QUALITY MATTERS TOOLKIT

Welcoming, Engaging and Encouraging

Learn. Grow. Lead.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
Extension

Quality Matters Toolkit

Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) Items: Supportive Environment

University of Missouri Extension and the 4-H Center for Youth Development have adapted this publication with permission from the University of Minnesota Extension.

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University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development delivers education, training, and professional development for adults who work with and on behalf of young people. Since 2000, the Extension Center for Youth Development has provided the latest youth development research and taught youth workers throughout Minnesota how to apply it in their work. The Extension Center for Youth Development is committed to expanding the knowledge and strengthening the practices of staff and volunteers who are committed to high quality youth development experiences for young people.

Attachments and resources

In addition to the staff meeting and training activities included in the Welcoming, Engaging and Encouraging Toolkit, the Extension Center for Youth Development has provided the following attachments and resources:

"Distinguishing Praise From Encouragement" — High/Scope's Youth Work Methods Series by Tom Akiva.

Gisela Konopka's Eight Basic Youth Needs, Proven Principles of Positive Youth Development and a Positive Youth Development Model-excerpts from Youth Work Matters series, YWI.

Welcoming, Engaging and Encouraging

Staff Meeting and Training Activities
YPQA Items: Supportive Environment

Three simple actions

Isn't it exciting to know that there are simple, cost-effective things that program staff can do to improve the quality of youth programs and positively impact outcomes for youths? This Toolkit provides activities and information designed to help you build environments that are supportive to young people by doing three simple things: creating a welcoming atmosphere; offering active, engaging opportunities; and supporting youths with encouragement. Each of the following sections include background information on one concept followed by a training activity.

A Welcoming Atmosphere — Introduction

A welcoming atmosphere is fundamental to positive youth development. The first few minutes of a session truly set the tone for continued positive interactions.

What does a welcoming atmosphere do for young people?

- Nurtures self-worth and acknowledges their presence has value to you and to the group: "I matter."

- Makes them feel known and recognized as individuals, like they're in "the right place"

- Connects them positively to a group or community

- Gives them a feeling of "instant ownership" of the space or offering

What does it do for the success of the session?

- Builds rapport with young people

- Creates a warm, respectful climate

- Sets the tone for active engagement, productivity and accomplishment

Activity — 15 minutes

In pairs, ask participants to share an experience where they went someplace for the first time and felt very welcomed — a store, a family gathering, a cruise ship, a new job. Ask for common themes between stories in large group. Record on flip chart. (Knowing names, focusing attention immediately, being curious about me, meeting immediate needs, introducing me to people)

Ask: How do we build these same elements into our program?
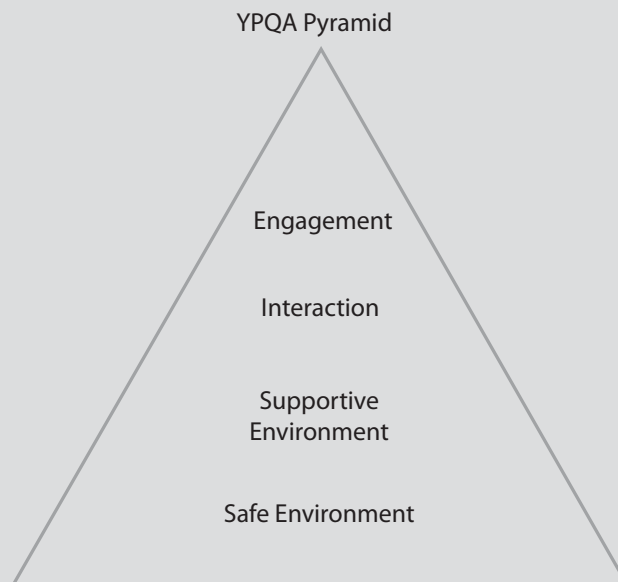
Practical Strategies

- Make the most authentically positive first impression possible.

- Reflect on your state of mind. Are you enthusiastic, preoccupied, irritable? Be honest with yourself.

