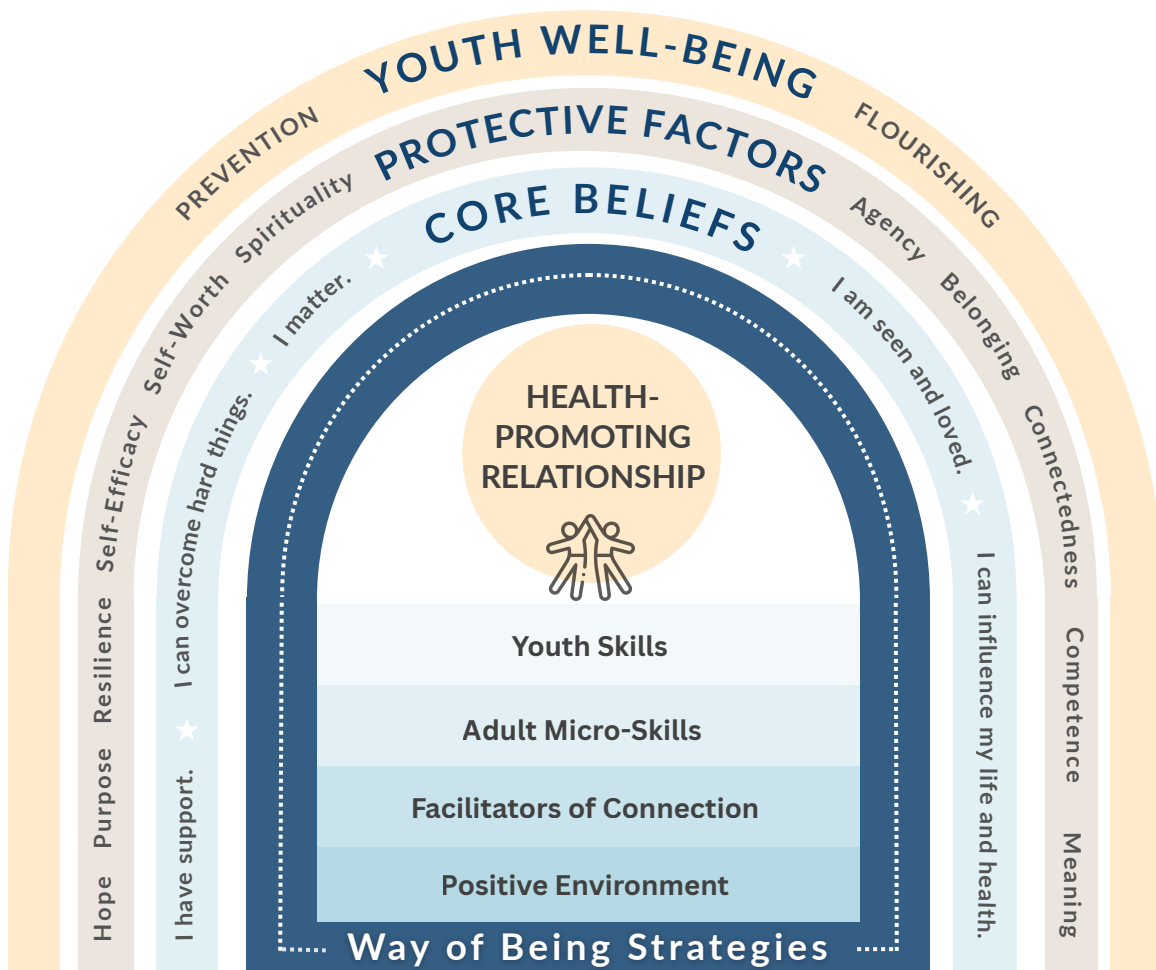


HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS PARADIGM TOOLKIT

Cultivating Protective Beliefs in Youth Ages 11-18
through a "Way of Being"



Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm



ABOUT

The purpose of this toolkit is to operationalize and support the application of the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm**. This paradigm describes a fundamental “way of being” in relationships that can cultivate protective beliefs in youth ages 11-18 to prevent mental and behavioral health risks and promote flourishing.



CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

- The Child & Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
- Center for Behavioral Health Integration, LLC



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was prepared by *A Division for Advancing Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT)* at the Washington/Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) in collaboration with Dr. Christina Bethell of the *Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative* and Dr. Jody Kamon of the *Center for Behavioral Health Integration*. ADAPT would like to extend a special thank you to Heather Ariyeh for co-designing the paradigm visual and to our many external contributors and reviewers who generously shared their time and expertise, providing unique perspectives and examples to support the translation of the science on relationships into practice.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| • Heather Ariyeh | • Rebecca Hoffman | • Beth Shrader |
| • Rebecca Bates | • Tiffany Jones | • Alicia Stromme-Tobin |
| • Miles Bonny | • Robert LaChausse | • Amy Syvertsen |
| • Bobbie Boyer | • Hanno Petras | • Win Turner |
| • Lee Anne Dodge | • Craig PoVey | • Jonathan Weiner |
| • Rick Frost | • Linda Richter | • Keith Weis |
| • Alexis Ganz | • Nathaniel Riggs | • Elizabeth Weybright |
| • Ashley Hall | • Amy Ronshausen | • Jenny Wood |



DISCLAIMER

This project was supported by Grant #G23WB0004A, awarded by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of National Drug Control Policy or the United States Government.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

All material within this document is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from the authors with appropriate citation of this source.

Recommended reference: A Division for Advancing Prevention and Treatment. Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm (Toolkit): Cultivating Protective Beliefs in Youth Ages 11-18. Published October 29, 2025. <https://www.hidta.org/adapt/prevention-intervention-resource-center/>

Publication #: PBT25-011-05

Release Date: October 29, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Orientation to the Health–Promoting Relationships Paradigm	04
▶ Glossary of Terms	09
Protective Beliefs	10
Way of Being	12
▶ 1. Create the environment.	13
▶ 2. Facilitate connection.	14
▶ 3. Engage micro–skills.	20
▶ 4. Develop skills in youth.	29
Reaching the Full Potential of Relationships	40
▶ Individuality and Background	40
▶ Beyond the Individual: Applying the Paradigm across Systems of Influence	45
Playbooks	48
▶ Parents and Caregivers	53
▶ Educators	55
▶ Coalitions	57
▶ Law Enforcement and Justice System	59
▶ Healthcare Professionals	61
▶ Coaches	63
Sharing Health–Promoting Relationships with Others	65
▶ Main Messages	66
Assessments	67
▶ Facilitators of Connection	67
▶ Micro–Skills in Trusted Adults	68
▶ Organizational Self–Reflection & Planning Tool	69
References	72
About ADAPT	79



ORIENTATION TO THE HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS PARADIGM

This toolkit illuminates the power of relationships to promote youth well-being. A *simple truth* about relationships is that we need them to be mentally and physically well.¹⁻³ Humans are biologically wired for social connection to fulfill basic needs, and adequate social connection is essential for well-being. A *quiet truth* about relationships, however, is that fostering meaningful connection and positive relationships is a skill that requires intrinsic motivation, self-awareness, intention, and life-long commitment to growth.

One of the most important types of relationships youth can have is with trusted adults, who can have a profound impact on positive youth development and well-being.⁴ Many factors that prevent harmful behaviors in youth and promote protection and flourishing in youth can be cultivated through their relationships with trusted adults. Having at least two adults who take genuine interest in the life of a youth is one positive childhood experience among seven that, when combined with at least two others, boosts resilience and reduced rates of depression, substance use, delinquent behavior, and risky sexual behavior.^{5,6} The experience of supportive, trusted adult relationships has been also shown to promote resilience and mitigate risks such as mental and physical health challenges following adversity.^{7,8}

Trusted adults are chosen by youth as safe figures that listen without judgment, agenda, or expectation, but with the sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a person's life. They can be anyone and often possess qualities such as being nonjudgmental, a good listener, honest, reliable, vulnerable when appropriate, and consistent in how they show up for youth. Trusted adults also offer clear boundaries and limits to youth and are willing to help youth exercise their agency and work through issues in their own way.⁹

At the core of trusted adult relationships with youth lies human connection, and how this connection is experienced can have a powerful influence on youth development.¹⁰

A “**health-promoting relationship**” is a way of being with youth that *enables* their healthy development and well-being by cultivating protective beliefs. This specific approach to relationships is 1) intentional towards the outcomes of health and well-being and 2) offers a means to reach those outcomes by enabling youth to increase control over, and to improve, their health.¹¹ A health-promoting relationship between a trusted adult and youth serves as both an intervention and a pathway for delivering other interventions. Take a moment and consider the notably vast number of evidence-based programs, practices, and policies that require a health-promoting relationship to achieve their outcomes!

The **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** is a conceptual framework that offers an organized way of thinking about how trusted adult relationships with youth can help youth ages 11-18 achieve and maintain well-being as they grow and develop to reach their full potential. The paradigm represents a **way of being** for trusted adults in their relationships with youth and describes an approach for cultivating core protective beliefs in youth using four intentional strategies:

Way of Being

1

CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT. Trusted adults can create an emotional and physical environment for youth by paying attention to both tangible and intangible influences such as emotional tone, norms, goals, values, standards, expectations, role modeling, culture, and sensory elements like music or artwork – i.e. the environment is the overall experience you create to set the stage for health-promoting conversation or activities.

