual development yet many of the youth workers in religious institutions are trained solely with religious focus (Kageler, 2010b). Therefore, the more disturbing statistic is the 46% of paid youth workers who reported having no training in youth development (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). To note the reality of this evidence, Jack and McRay (2005) also stated that most youth workers in religious institutions learn on the job without prior training.

When youth workers in religious institutions, particularly full-time paid youth professionals but also overworked volunteers, fully engage in their work with youth, high rates of burnout are reported which cause challenges for the congregation (Goreham, 2004). Kageler (2010a) addressed the many reasons that youth workers have high burnout rates in religious settings. The two main reasons are feeling isolated and conflict with the senior pastor or other staff. Unfortunately, feeling isolated is of great concern for most youth workers because the majority of congregations do not have enough youth to warrant more than one youth worker. However, recruiting more volunteers or partnering with other local congregations can address this.

Most congregations understand and address the need for youth-based activities. These youth activities can range from religious education to youth groups, camps to mission trips, or service projects or bands and choirs (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). Yet most congregations misunderstand the importance of the relationships with the adults as the most beneficial factor in building positive youth development assets. Ji and Tameifuna (2011) explained the significance of youth staff connecting with youth on a more personal level to offer support and model behavior. National Youth Development Learning Network (2004) outlined 10 specific qualities

that a youth worker should embrace: understanding principles, developing relationships, facilitating age appropriate activities, respecting diversity, empowering youth, identifying risk factors, involving families and communities, showing professionalism, acting as a positive role model, and asset building interactions with youth. While the first of these qualities listed as understanding basic youth development principles, developing positive relationships with youth is second. These relationships can be informal, but it may be beneficial for these youth workers to understand youth mentoring in order to have appropriate and highly effective relationships with the youth with whom they work. Rhodes and Chan (2008) examined the crossroads of spirituality and mentoring relationships. Adults involved in mentoring youth should be advised to follow the best practices that have been developed through ongoing research as it has been noted that negative outcomes can arise in contrast to the highly positive outcomes if some aspects of the relationship are not addressed. For example, the adult and youth must have consistency and longevity in their interactions (Rhodes & Chan, 2008). Regardless of whether the congregational youth worker is paid or unpaid, training or dispersing information and knowledge based on research to them is integral for their role in promoting positive youth development in the youth involved with their congregations to be successful.

CONCLUSION: “A CRASH COURSE FOR YOUTH MINISTERS”

Untrained or uninformed youth workers can be detrimental to youth development.

Unfortunately many youth workers in religious institutions strictly focus their programing efforts on fun fellowship activities or religious-teaching curriculums. This approach to religious youth activities does not utilize its potential to influence youth development in the adolescents involved in the program. If religious institutions can be and/or are an integral part of youth development, particularly PYD, the youth workers in these contexts must be prepared and informed to influence youth in positive ways. The structure and financial status of the vast majority of religious institutions prevent the hiring of full-time and fully trained youth professionals. Therefore focusing on how these congregations can train their staff appropriately is key to the success of utilizing religious involvement to promote positive youth development.

Roehlkepartain and Scales (1995) confirmed the need for youth workers to be trained and suggested ways in which this type of training could occur on a large scale for congregations with various types youth workers. In response to this need, this paper offers a “crash course” for youth workers in religious institutions to gain the necessary information to influence adolescents with PYD approaches to programing.

The purpose of this “crash course” is to establish a curriculum for training that fits the time and cost restraints that most part-time or volunteer youth workers have while still being relevant to full-time youth workers who have had little or no training in youth development. Compiling and utilizing the vast array of resources from each of the courses in the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance Youth Development Master’s degree program, this “crash course” (see Appendix) provides untrained religious youth workers (denoted as youth ministers regardless of denomination affiliation or ordination status) with the necessary

information and recommendations needed to successfully lead their congregation's youth program in correlation with the PYD approach. Driven by the available research on the 40 Developmental Assets and the 5 Cs of youth development, this "crash course" focuses on ways in which these two pieces of PYD can be integrated into religious youth programming. It is imperative that youth workers in religious institutions understand the goal of PYD and the avenues in which it is achieved. Many of the assets and Cs are directly provided or affected by family and community, so these two influences are focused on in the "crash course" after an overview of PYD is covered.

This "crash course" can be used in many ways. In an easy to read format with activities and reflection questions, it was written to be used as a self-study guide. Yet, it could easily be utilized in a group setting for a training session. Regardless of the setting in which the "crash course" is used, the videos within the text should be viewed to gain a broader perspective on the topic. Also, the reflections for the each section should be completed as a self-reflection but could be used for discussion with other youth workers. This "crash course" is intended to be a resource for religious institutions to provide for their new (or old) youth ministers to fully succeed in working with the adolescents of their congregation.