- Smile, say "hi, ___," make eye contact with each youth as he or she enters. Make it a habit every day.

- At least once every session, acknowledge something specific and positive about each youth using his or her name.

- Initiate informal conversation when appropriate.

- Ask youths for ideas of how to help newcomers feel more welcome.

- Establish peer partners for newly enrolled youths.

- Have young people design their own autobiographical page for a community book; share with newly enrolled youths and ask them to contribute.

YPQA Related Indicator: Supportive Environment

All youths are greeted by staff within the first 15 minutes of the session.

During activities, staff mainly use a warm tone of voice and respectful language.

During activities, staff generally smile, use friendly gestures and make eye contact.

YPQA Pyramid

Engagement

Interaction

Supportive Environment

Safe Environment

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Active Engagement — Introduction

Children and young people learn best through hands-on experiences with people, materials, events and ideas. Motivation and learning increase when youths are actively engaged.

Active engagement is a process:

- First, young people are attracted to a particular activity based on a variety of factors.

- Second, their attention is sustained over a period of time, as they have meaningful experiences with people, materials, ideas.

- The final result is positive youth development: they build skills, consider ideas, work collaboratively, etc. Who they are or how they are equipped changes through engagement.

Why is it critical to quality?

Young people learn best when they use not only their minds but also their physical skills and energy. Youths thrive when given opportunities to work with materials and tools and to engage in tasks that push them to their learning edge.

How can you tell youths are actively engaged?

- Consistent participation

- Positive effects and interactions

- Oblivious to time passing and desire to continue even after set end time

- Willingness to try new things, take risks, fail or make mistakes…because they are "just havin' a good time"

- Acceptance of others and their contribution

What are some common barriers to active engagement?

- Inadequate planning time

- Insufficient materials for all youths to get engaged

- Disruptive contextual factors

- Lack of active engagement in staff

YPQA Related Indicator: Activities Support Active Engagement

The bulk of the activities involve young people engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials or ideas or improving a skill through guided practice.

The program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products or performances that reflect ideas or designs of young people.

The activities provide all youths one or more opportunities to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others.

The activities balance concrete experiences involving materials, people and projects (e.g. fieldtrips, experiments, interviews, service trips, creative writing) with abstract concepts. (e.g. lectures, diagrams, formulas).

YPQA Pyramid

Engagement

Interaction

Supportive Environment

Safe Environment
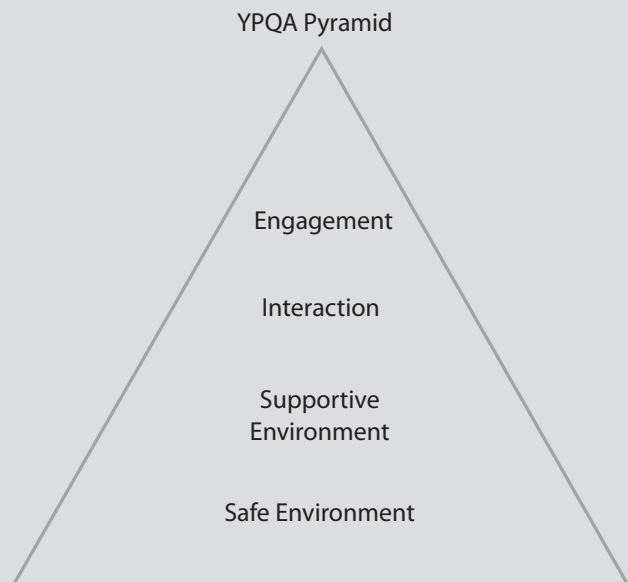
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Active Engagement Activity — 45 minutes

Setup

- Arrange furniture for pairs or small groups.

- Put workshop title on an easel or dry erase board. Below, list the elements of the Session Plan.

- On a large sheet of paper, draw a large hand print and post it to the wall. Be sure you have more large sheets of paper and markers for the activity.