2

FACILITATE CONNECTION. Facilitators of connection are factors that should be incorporated as part of the approach to building, or “facilitating”, strong connection with others. Trusted adults can enhance their ability to connect with youth by leaning into connection facilitators such as self-awareness, patience, respect, full presence, humility, authenticity, nonjudgment, and honesty in their moments with youth.

3

ENGAGE MICRO-SKILLS. Trusted adults can use small, specific actions and communication strategies, such as full presence, curiosity, and activating agency, to strengthen connection and activate protective beliefs in youth.

4

DEVELOP SKILLS IN YOUTH. When youth feel connected to a trusted adult, they are more receptive to learning and applying new skills. Trusted adults can be mindful of building or reinforcing protective skills in youth through planned or spontaneous opportunities.

ORIENTATION TO THE HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS PARADIGM (CONT.)

Growing into a *way of being* in health-promoting relationships that builds genuine connection and strengthens protective belief systems begins with YOU, the trusted adult. To bring your most authentic and connected self into your relationships with youth, trusted adults must be willing to gain self-awareness, do their own healing work, and intentionally release qualities and behaviors that don't match their values and beliefs. Doing so will support you in embodying the language (both verbal and nonverbal), attitude, and ways of being strategies as you take on a health-promoting approach.

Intended Audience

The intended audiences for this toolkit are prevention professionals and other trusted adults who routinely engage with youth ages 11-18 and are interested in making the most of their relationships with youth to help prevent mental health and behavioral risks and promote flourishing.



Examples of the intended audience include a variety of trusted adult roles such as parents/caregivers, educators, police and school resource officers, coaches, mentors, and religious or spiritual leaders.

Development of the Paradigm

The **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** was developed with the purpose of synthesizing relationship science to bring attention to the vital components of adult-youth relationships that are needed to promote youth well-being. As with all tools developed by ADAPT, a systematic approach was used to gather information for the paradigm. This ensures all feasible forms of input and feedback from experts from the field were considered and align with the current state of the science. This toolkit was developed to support users in applying the paradigm's approach to health promotion through relationships. All resources and references were selected based on their evidence, relatability, usability, and feasibility.

Key resources informing the paradigm and supporting material include:

- *Protective Factors for Adolescent and Young Adult Substance Use by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*¹²⁻¹³
- *Developmental Relationships Framework by Search Institute*¹⁴
- *Positive Childhood Experiences*^{5*}
- *Social Emotional Learning*¹⁵
- *Family Resilience and Connection Index*^{16*}
- *Measures of Flourishing*^{17*}
- *Protective Factors Against Delinquency by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*¹⁸
- *Measurement scales for all protective and flourishing factors used in the paradigm.*

*Research by Dr. Christina Bethell

While these resources span developmental stages, they overlap in their inclusion of the 11-18 year old period of development. While many of the concepts within this toolkit apply across developmental stages, the focus of this toolkit, and resulting examples and strategies shared, focus in on youth ages 11-18.

The **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** is a relational prevention approach that focuses on the broader outcome of well-being through enhancement of trusted adult relationships. The approach emphasizes widespread application by any trusted adult to promote positive youth outcomes across social and environmental contexts. Health-promoting relationships are not considered a standalone prevention strategy. Rather, they are recommended as a foundational component that can complement and enhance prevention activities within a comprehensive prevention strategy.

Learn more about Developing a Comprehensive Community-Based Prevention Strategy [**HERE**](#).

ORIENTATION TO THE HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS PARADIGM (CONT.)

How to Use This Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to support people trained in the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** by helping them to identify opportunities to enhance connection with youth, inform activities that will strengthen and sharpen skills within trusted adults to support youth well-being, and promote a culture of youth well-being in the systems where they live and work. Guidance for trusted adults who want to mobilize their relationships with youth to foster the outcomes of protection, prevention, and flourishing is provided; therefore, even for those new to the paradigm, the strategies shared can be used.

Each section of the toolkit presents strategies for achieving these outcomes with considerations for one-on-one, group, and organizational-level application. The first two sections identify core protective beliefs and the four-part way of being described above to support you in creating a positive environment, facilitating meaningful connection, developing micro-skills (i.e., core competencies in how we show up and engage with youth that support youth health and well-being), and supporting youth in recognizing and building their own set of skills to reinforce protective beliefs. Remember to continue 1) considering the type of environment you are creating, 2) connecting meaningfully, and 3) and using your micro-skills as you help youth focus on skill-building!