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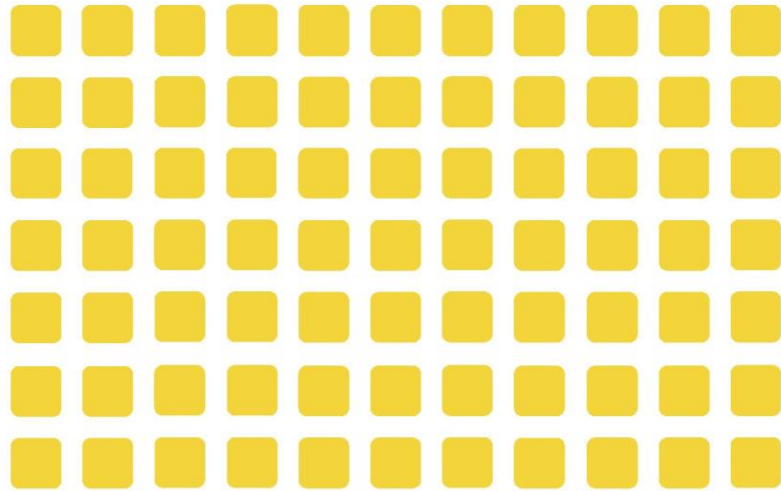
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APPENDIX



**positive
youth
development**

a crash course for youth ministers

Lynsey Rittenbach



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positive youth development

a crash course for youth ministers

Lynsey Rittenbach
NDSU Graduate Student
April 2014





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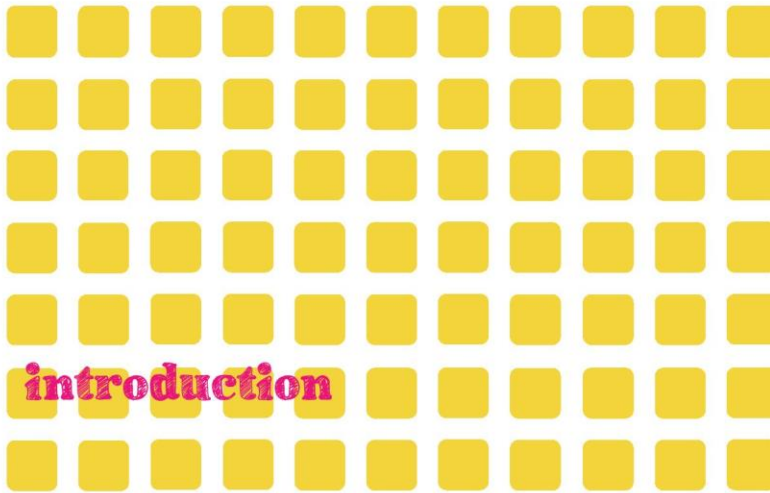




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Let us begin by addressing the term youth minister. All denominations label their leadership in different ways: pastor, leader, director, coordinator, deacon, priest, etc. For the purpose of this crash course, **youth minister** is defined as one in a leadership position who works with youth in a ministry setting regardless of denomination affiliation or ordination status. Youth ministers have an incredibly unique role to play in an adolescent's life. We have the great opportunity to connect with adolescents in ways that few people do through our youth ministry programs. Jason Gant says it best:

Youth ministry is a rip-roaring, staying-up-all-night, smelly-van, tear-filled-prayer, belly-laugh, caring-heart, listening-ear, goofy-song-motion, deep-

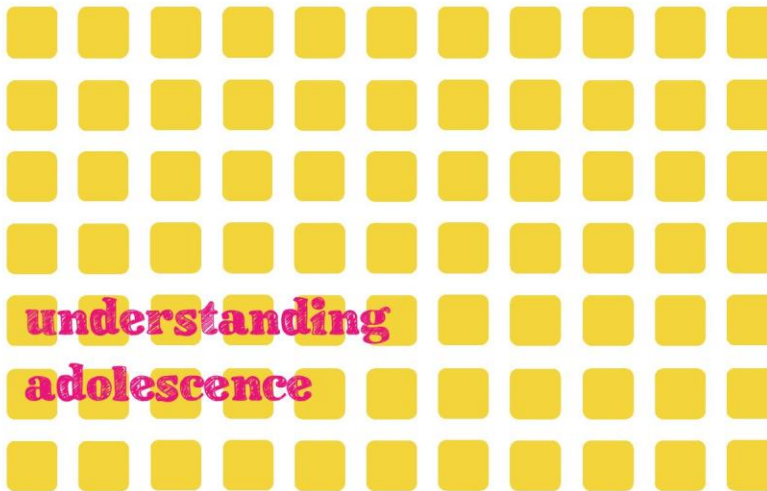




*question, strong-hug, water-balloon, late-night-worship, pie-in-the-face, exhausting, and exciting movement of the holiness of God through the heart, head, and hands of teenagers and the adults who love them!*¹