- On a large sheet of paper, write "Top Ten List for Actively Engaging Youths."

- Write each indicator for the YPQA Item: Active Engagement and post them on the wall for reference during activity.

Remarks and introductions

Welcome attendees by name (if possible) as they arrive for session. (Re)acquaint the group with the YPQA Item and specific indicators the session will address (Supportive Environment: Activities support active engagement).

Ask participants why hands-on activities work so well in engaging youths? Write their ideas inside the large hand print on the easel or dry erase board. Supplement from your own experience.

Activity

Ask: Line up against a wall based on how many years you have been in the field of youth development.

Break group at midway point in line and match up the most veteran with the last person in the professionally "younger" group.

Have pairs work together to generate their best ideas in response to this:

Identify a few examples of your best work… times when youths were highly engaged in an activity?

List each idea on a large sheet of paper.

Have the pairs choose their best, most unique and potentially the most useful idea to the group.

Give them 10 minutes to creatively "tell the story" of that activity from a youth perspective. Instruct them to illustrate not only the activity but the youth reaction.

Practical Strategies to Promote Active Engagement

- Engage young people with materials or ideas like everyday science experiments; using math to solve real life problems; or youth issue debates where youths agree on an issue for debate, get into teams, decide on positions, prepare, debate and critique their performance.

- Provide opportunities for products and performances that reflect youth ideas: talent shows; debates; health, resource, employment fairs; musical or dance performances; history shows; oral reports; music productions; poster contests; cook-offs; "drives" of food, art supplies, school supplies; or other service learning projects.

- Provide opportunities to talk about what they are learning: daily reflection process; peer question and answer periods; "Be the Expert" — encourage youths to volunteer to talk about their newfound expertise on a topic; Peer Partners (to share discoveries, findings and learning).

- Balance concrete experiences with abstract concepts: Provide daily "community" time prior to the activity to discuss general issues, raise concerns, problem-solve; community garden planning project (measuring and planning balanced with digging and planting); service learning project (reading and interacting with children, then reflecting on the experience); lecture on electricity and then have the youths build several different circuits.

Reflection

Debrief the activity. Ask: How was that activity? Were we engaged? How could you tell? Any barriers for you personally? For the group?

Debrief the content. On a flip chart, post "Top Ten List for Actively Engaging Youths." Ask: What are the common threads across the activities and stories we just heard about? What do we need to keep in mind about strategies for promoting active engagement?

Supportive Encouragement — Introduction

High/Scope defines encouragement as giving young people positive attention and motivating them without using praise.

In youth development work, we are trying to build or improve intrinsic motivation. We want young people to see the value in who they are and be proud of what they do. We want them to want to do more because it feels good inside!

Extrinsic motivation involves young people performing for an external reason, such as a prize incentive, higher grade, or verbal praise. These commonly used strategies can actually have a negative impact on the building of intrinsic motivation. Praise makes the power shift to the adult; judgment is passed and the youth's internal voice is quieted.

Here are some practical strategies that contribute to a supportive and encouraging environment:

- **Be actively involved** in participant's program experiences. This builds rapport and trust and aids in the development of relationships with other caring adults.

- **Ask open-ended questions** that explore subjects in different ways. This is an effective way to learn about their lives and helps youths feel understood and valued. Work with them to apply their understanding.

- **Use specific, non-evaluative feedback to increase internal motivation.** "You played both hands together!" or "What were the steps you completed to finish this project?" or I notice that you used both color and texture to create your sculpture."
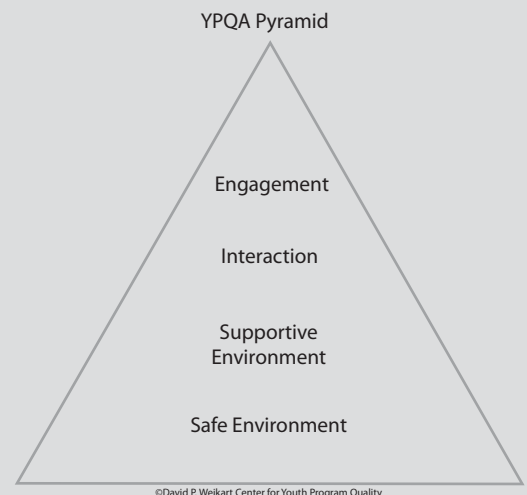
Consider what happens in your setting…

- Have you or other staff used praise or rewards with young people?