Additional information to support personal development and the application of toolkit strategies can be found in later sections of the toolkit. These sections describe how to help health-promoting relationships reach their full potential, scale toolkit content beyond individual application, and assess your ability in connection and micro-skills. A final playbook section at the conclusion of the toolkit offers ideas for how to bring toolkit content to life for specific roles. Concrete starting points for creating the physical and emotional environment, having conversations, and growing as individuals and organizations are presented.

Collectively, the toolkit is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide for trusted adults who have received training in the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm**. However, it is also designed to provide effective strategies that align with the paradigm that any trusted adult or prevention professional can incorporate into their existing prevention activities. We recognize that application of the paradigm's components can be strengthened through ongoing training. **Subscribe** to ADAPT's listserv to stay informed about upcoming trainings and additional resources to support your application of the paradigm.

It is not expected that the reader will review the toolkit all at once and have learned all the content. Rather, we encourage you to review the material, focus in on sections that you have identified can best support you in advancing a health-promoting approach with youth, and routinely come back to the toolkit as a reference tool and guidance for additional strategies that may be useful to you.

Getting Started

The following page lists steps you may choose when learning and applying the contents of this toolkit. These steps are not designed to be sequential or to address all the domains of the paradigm at once. For example, you might focus on one aspect for a "deep dive" into understanding a skill-building domain and later return to the toolkit to repeat the process with other aspects, or consider how you might apply the paradigm beyond individual interactions to organizations, agencies, or systems. As with any "toolkit", you are encouraged to select the best-fitting tool for the task at hand by leveraging your lived experience and professional insights while attending to the needs of the youth and the contexts in which they and your relationships with them exist.



Steps for getting started include:

- 1 Orient yourself to the health-promoting relationships paradigm and why it matters.
- 2 Reflect on your current mindset, skills, and relationships with youth and identify opportunities for development.
- 3 Plan how you will integrate health-promoting strategies (creating the environment, facilitating connection, using micro-skills, and supporting skill development in youth) into those relationships.
- 4 Share what you've learned and help others take action, too!

The figure below visually depicts the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** as consisting of five critical components starting from the bottom center and moving outward. All are described in more detail on the next page.