With this great opportunity comes great responsibility. Beyond religious teaching, we have the ability to influence adolescents' development of competencies that are indicative of adulthood. The vulnerability for all involved in youth ministry is remarkably high and can become detrimental to not only ourselves but also the adolescents if poor choices are made. Unfortunately, many of us acquire the role of youth minister without any prior training in youth development or youth work. This lack of knowledge in the complex field of youth development increases our vulnerability. Therefore, it is utterly important for us to familiarize ourselves with the basics of youth development. We are then able to understand our role as well as the role our congregations can play in the collaborative effort to successfully transition our adolescents into meaningful adulthood.





Adolescents are more advanced in brain function than children but are certainly not as advanced as adults whose brains have fully developed. This means adolescents are lacking abilities in areas such as rational decision making, future planning, and problem solving. As the brain develops during adolescence and into young adulthood, brain function becomes faster but less flexible and more rigid. A less flexible and more rigid brain makes it more difficult to learn new tasks. The experiences during adolescence greatly influence the development of the brain, utilizing a “use it or lose it” concept.


It is important for youth ministers to first be a role model of positive behavior for adolescents and second instigate experiences that will enable





adolescents to use their brain in ways that promote positive development of higher order skills such as rationalizing decisions and problem solving. Our understanding of cognitive and brain development should reflect itself in the types of program activities as well as the teachings we utilize.

watch this



*Sarah-Jayne Blakemore:
The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zVS8HIPUng

Cognitive neuroscientist and professor at University College London, Sarah-Jayne Blakemore speaks about the adolescent brain in this TEDTalks video.



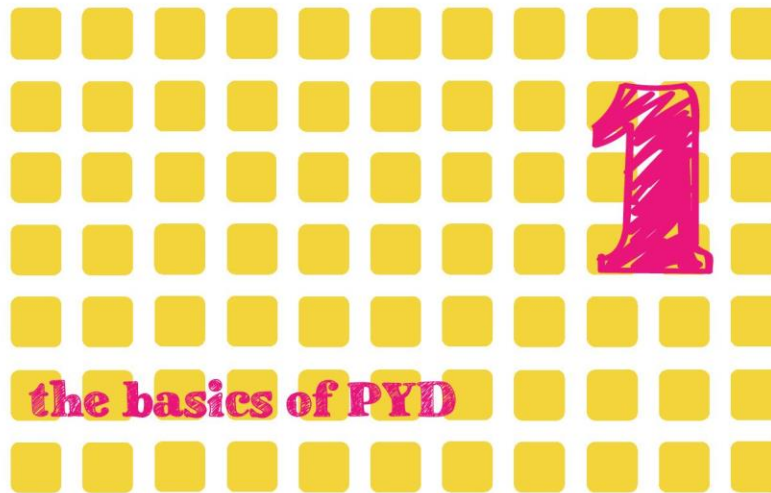


your adolescents

How does understanding Blakemore's discussion on cognitive development influence your interactions with your adolescents?

In what ways can you promote positive neurological processes during a time of synaptic pruning (use it or lose it, as Blakemore explained)?





The basic premise of youth development is for adolescents to gain autonomy or independence from their parents as they grow into adulthood. **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** is a holistic approach to supporting and encouraging this transition of adolescents into healthy adulthood that is focused on the strengths and assets rather than the problems of adolescents. As youth ministers, we have the opportunity to play an integral role in PYD endeavors. The Old Testament tells us to “train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”² This is exactly what PYD stands for: enabling adolescents to be successful in their ways as adults. However, we must understand PYD and the





research, theory, and practice that it includes in order to facilitate programming that supports it.

Youth development has many theories to explain the complexity of transitioning from adolescence into adulthood. Yet in recent decades, PYD has become the holistic approach to the trifold realm of research, theory, and practice of youth development. Prior to the debut of PYD, youth development programs often focused on rehabilitation of adolescents exhibiting problem behaviors. Prevention was another focus of youth development programs for at-risk adolescents. Although rehabilitation and prevention are key for these at-risk adolescents, if they are the primary focus of youth development programs then we are not serving the majority of adolescents. Eliminating problems will not prepare adolescents for successful futures nor will it engage them in their own development. The goal of PYD is for adolescents to thrive by providing a holistic, strengths-based approach to youth development programming that focuses on all adolescents as active participants in their own development while utilizing resources to encourage, train, and support them along the way.