- What are the consequences for youths and adults when praise and rewards are used frequently?

- Give specific examples of what praise sounds like in your setting.

- What rewards have you used?

- When you see or hear encouragement (vs. praise) with young people, how do they react?

- What do you imagine would happen if you used encouragement frequently?

- What are longer-term outcomes in a program culture that actively supports young people with encouragement?

YPQA Related Indicator:
Staff Support Youths with Encouragement

During activities, staff are almost always actively involved with youths (e.g. they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individual or small groups).

Staff support at least some contributions or accomplishments of young people by acknowledging what they've said or done with specific, non-evaluative language (e.g. "Yes, the cleanup project you suggested is a way to give back to the community").

Staff make frequent use of open-ended questions (e.g. staff ask open-ended questions throughout the activity and questions are related to the context).

YPQA Pyramid

Engagement

Interaction

Supportive Environment

Safe Environment

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Supportive Encouragement — Introduction (continued)

Alternative to praise

Setup

- Divide participants into groups of two to four.

- Distribute "Distinguishing Praise from Encouragement" Handout (2007 High/Scope Educational Research Foundation).

- Prepare ahead of time: Three to five written scenarios with adults praising young people for their achievement.

Warm-up

Have a recorder for each group note P or E for each statement on handout, determining if the statement is Praise or Encouragement.

Scenarios

Learning to praise less often is easier if there is a clear alternative. Below are scenarios in which adults used praise to provide students with positive feedback.

Distribute one scenario card to each group. For each scenario, ask participants to explain why the adult's response may be problematic for the student and suggest an alternative response. Give groups 10 minutes.

1. In a quilt-making workshop, Brent is the first person in the group to complete his design. It is quite complex, involving a variety of geometric patterns.

    Adult: "I really like the way you designed your quilt."

2. In a drama workshop, youths have taken a fairly passive role, looking to the adult for ideas and suggestions. Finally, Lakiesha speaks up and suggests planning a skit around the issue of racism.

    Adult: "That's a great suggestion, Lakiesha."

3. In the middle of a strenuous community service project cleaning a vacant lot, Dave suggests the group pick up its mood by singing some songs while working.

    Adult: "You have such a great attitude, Dave."

Identify and record alternative responses.

Ask small groups to return to the larger group, briefly share scenario, problematic nature of feedback and three alternatives that were identified.

Reflection

Debrief by asking:

Think of the type of feedback you get from coworkers or your supervisor. Is it evaluative or non-evaluative?

Is feedback important to you? If so, do you see yourself feeling differently depending on the nature of the feedback: external praise or supportive encouragement?

What is the type of feedback you give to participants most frequently?

What will you take away from this activity? Anything you will do differently?

Additional resources

- YPQA Form A completed by your Quality Matters coach or consultant

- High/Scope training materials

- "A Questioning Toolkit" (Toolkit 4) from the From Now On Educational Technology Journal: *http://www.fno.org/nov97/toolkit4html#anchor218129*

- "Tools of encouragement" by Cyc-Online: *http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0205-encouragement.html*

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Practical Strategies to Support Youths With Encouragement

Stay actively involved

- Provide clear directions
- Answer questions promptly
- Work with one team or group; perhaps rotate
- Check in with individuals

Use specific and non-evaluative language

- Encourage young people to describe their plans, what they have in mind.
- Ask them what their goal is.
- Acknowledge their work and ideas by making very specific comments as you talk to them.
- Comment on the level of detail in their work.
- Point out different colors, shapes, designs they've used.
- Wonder out loud what their project might look like in its next phase.