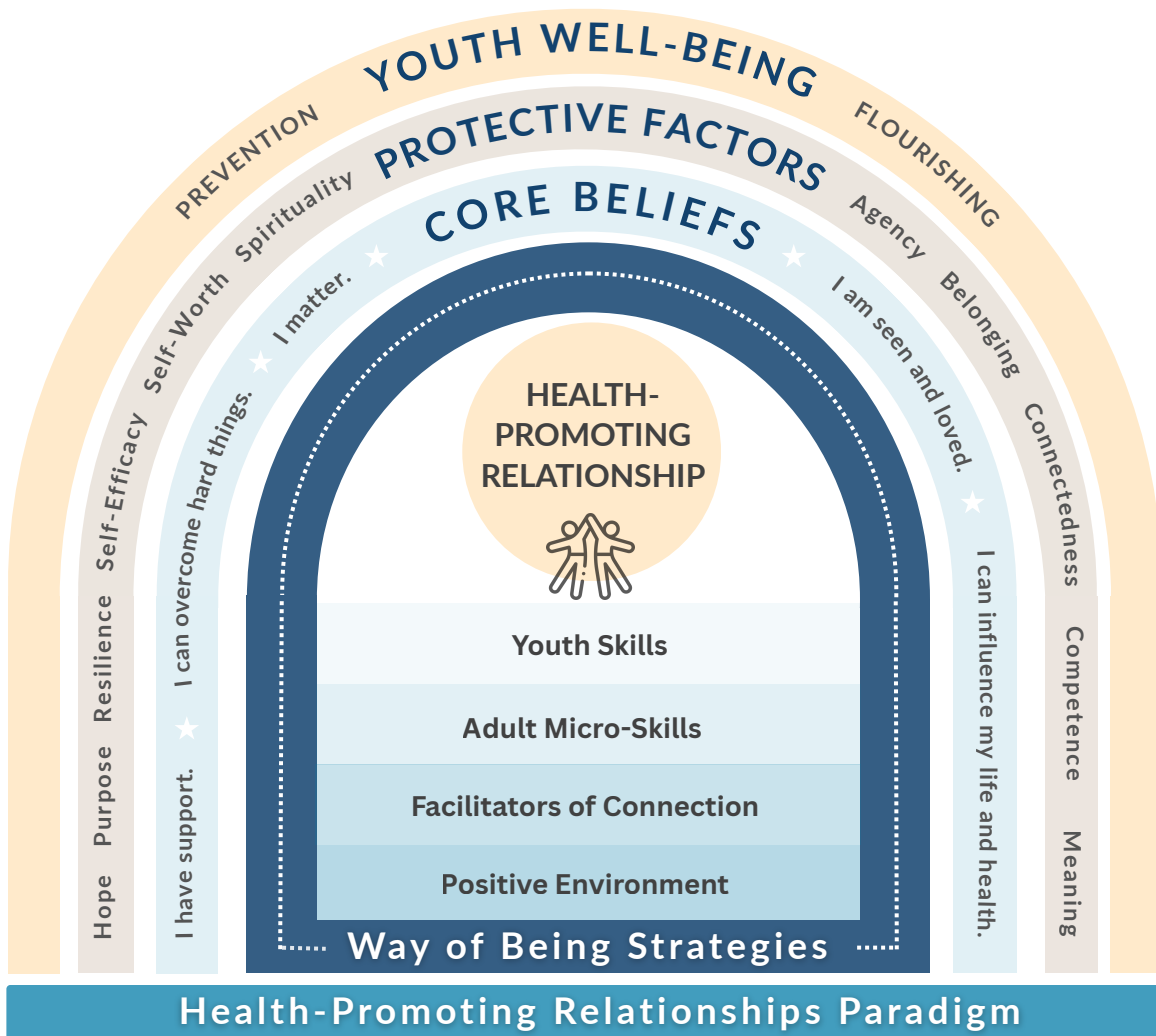
1. WAY OF BEING STRATEGIES

2. HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIP

3. CORE BELIEFS

4. PROTECTIVE AND FLOURISHING FACTORS

5. PREVENTION, FLOURISHING, AND WELL-BEING



The five components of the paradigm are described in more detail below:

1 WAY OF BEING STRATEGIES

1. Create the environment.
2. Facilitate connection.
3. Engage micro-skills.
4. Develop skills in youth.

Through creating the environment, facilitating connection, and engaging micro-skills, adults can foster trust – the belief in the reliability, truth, and strength of others¹⁹ – which is essential for nurturing meaningful, supportive relationships and engaging youth in developing skills to cultivate well-being

Facilitators of Connection

Authenticity, Care, Empathy, Full Presence, Honesty, Humility, Kindness, Love, Nonjudgment, Nurturance, Patience, Respect, Self-Acceptance, Self-Alignment, Self-Awareness, Vulnerability

2 HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIP

At the heart of the paradigm is a powerful assertion – Health-promoting relationships are essential for shaping healthy youth development. When intentionally nurtured, they can create the conditions, behaviors, and supports that both protect against adverse outcomes and actively foster young people's ability to thrive. Therefore, the relationship itself is beneficial to the youth and serves to deliver other interventions that promote well-being.



3 CORE BELIEFS

Through trusted relationships as a foundation, youth can develop protective beliefs (what they hold to be true about themselves).²⁰ These more immediate outcomes of health-promoting relationships can all be learned and reinforced within relationships, serving as the “means” of positive development and vehicles for growth and resilience. The beliefs in this paradigm resulted from a synthesis of the best available evidence for 1) substance use, mental health, suicide, and violence prevention in youth and 2) flourishing in youth.

Core Beliefs

1. I am seen and loved.
2. I matter.
3. I can influence my life and health.
4. I can overcome hard things.
5. I have support.

5 PREVENTION, FLOURISHING, AND WELL-BEING:

Ultimately, this process leads to long-term outcomes of prevention, protection, and flourishing and culminates in youth well-being – the paradigm's ultimate goal. Well-being is defined as a holistic experience of health, happiness, meaning, and resilience – the result of relationships that are intentionally cultivated through connection, trust, and the development of beliefs and skills.²³

4 PROTECTIVE AND FLOURISHING FACTORS

Protective beliefs give rise to protective and flourishing factors such as self-worth and resilience. These intermediary outcomes act as buffers against risks¹²⁻²¹ and help reduce the likelihood of harmful behaviors like substance use, suicide, delinquency, and violence.^{12,18,21,22} At the same time, they promote positive development across physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and relational domains.¹²⁻¹³

Protective and Flourishing Factors

Agency, Belonging, Competence (Cognitive, Behavioral, Emotional, Moral, Social), Connectedness, Hope, Meaning, Purpose, Resilience, Self-Efficacy, Self-Worth, Spirituality