While PYD is still a relatively new approach, ample research has surfaced to support its effectiveness and explore its complexity. Many experts in the field of youth development have participated in the process of bringing PYD to center stage and have contributed greatly to its development. Many entities such as Search Institute, 4-H, National Collaboration for Youth, the Forum for Youth Investment, and various research universities are actively researching and developing useful tools for youth development workers. Two of the main contributions of PYD research from these entities are the 40 Developmental Assets and the 5 Cs. Each of these contributions provide framework for understanding essential elements in youth development.

40 developmental assets³

Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN sparked the development of the PYD approach in the 1990s when they identified the **40 Developmental Assets** from an extensive survey reaching more than 4 million children and adolescents. These 40 assets consist of internal behaviors and skills that are considered to be a framework of healthy development for adolescents





but also external supports such as experiences and relationships. A full listing of the 40 Developmental Assets and more can be found at www.search-institute.org. Adolescents with more assets present in their lives are expected to have higher chances of success through adolescence and adulthood. We have the opportunity to directly (and indirectly) influence numerous internal and external assets for adolescents as youth ministers.

Internal assets are categorized into four groups: “commitment to learning,” “positive values,” “social competencies,” and “positive identity.” Many of these assets are traits, characteristics, or qualities that adolescents must learn to embody. Our opportunity for direct influence starts as we teach and instill competencies and values while promoting learning and identity development in our adolescents. Most religious teachings address and encourage all of the “positive values” assets of caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint. This makes promoting these assets natural and fluid in our programing.

As adolescents gain an understanding of the “positive values” assets and begin to incorporate them





into their lives, we are able to work with them to develop the “social competencies” assets of planning and decision making, interpersonal as well as cultural competence, conflict resolution, and resistance skills through interactions with our youth groups, both formally and informally. A “commitment to learning” can then be promoted within our groups as we encourage the importance of education and knowledge both in and out of the school setting. While a “commitment to learning” may be difficult to teach, our encouragement can be a key factor in their development of these assets: achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure. Our ability to promote their importance as well as showcase our own commitments to lifelong learning can greatly influence the adolescent mindset.

The “positive identity” assets can be encouraged and affirmed daily as we interact with our adolescents. Personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future are all integral assets for PYD as they are the core of the adolescent’s inner being. We can influence all of the internal assets in some way. As we familiarize ourselves with these





assets, we find ways in which we can teach, encourage, recognize, or affirm these assets in the adolescents of our youth groups.

External assets are categorized into “support,” “empowerment,” “boundaries and expectations,” and “constructive use of time.” These four categories can be applied to all religious youth programming, even if they are intended for other facets of adolescent life. “Support” assets include family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighborhood, caring school climate, and parent involvement in schooling. Perhaps the most easily applicable and influential of these assets as they pertain to religious institutions is that of other adult relationships. Youth ministers might be able to influence and encourage family support and communication, but most certainly have the ability to be an adult who provides support as well as recruits and trains other adults to be in supportive relationships with adolescents.

The “empowerment” assets are community values youth, youth as resources, service to others, and safety. These assets should be the mission of youth ministries. Congregations should value





adolescents and view them as resources within their religious community as well as provide a safe environment for adolescents to explore and question while they develop their own morals, beliefs, and identities. Adolescents in return affirm their role as resources by demonstrating service to others not only within the congregation but also in the greater community and world.

“Boundaries and expectations” are both terms that everyone must define for themselves throughout their entire lives. Establishing safe and appropriate boundaries in all aspects of life is an important task that adolescents must learn before entering adulthood. This asset category is broken down into family, school, and neighborhood boundaries, adult role models, positive peer influence, and high expectations. As youth ministers, we can be the adult role models of safe, appropriate, and positive behavior while we assist adolescents in setting boundaries for their own lives and promote adherence to the boundaries that are set for them. In doing so we are setting high expectations for our adolescents and encouraging positive relationships with not only peers but all people in their lives.





Finally, the most applicable grouping of assets for youth ministries: “constructive use of time.” These assets are creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home. Youth ministries are youth programs that often provide opportunities for creative activity such as interpretive dance, worship bands, or visual art projects and are a part of religious communities that encourage family time at home. Therefore, youth ministers play an extremely vital role in the “constructive use of time” assets for adolescents. It is imperative that programing be evidence-based to provide positive outcomes, include a variety of activities to establish creativity, promote family time at home, and be scheduled consistently with at least one hour of programing per week. Actively seeking ways to create programing that provides for and facilitates the development of external assets is a key part of a youth minister’s role in PYD.