Use open-ended questions

- "How" is a great open-ended question word!
- Who contributed to your design, plan or project?
- How did you resolve that problem?
- What about that was inspirational to you?
- What was that experience like for you?
- Describe what you see.
- What is your rationale?
- What makes you think that?

Ask — Listen — Encourage

- **Ask** effective questions.
- **Ask** questions with depth and variety.
- **Ask** and care about the answer. Remember body language!

- **Listen** actively to build trust and show you value what they have to say.
- **Listen** with your heart to identify feeling components.
- **Listen** and ask questions to make sure you're understanding.

- **Encourage** youths to describe their work.
- **Encourage** youths to recognize their own gifts and talents.
- **Encourage** youths to learn how to give specific feedback to peers.

Three indicators staff are supporting young people with encouragement:

- Staff are almost always involved directly with young people.
- Staff use specific non-evaluative language.
- Staff frequently use open-ended questions.

Do You Praise or Encourage Young People?

Do you make comments to young people like "Good job," "Way to go," "Nice work" or "I like the way Molly is paying attention right now"? If so, you are like most adults who work with young people. Most of us have probably made statements like these for years. We may have even received training in how to praise. Praise is an adult evaluation of young people's opinions, ideas and efforts. However, there are some tremendous disadvantages to praise.

Here is a sampling of what researchers and child development experts say about praise and reward environments:

"Students frequently try to read or check the teacher's eyes for signs of approval or disapproval. Praise lowered student's confidence in their answers and reduced the number of verbal responses they offered."

Rowe, M.B. (1974). Relation of wait-time and rewards to the development of language, logic and fate control. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 11(4), p. 292.

"Some students are particularly adept at pulling praise from teachers by smiling or beaming proudly, showing off work and even communicating an expectation of praise. This praise, however, may have a negative effect such as diminishing a child's sense of worth and struggle for independence."

Brophy, J.E. (1981). Teacher praise: A functional analysis. Review of Educational Research, 51 (1), p. 27.

"To judge at all implies superiority and takes away from the children's power to judge their own work. Such praise is not conducive to self-reliance, self-direction, or self-control. To the child, if the authority figure can judge positively, they can also judge negatively."

Ginott, H. (1974). Teacher and child. Boston, MA: Macmillan, p. 93.

"Children praised for intelligence preferred to find out about the performance of others on the tasks rather than to learn about new strategies for solving the problems, even when these strategies might have improved their future performance."

Mueller, C. and Dweck, C. (1998). Praise for Intelligence Can Undermine Children's Motivation and Performance. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 75 (1), p. 48.

"Praise can actually lessen self-motivation and cause children to become dependent on rewards. Praise may be useful in motivating students to learn by rote, but it may actually discourage problem solving."

Martin, D.L. (1977). Your praise can smother learning. Learning, 5(6), p. 51.

"The most notable aspect of a positive judgment is not that it is positive but that it is a judgment. Older children and adults may hear praise as condescending, as a reminder of (or an attempt to bolster) the greater power of the person giving it."

Kohn, A. (1993). Punished by Rewards. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, p. 102.

Do You Praise or Encourage Young People? (continued)

Adults praise young people with the best intentions. We want our young people to feel good about themselves. But in the long term, praise can have the opposite effect. Praise sets up a dynamic in which the adult evaluates the youth. Power shifts to the adult. Even though an evaluation may be positive, it is an evaluation. Judgment is passed.

The good news is you can give kids positive attention without using praise. This strategy, we call it encouragement, can help motivate young people and help them to feel good about themselves and their efforts. Encouragement is the act of being involved with young people, asking questions, listening and participating with them. Showing that we care and are paying attention, encouragement avoids the disadvantages of praise.

It's important to recognize the difference between praise and encouragement. The key is whether a statement judges a youth or the youth's actions, ideas or accomplishments. If it does, the statement is praise.