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS PARADIGM

- 1 **Health-promoting relationship:** a way of being with youth that enables¹¹ their healthy development and well-being by cultivating protective beliefs and skills
- 2 **Way of being:** how we approach life and relationships within any given moment or context. A way of being in health-promoting relationships is how we show up and interact with youth to enable them to be well by cultivating core protective beliefs. It is comprised of four intentional strategies: create the environment, facilitate connection, engage micro-skills, and develop skills in youth.
- 3 **Facilitators of connection:** core qualities that foster meaningful human connection.²⁴ Definitions for each facilitator of connection can be found [here](#).
- 4 **Micro-skills:** concrete actions and communication strategies trusted adults can use to strengthen connection and activate or reinforce protective beliefs
- 5 **Belief:** something one holds or considers to be true²⁵
- 6 **Well-being:** a holistic experience of health, happiness, meaning, and resilience²³

PROTECTIVE & FLOURISHING FACTORS

- 1 **Agency:** having the capacity and power to influence one's life to produce desired effects²⁶
- 2 **Belonging:** the feeling of being accepted and approved by a group or by society as a whole²⁶
- 3 **Competence:** the ability to exert control over one's life, to cope with specific problems effectively²⁶
- 4 **Connectedness:** being in a close emotional relationship with others²⁷
- 5 **Hope:** the expectation that one will have positive experiences or that a potentially threatening or negative situation will not materialize or will ultimately result in a favorable state of affairs²⁶
- 6 **Meaning:** the extent to which one's life is experienced as making sense, as being directed and motivated by valued goals, and as mattering to the world²⁶
- 7 **Purpose:** the reason for which something is done or for which something exists, a mental goal or aim that directs a person's actions or behavior, persistence or resolution in pursuing such a goal²⁶
- 8 **Resilience:** the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands²⁶
- 9 **Self-efficacy:** an individual's subjective perception of their capability to perform in a given setting or to attain desired results²⁶
- 10 **Self-worth:** an individual's evaluation of themselves as a valuable, capable human being deserving of respect and consideration²⁶
- 11 **Spirituality:** a sense of interconnectedness, belief in a higher power, or involvement in spiritual practices or religious activities¹³

OTHER TERMS

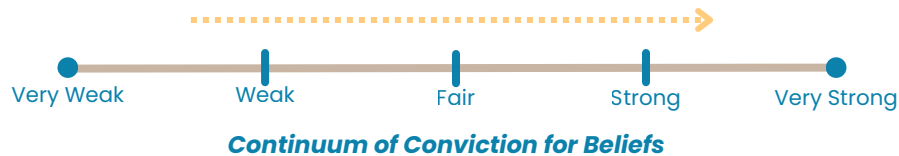
- 1 **Safeness:** A subjective feeling of emotional and psychological security and comfort

PROTECTIVE BELIEFS

Every interaction with youth is an opportunity to shape their beliefs about themselves, others, and the world around them. Health-promoting relationships serve as pathways that allow trusted adults to take intentional, active steps toward cultivating protective beliefs.

It is important to have a basic understanding of how beliefs are formed to fully appreciate the opportunities for trusted adults to cultivate these beliefs in youth. Exposure to a new belief triggers several processes as we determine how to integrate this new perspective. First, our brain takes in all the relevant information associated with that belief. This includes the sensory information and memories activated by that belief, our social context, and the perceived personal relevance of the belief. With this information, our brains then interpret the meaning of the belief, evaluate its relevance and credibility, and decide whether to accept it. During this process, new beliefs undergo intense scrutiny against pre-existing beliefs, meaning they are put on trial to determine if they are consistent with beliefs already held and if they seem reasonable. This process of belief integration highlights that beliefs are not static but rather continuously updated through interactions with the environment and social context.²⁸ Trusted adults can create positive environments, model healthy behaviors, engage micro-skills, facilitate meaningful connections, and foster skill development in youth to help youth build or reinforce protective beliefs. Neglecting these opportunities can unintentionally cultivate negative beliefs or simply do nothing and be a missed opportunity, especially if the youth does not have many trusted adults in their lives investing in them in similar ways. Attentive and deliberate interactions ensure adults are actively shaping beliefs that support youth's long-term development and well-being.

The table on the next page introduces the five core protective beliefs found in the literature to promote youth well-being when held with strong conviction. Each belief exists on a continuum of conviction (how strongly they hold the belief to be true) ranging from very weak or nonexistent to very strong or firm. Through health-promoting relationships with youth, trusted adults can mobilize them to advance further along the individual continuum for each belief, helping them to progress from "I can be..." to "I am..." as they strive to actualize each belief. This is done through meaningful connection, using micro-skills in everyday interactions, and supporting skill development in youth – all of which affirm and reinforce that these beliefs are indeed true. The synergy among these components helps youth advance along each belief continuum.