While the 40 Developmental Assets are a framework of many influential factors that play an integral role in youth development, it may be overwhelming and difficult to remember or promote 40 different assets while working with adolescents and





dig deeper



Peter Benson—Sparks: How Youth Thrive

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqzUHcW58Us

The late Peter Benson, past president of Search Institute, discusses thriving in this TEDx Talks video through the idea of sparks and thriving indicators.

www.search-institute.org

The Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN plays an integral role in the ongoing research of youth development. Explore the website to learn more about what type of research is currently underway.





your assets

How would you explain PYD to someone who has never heard the term before?

What assets can you provide for adolescents involved in your youth group?

How can you utilize the 40 Developmental Assets in your programing to promote PYD?





creating sound programming for our youth groups. Along with the 40 Developmental Assets and other research in the field, the 5 Cs were identified as imperative in youth development. The 5 Cs offer another model that frame essential qualities in successful youth development in an easier to remember format.

the 5 Cs⁴

Through the collaboration of many experts, the PYD framework of the 5 Cs based on the concept of thriving emerged in recent decades and has been confirmed and supported through national, longitudinal studies. Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring/Compassion are labeled as qualities that should be present for an adolescent to thrive. These qualities are known as the **5 Cs of youth development** and provide the foundation for a sixth C, Contribution, to be present.

Competence is a loaded term intended to include numerous domains of an adolescent's life. School, work, social world, and cognitive activity are all relevant domains to discuss when assisting





adolescents in developing competence. An adolescent's abilities to perform actions or exhibit qualities that are appropriate for each of these domains is what measures their competency. For example, school or academic competence may be measured through grades or attendance record.

Confidence is marked by a personal, internal feeling of positivity and self-worth. Adolescents who exhibit confidence have a positive view of themselves and their abilities.

Connection refers to all of the relationships present in an adolescent's life, particularly ones of equal contribution between the adolescent and family, peers, and community institutions.

Character alludes to a moral being who understands and upholds social rules and norms and has integrity. An adolescent's character is shown in all hours of the day, but in the darkest moments true character is seen.

A **Caring** and/or **Compassionate** adolescent shows both sympathy and empathy for others, exhibiting emotional understanding. These traits are applied to other aspects of the adolescents' behavior,





often showing many of the other internal assets in the “positive values” category.

A sixth C is noted as **Contribution**.

Researchers believe that the presence of all 5 Cs may provoke a lifestyle that contributes to one’s self, family, and society. Contribution may include a servant mindset with a strong desire to seek social justice and equality.

Youth ministers can utilize the 5 Cs in many different ways to help promote PYD. Many organizations use them as part of their mission or vision to guide programing. For example, a group of adolescents from a Kwanzaa Church put together a video to better understand the importance of the 5 Cs they learn about in their group.⁵ Through creating the rap and video the adolescents are showing their own understanding of these qualities. The ideas and purpose behind the video are indicative of PYD and extremely useful for any youth worker to see.





your 5 Cs

How can you promote these 5 Cs in your program(s)?

COMPETENCE

CONFIDENCE

CONNECTION

CHARACTER

CARING/COMPASSION





Youth ministry programing should be well-thought out and planned to incorporate the components of PYD and utilize evidence-based practices for safety and success. The full process of programing starts with the design phase. Designing a program should involve a needs assessment which results in a focused mission statement. A **needs assessment** allows you to systematically determine unmet needs, to analyze possible solutions, and decide how to proceed. The first step is to identify the needs within our community. This can be done through observations or surveys. The unmet needs can then be analyzed in a brainstorming session to determine possible solutions to meet those needs. When the





identification and analysis processes are complete, we can decide which solution best meets the needs and develop both a vision and mission statement to guide our programing efforts.

After we have developed a vision and mission for our program, we brainstorm the services and/or activities that can be involved within the program. We must ask whether or not each of these services and/or activities specifically addresses our mission or provokes the results we desire with our vision. We must also consider what resources are available and what resources we may need to find to make the service and/or activity feasible. It is important to ensure we are thinking through the process of the program from planning to implementation to evaluation and holding ourselves accountable to the mission and vision of the program.

A key part to working as a youth minister is the ability to recruit and train other staff or volunteers to work with the adolescents in our youth groups. Other adults play an essential role in youth development programing. Mentoring, whether formal or informal is the way these adults can impact the adolescents which will be discussed in chapter 4.





people watch



Test Your Awareness : Whodunnit?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubNF9QNEQLA

This London commercial tests your observation skills. Observation can help you understand the needs within your congregation. Spend some time observing in your congregation, being mindful to jot down your observations. Pay close attention to the details of the interactions and behaviors of the families with adolescents. This helps with your needs assessment in developing a mission or vision.





your congregation

Jot down your “people watching” observations here. Make note of interactions, behaviors, attitudes, emotions, activities, etc. of multiple people from a variety of families:





mission and vision

Having a vision and a mission statement for our programing will help us to guide each of our decisions in our planning efforts. These statements offer a point of reference in planning and implementing program. If a particular piece of a program does not align with our vision and mission, we must evaluate either the program or the vision and mission. This is the case for beginning stages of planning as well as the stages of evaluation after programing has been implemented to ensure that the vision and mission are upheld and maintained as focus of the program.