To help determine whether a particular statement is a praise statement, consider these criteria:

	Encouragement	Praise
Evaluation	Are we helping a youth evaluate him or herself….	Or are we evaluating a youth?
Self-determination	Are we helping a youth feel a sense of control over his or her life, make his or her own judgements, and choose what kind of person to be….	Or are we manipulating his or her behavior by causing her or him to wonder whether he or she has met our criteria?
Intrinsic motivation	Are we creating conditions for a youth to become more deeply involved in what he or she is doing….	Or encouraging him or her to try to win our approval?

Encouragement Strategies: Fostering Internal Motivation

Encouragement promotes the development of internally-based motivation in that it focuses on the youth's efforts, plans and feelings rather than those of you, the youth worker. It removes the external motivation that comes from reward systems and the judgment or pleasing behaviors that come from praise-based interactions.

So, how do you encourage young people?

Participate with youths. Work side-by-side with young people. Become a partner in the learning process by following their lead, experimenting with the materials they are using and exploring the problems they are attempting to solve.

A group of young people is learning about the bone structure of humans and birds. They plan to assemble models of a human arm and a chicken wing. You sit down with them and join in the conversation they have begun about how to hold the bones together, saying, "What if we tried…"

Encourage young people to describe their plans, efforts and goals. The goal is to have the youth, rather than the adults, evaluate their work. If a youth's self-confidence is to be enhanced through the learning process, she needs to be able to recognize and articulate her own accomplishments. One way to facilitate this is to ask open-ended, divergent questions:

- Who will be involved in your project?

- How did you build this model of a volcano?

- How will you continue to develop and improve your poem?

- What happened when you tried that new way of handling conflict at school?

Acknowledge a youth's work and ideas by making specific comments. You can encourage a young person to describe and expand his or her ideas by making specific, objective comments about the work as you talk. The following kinds of comments provide necessary adult acknowledgment without being judgmental. These comments are simple but the real effect is to encourage the youth to do the talking:

- I see that you have listed all these details that will go into the event.

- You used lots of different colors on your volcano.

- You've found ways to use alliteration at several points in your poem.

- It sounds like it worked out well when you and your classmate started to disagree about whose turn it was.

Distinguishing Praise From Encouragement Activity

Determine whether each of the following statements is one of praise or encouragement. Then place a P or an E in front of each statement. If the statement is a praise statement, rewrite it to make it a statement of encouragement.

_____ 1. "I like the way Luis always is cleaning up."

_____ 2. "Good idea, Pat."

_____ 3. "I notice that you used both color and texture to create your sculpture."

_____ 4. "Stephanie, what a great painting!"

_____ 5. "You worked together to solve that math problem."

_____ 6. "How did you decide what method to use to conduct this experiment?"

_____ 7. "I like the way you included other group members in your plans."

_____ 8. "Very good, Sara — you included homework time in your schedule."

_____ 9. "Great job, freshmen!"

_____ 10. "What were the steps you took to complete this project?"

Alternatives to Praise Activity

Learning to praise less often is easier if there is a clear alternative. Below are descriptions of some situations in which adults have used praise to provide students with positive feedback. Under each description, explain why the adult's praise may be problematic for the student and suggest an alternative response.

1. In a quilt-making workshop, Brent is the first person in the group to complete his design. It is quite complex, involving a variety of geometric patterns.

> Adult: "I really like the way you designed your quilt."

2. In a drama workshop, youths have taken a fairly passive role, looking to the adult for ideas and suggestions. Finally, Lakiesha speaks up and suggests planning a skit around the issue of racism.

> Adult: "That's a great suggestion, Lakiesha."

3. In the middle of a strenuous community-service project cleaning a vacant lot, Dave suggests the group pick up its mood by singing some songs while working.

> Adult: "You have such a great attitude, Dave."

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Alternatives to Praise Activity (continued)

4. Kareem shows a staff person the painting he made during the morning art program. The piece is very abstract and full of color.

>   Adult: "Good job!"