In addition to the core protective beliefs, the next table lists common interrelated beliefs related to the core belief. These interrelated beliefs represent components of the core belief and may serve as building blocks toward full embodiment of each belief. The third column in the table denotes the protective and flourishing factors shown to contribute to the development of the beliefs. Key takeaways on the function and impact of cultivating protective beliefs within the context of health-promoting relationships include:

- 1 The five core beliefs represent a fundamental belief system that protects youth in the context of risk, prevents harmful behaviors, and promotes flourishing.
- 2 All core beliefs exist on a continuum of strength within each individual youth.
- 3 We as trusted adults can aspire to cultivate these core beliefs in youth and equip them with skills, thereby enabling their ability to be well.
- 4 Natural opportunities to cultivate protective beliefs in youth include 1) creating a positive physical and emotional environment, 2) engaging facilitators of connection and micro-skills in conversations, 3) seizing spontaneous or planned opportunities to foster skill development, and 4) prioritizing growth as individuals, families, and organizations.

Table: Core Beliefs, Interrelated Beliefs, & Protective Factors

CORE BELIEFS	INTERRELATED BELIEFS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
I am seen and loved. <i>By others, self, and higher power</i>	- I am safe to show myself. - I am respected. - I am cared about. - I can trust you with my truth. - I am accepted for who I am. - I like who I am even with my challenges. - I have people in my life that enjoy being with me even when I am struggling. - I believe in myself. - I have people in my life that believe in me. - I am worthy. - I am loved unconditionally. - I am capable of being seen and loved through faith in myself and a higher power. - My faith is a source of strength for me. - I have a purpose in life. - I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful. - I feel like I belong. - I feel connected with others.	- Agency - Belonging - Competence - Connectedness - Hope - Meaning - Purpose - Resilience - Self-efficacy - Self-worth - Spirituality
I matter. <i>To self and others</i>	- I am worthy. - I am capable. - I am needed. - I have something to offer. - I add value. - I feel valued. - I am taken seriously and treated fairly. - I have people in my life that rely on me for help, support, or advice. - I matter <i>just because</i>.	- Belonging - Competence - Connectedness - Purpose - Self-efficacy - Self-worth
I can influence my life and my health.	- I have a purpose in life. - I see possibilities for my future. - I can grow and succeed. - I am responsible for my actions. - I have goals for myself. - I have choices. - I am confident I can take charge of my life. - I am aware of my own strengths. - Learning is important to me. - I can learn from mistakes and setbacks. - My past experiences will help me in the future. - I have people in my life that create opportunities for me to take action and lead.	- Agency - Competence - Connectedness - Meaning - Purpose - Resilience - Self-efficacy
I can overcome hard things.	- When things are hard, I can find strength and hope in myself, others, and a higher power. - I can think of ways to get things in life that are important to me. - I can come up with many ways to solve a problem. - I am capable. - I can learn from mistakes and setbacks. - I can manage my emotions. - I have coping skills to use no matter what comes my way.	- Competence - Hope - Resilience - Self-Efficacy - Spirituality
I have support.	I have people in my life that... - Help me grow, succeed, and reach my full potential. - Believe in me. - Recognize my efforts and achievements. - Guide me through hard situations and systems. - Watch out for me and stand up for me when I need it. - Connect me to people who can help me grow. - Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. - Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.	- Connectedness - Competence - Hope