A vision statement is a dream or an ideal that our congregations or youth groups can see for our programs. A mission statement, on the other hand, is the action toward the vision. It contains the what and the why of acting upon the vision of the congregation or youth group. The vision statement encourages our adolescents to dream of what can be and the mission statement encourages our adolescents to take action upon those dreams.





your vision

Prayerfully dream about youth ministry in your congregation. What dreams or visions do you see?

Develop a simply worded vision statement that includes your dream for your youth group.





your mission

Considering your dream session from the previous page, think about ways you may be able to take action upon the vision you created.

Develop a simple, concise mission statement that addresses the action needed to tackle your vision.





We know that working with adolescents involves and affects the entire family, but family can mean something different for everyone. Regardless of the meaning of family for any adolescent, the term **family** is universally known to include the deepest and most influential relationships a person is involved in. An important theory to understand when working with families is the **Family Systems Theory (FST)**. FST theory alludes to the complexity of the relationships, labeled as subsystems, within the greater family system. Any disturbance with a subsystem provokes a disturbance within the whole system.⁶ For example, as adolescents undergo difficulty in any aspect of their lives, this affects all





other subsystems such as parents and siblings as well as the whole family system in the spillover effect.

parents

As society has evolved and its inhabitants have affected its development, the definition of family has morphed to refer to many different situations. One subsystem within the family that has greatly changed in definition is the role of parent-adolescent relationships. Rather than the simple definition of biological mother and father, parent(s) within a family now refers to both biological parents, a single biological parent (including never married, divorced, separated, and widowed), step-parents, grandparents, and adoptive or foster parents (sometimes labeled guardians). This complexity makes it difficult for youth ministers to label family with a universal definition and approach all adolescents similarly.

Above and beyond the different types of parents, there are four different styles of parenting that influence an adolescent in many ways. These four styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and disengaged) are based on the level of responsiveness





your parents

List ways in which you can involve parents in your program. Be creative!

As you “people watched” your congregation, what particular gifts or talents did specific parents have that they could contribute to your youth group?





and demandingness a parent offers. This responsiveness and demandingness are more often referred to as warmth and control. The **authoritative** parenting style has high levels of both warmth and control. Adolescents exposed to this parenting style are often noted to have higher levels of responsible autonomy and social skills. **Authoritarian** parents are low in warmth but high in control. Adolescents in authoritarian households often struggle to develop independence and show passive behaviors. **Permissive** parents are characterized with high levels of warmth but low levels of control. Adolescents with permissive parents often show irresponsible behaviors and are more apt to give in to peer pressure. The **disengaged** parenting style portrays low levels of both warmth and control. Adolescents exposed to permissive parenting are often found to be impulsive and delinquent in nature.⁷

As adolescent behavior is directly affected by the parenting style used, it is important for youth ministers to understand these different styles and how an adolescent might behave in response. Particularly in youth ministry, we constantly involve parents in programing efforts. We can see patterns of





behavior between the parents and the adolescents. Seeing and evaluating these patterns can help us adjust interaction with different adolescents based upon their behavioral responses to their parents.

Despite the diversity in parenting styles and the different ways in which they affect our youth groups, it is important to involve the parents of our adolescents in ways that are fitting to them. Some parents may want to simply receive a newsletter to be current on information while others may want to be an extra chaperone at weekly events and others yet may want to provide food or help plan bigger events. Regardless, involving parents in our youth groups is a way for all adolescents to experience the role of caring adults (whether their own parents or those of other adolescents) in different ways which is an asset that is beneficial in youth development (see chapter 4).

siblings

Just as the societal definition of parent has changed over the years, so has the definition of sibling. Although not all children have siblings, it is important to note the influence that siblings have on





one another. The type of relationship that siblings have with one another can be affected by the relation: biological, step, half, foster or adopted siblings. It is worth noting that cousins also often play the roles of siblings in families. Aside from the relational aspect of defining a sibling, the age of the siblings can also influence their interaction and relationship with one another. Combining the relation and age of the siblings as well as the parenting style and situation, we can assume each sibling subsystem plays a specific role to all of the other siblings and subsystems in the family system.