5. During an academic enrichment session on applied geometry, Louisa spends much of her time helping Sharonda come up with a project idea and planning the first couple of steps.

>   Adult: "You are an excellent teacher, Louisa. Thanks!."

6. During a group project on politics, Bill keeps asking the staff for approval during each step of the process: "Don't you like this idea? Do you think this will be better than last you're project?"

>   Adult: "That is a great idea, and I expect you will surpass last year's group by a long shot!"

Excerpts from High/Scope's Youth Worker Methods Series by Tom Akiva.

What Happens in Your Setting Activity

1. When do you see or hear adults using praise or rewards with young people?

2. What are the consequences for young people and adults when praise and rewards are used frequently?

3. Give specific examples of what adults say and do when using praise or rewards.

4. When do you see or hear adults use encouragement with young people?

5. What are the consequences of using encouragement frequently?

6. Give a specific example of when encouragement has been used.

Youth Development Model

The problem-focused approach

- Prevention and intervention as the method of working with young people

- Focuses on a problem

Intervene

Prevent
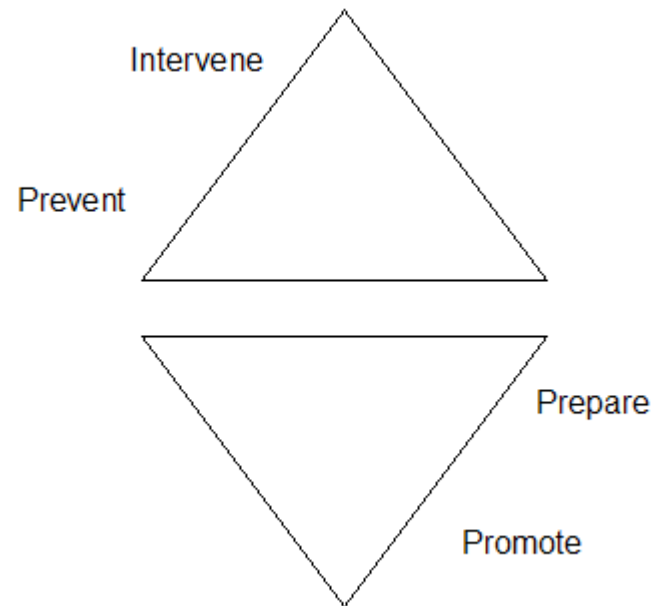
Prepare

Promote

The developmental approach

- Prepare and promote as the method of working with young people

- Focuses on supports and opportunities

- Young people seen as resources

Basic Youth Needs

- Feel a sense of safety and structure

- Experience active participation, group membership and belonging

- Develop self-worth through meaningful contribution

- Experiment to discover self, gain independence and gain control over one's life

- Develop significant quality relationships with peers and at least one adult

- Discuss conflicting values and form their own

- Feel pride of competence and mastery

- Expand their capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible

Adapted from:

Konopka, G. (1973). Requirements for healthy development of adolescent youth. Adolescence 8(31), 2-25.

Pittman, K.J. and Wright, M. (1991). A rationale for enhancing the role of the non-school voluntary sector in youth development. (Commissioned for the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.) Washington, D.C.: Center for Youth Development and Policy Research.

Proven Principles of Positive Youth Development

Youths do youth development

- It is young people who actually do youth development work, or growing from youths into adults

- Adults prepare and promote young people for this process

An asset-based approach builds on the positive protective factors in a young person's life

- Begin with the understanding that young people are full of potential and possibility rather than broken

- Work to prepare and promote rather than prevent and intervene

- Acknowledge and understand the context in which young people live (family, community, etc.)

Basic youth needs are fundamental to our work

- Youth needs must be taken into consideration from the beginning and throughout the process of planning and doing programs

Context is critical

- Young people come from varied families and communities, all of which provide different situations, opportunities and supports

Caring adults provide support to youths

- Caring adults support young people in their development — guide, coach, listen, share, advise

- Caring adults are the number one factor in healthy youth development