Researchers have identified five types of relationships that adolescents play in relationships with their siblings: caregiver, buddy, critical, rival, and casual. A **caregiver** relationship is indicative of older siblings functioning as a parental figure for younger siblings. A **buddy** relationship is most common in similar-aged siblings where they function as friends. **Critical** relationships involve much conflict between siblings. The **rival** relationship portrays high levels of competition. **Casual** relationships are characterized by low levels of emotional attachment between siblings.⁸





your siblings

After reading about types of sibling relationships, utilize the information from your “people watching” observations to identify siblings within your congregation and the types of relationships they have with one another.





Each of these relationships factor into the role that the adolescent plays in the family system. If the adolescent is involved in mainly critical relationships with his/her siblings, it is fitting to assume that this adolescent may find conflict in peer relationships as well. This is an example of how sibling relationships can affect the adolescent's behavior in settings outside of the home, such as school or religious institutions.

Understanding adolescent relationships with siblings is important in more than one way. First, their role in sibling relationships affects their own behavior and interactions with others. It is to our advantage to understand the context of their learned behaviors to effectively respond to any problem behaviors that may arise during youth activities. Second, we may have the opportunity to work with siblings together in our youth groups if they are close enough in age. Understanding their relationship with one another will enable us to adjust programing to provide a healthy environment for all siblings. For example, if we have a pair of siblings who distinctly participate in a critical relationship, it may be beneficial to separate them during activities when possible. Siblings can both positively and negatively





affect youth development. We must utilize the knowledge of positive attributes of sibling relationships to promote positive development in the adolescents involved in our youth group.

the pseudo-family

Another way that the definition of family has changed throughout the generations is by its overused terminology. Adolescents use the term family to refer to many of their close relationships. Close female friends may consider themselves sisters because of their close bond. Youth group members who have spent years together in their religious institution may consider the group to be their “family” in many ways. This type of pseudo-family has an important role to play in PYD. When adolescents feel trusted and are trusting enough with others to consider them family, the relationships that have developed are extremely influential in the development of the adolescent. This is why youth groups play an integral role in helping youth thrive.

Many youth groups are based on authentic relationships with one another, not just between peers





but with youth ministers and other caring adults that participate in the ministry. Our congregations offer a wealth of potentially influential relationships that our adolescents can be involved with beyond the other youth members. We'll discuss some of the valuable resources in our communities in chapter 4.

According to FST, the family system is the most influential of systems in a child's life. Our interactions with some adolescents and their families may be a challenge until we are able to understand two subsystems in their lives: parent and sibling relationships. When we are able to view the adolescent's behavior as a conglomeration of responses to the other subsystem's influences, we are better able to adjust our interactions with them to positively affect their involvement in our youth groups and ultimately their development.





your family

In what ways can you facilitate a “family” atmosphere in your youth group (ex. Provide inclusive, safe environments)?

Many families include multi-generational components. Aside from mentoring, how can you build multi-generational components into your youth programming?





The phrase “it takes a village” is certainly credible as we study youth development. The village or community and its many contributors are an important part of the mesosystem of influences that play a role in youth development, especially within the PYD approach as can be seen through the 40 Developmental Assets from Search Institute. However, there are numerous communities within communities that may factor into youth development for our adolescents. We often think of the community as the city in which we live. Yet the people with whom we worship are also a community. The students, faculty, and staff of a school make another community. All communities play different and essential roles.





congregations

Our congregations are self-contained communities but are also a part of a greater community that influences youth development. A congregation has a wealth of resources available to the adolescent as a network of people with connections to the greater community. The more connected we are to our congregation, the more influential they can be in our adolescents' lives. Therefore, nurturing our own relationships and partnerships within our congregational communities is essential. We can open and maintain the positive connections between our congregation and our adolescents.

Aside from the indirect connections with the congregation through us, the members of the congregation can directly influence the adolescents by playing a key role in their lives through close, lasting relationships. Helping to facilitate and foster these relationships should be one of our goals as youth ministers as these relationships are part of the 40 Developmental Assets: "positive peer influence," "other adult relationships" and "adult role models" and one of the 5 Cs: Connection.





your congregation

List some of the resources your congregation has to offer your adolescents and your programs.

How can you promote interaction between your adolescents and the members of your congregation to instigate authentic relationships?





start a fan club



KFGO.com's NDSU Bison Fan Experience 2011

www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8WMKaoT8do

We have something to learn from the atmosphere of college football: how to be a sincere fan. Your adolescents are involved in a wide variety of activities. Take time to be their biggest fan. Attend games, concerts, plays, and competitions. To build community involvement, start a fan club of people who will go to various events with you and show their support of the adolescents in your youth group. Parents, siblings, grandparents, and other adults in the congregation may surprise you with the amount of support they have to offer the adolescents!





relationships

The interactions of close relationships within communities are amongst the most influential of relationships in an adolescent's life outside of the family system. Therefore it is the relationships that we have with the adolescents (and those that we can help facilitate within the congregation) that should be our focus. Alongside his/her family and teachers, youth ministers are highly influential as caring and trustworthy adults.

As noted above, relationships are amongst the most influential assets an adolescent can have in their developmental journey, particularly those with caring adults who can be a positive role model. The most common type of this relationship is informal in nature and happens naturally through interactions during congregational sponsored gatherings such as worship, meals, or service events. The interactions over time develop an informal relationship between the adolescent and a caring adult, but are often superficial in nature. However, we can instigate more intentional and formal relationships through the use of mentoring programs.





Widely circulated research within the field of mentoring comes in the form of six research and evidence-based standards for practice that are presented as recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and support, and closure.⁹ No matter what type of youth mentoring a program supports, it is essential that the best practices in the field are followed to ensure the safety and well-being of all people involved.

Along with the six standards that are presented, it is important for us to follow suggestions of research when it comes to effectiveness of relationships. Experts in the field make note that mentoring relationships must promote close bonds based on trust and care and also be long-lasting with consistent contact time. They also explain the importance of adhering to the best practices that are present by research. Ultimately, to uphold ethical standards, mentors are expected to promote safety, be trustworthy, have integrity, seek justice, and respect the rights of the young people.¹⁰

Finding adults willing to commit to formally mentoring adolescents can be difficult due to the extent of the commitment (as seen through the





evidence-based best practice of consistent contact over a significant period of time). Yet, research shows that personally asking someone to volunteer for such a task is generally related to higher levels of people volunteering in response to the personal request.¹¹

Many adults want to volunteer in some way but do not know where or how they can use their gifts of time and talent. Recruiting and training a group of caring adults to be mentors for our youth group can be empowering for both the adults and the adolescents involved as the deep relationships develop over time. However, it is important to keep in mind the vulnerabilities of the mentor and the mentee when establishing the program guidelines. We must investigate available literature to familiarize ourselves with best practices in mentoring prior to implementing such a program and exposing our adolescents and congregation members to such vulnerable settings.



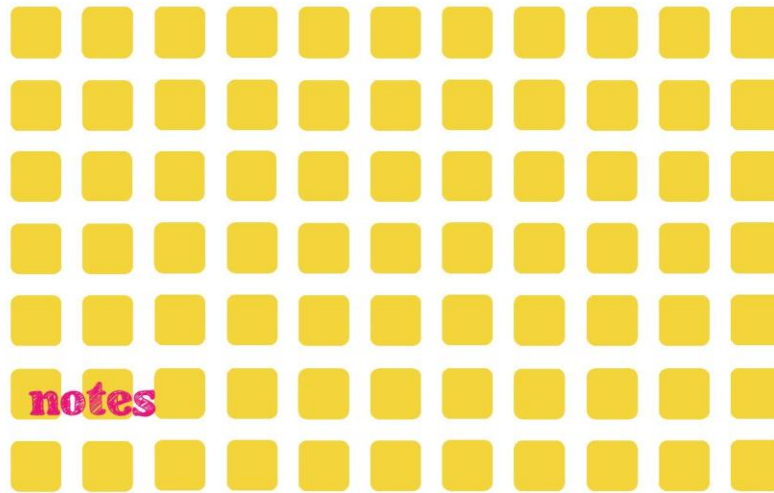


your mentors

From your “people watching” observations, who stood out as a good candidate that you could ask about mentoring adolescents?

Brainstorm ways in which mentoring could be a part of your regular programming in your youth group.





(1) Gant, J. (2008). *Youth ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

(2) Proverbs 22:6

(3) www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18

(4) Lerner, R. M. (2004). *Liberty: Thriving and civic engagement among America's youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

(5) www.youtube.com/watch?v=bH1CYEpc5lo
Kwanzaa Church ELP Productions





- (6) Cochran, M., & New, R. (2007). *Early Childhood Education : An International Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers.
- (7, 8) Arnett, J. J. (2010). *Adolescence and emerging adulthood: A cultural approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- (9) MENTOR. (2009). *Elements of effective practice for mentoring. 3rd edition*. Alexandria, VA: MENTOR.
- (10) Rhodes, J. L., Liang, B., & Spencer, R. (2009). First do no harm: Ethical principles for youth mentoring relationships. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40(5), 452-458.
- (11) Maton, K. I., & Sto. Domingo, M. R. (2006). Mobilizing adults for positive youth development: Lessons from religious congregations. In E. G. Clary & J. E. Rhodes (Eds.), *Mobilizing adults for positive youth development: Strategies for closing the gap between beliefs and behaviors* (pp. 159-175). New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media.