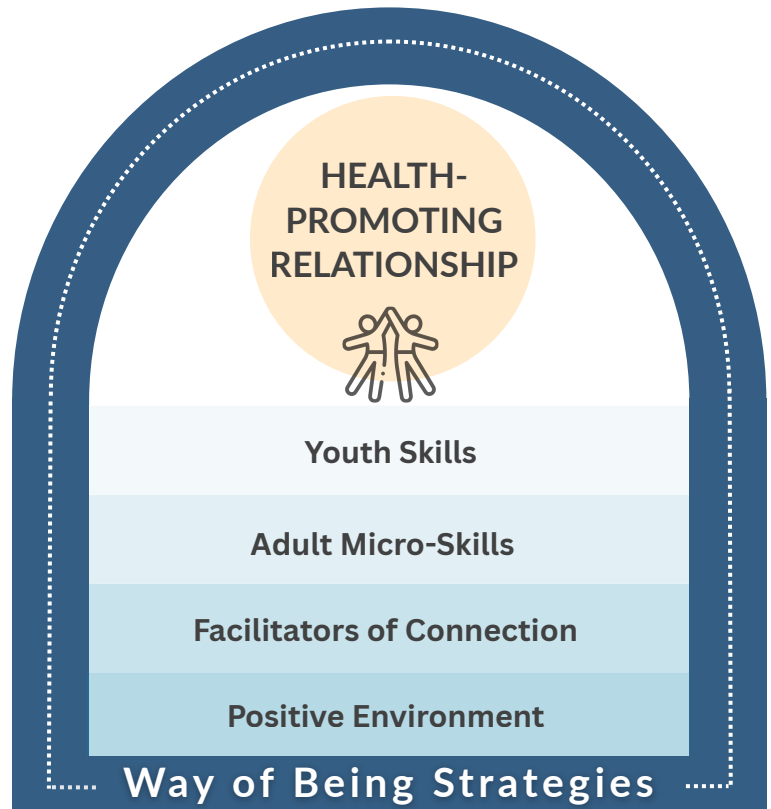
WAY OF BEING

A **way of being** describes how we approach life and relationships within any given moment or context. A *way of being* in health-promoting relationships is how we show up and interact with youth to enable them to be well by cultivating core beliefs that form the foundation for lifelong protection and flourishing. This *way of being* is best characterized by **intention** towards four specific strategies. Embodying this intentional *way of being* with youth enhances a trusted adult's ability to build the trust and safeness necessary to understand youth needs, respond in personalized and meaningful ways, and propel youth towards well-being.

The following four strategies comprise the intentional *way of being* in health-promoting relationships:

1. **Create the environment.**
2. **Facilitate connection.**
3. **Engage micro-skills.**
4. **Develop skills in youth.**

By creating the environment, trusted adults set the physical and emotional tone that conveys belonging, possibility, and opportunity. By facilitating connection, they intentionally embody respect, authenticity, empathy and other qualities that open the door to trust. Through engaging micro-skills, they use small but powerful actions (i.e. curiosity, reflective listening, and empowering language) to deepen dialogue and activate protective beliefs. Finally, by developing skills in youth, they intentionally guide young people toward building resilience, self-regulation, and agency.



When practiced together, these four strategies form a coherent and intentional *way of being*, a presence that consistently nurtures protective factors and reduces risk for substance use, violence, mental health challenges, and suicide. This integration reflects the understanding that prevention is not a single act, but a continuous, intentional process embedded in how adults show up, listen, and respond in the lives of youth. Below are four *way of being* questions one can reflect on before and during interactions with youth:

1. ***What messages does the physical and emotional environment I am creating convey to youth?***
2. ***How am I facilitating connection with youth today?***
3. ***What small, intentional words or actions am I using with youth to cultivate protective beliefs?***
4. ***How am I seizing or creating opportunities for youth to learn or practice skills that build or reinforce protective beliefs?***

1. Create the environment.

What message does the physical and emotional environment I am creating convey to youth?

The environment around us communicates what is valued and what is possible. Every space sends messages through words, tone, rhythm, and even silence. The way a room feels, how adults respond, and the culture that is modeled all shape whether youth feel safe, valued, and capable. Creating the environment is not just about decoration or comfort but about intentionally designing experiences that cultivate the five core beliefs.²⁹

Trusted adults can create an emotional and physical environment that sets the stage for health-promoting relationships. This involves attention to both tangible and intangible influences, such as emotional tone, norms, goals, values, standards, expectations, role modeling, and sensory elements like music or artwork. When the physical and emotional environment communicates calm, respect, and stability, it promotes belonging and growth, and an increased likelihood youth will engage positively and adopt positive social and health behaviors, especially when combined with other prevention efforts.^{30,31}

Below are several considerations for creating a health-promoting physical and emotional environment for youth:

Shape the physical environment with purpose.

Tangible elements such as space, structure, and sensory design, can communicate safeness, belonging, and that youth preferences matter.

- Keep areas organized, well-lit, & predictable. Structure builds trust.
- Display youth-centered visuals: photos, affirmations, shared goals.
- Integrate music, color, art that reflect community identity & calm.
- Involve youth in co-creating the space - naming rooms, choosing décor, or organizing materials.³²

Establish an emotional tone and norms that create safeness.

The emotional tone adults set (calm, patient, and respectful) shapes how youth regulate their own emotions.

- Begin each day or meeting with a warm acknowledgment: "I'm glad you're here."^{30,32}
- Model emotional honesty and repair. Admit mistakes and apologize.³²
- Create group norms together and revisit them regularly.
- Celebrate small wins publicly to build a shared sense of pride.

Model and reinforce core values through everyday actions.³⁰

- Model self-regulation and empathy under stress. How you respond becomes the lesson.
- Ensure all voices are heard. Encourage quieter youth to share.
- Frame mistakes as opportunities for growth and self-compassion.^{30,33}
- Reflect organizational values and standards in how rules are enforced and how people are treated.³³

Foster a culture of voice, choice, and contribution.³⁰

- Invite youth into decision-making about projects, activities, or group goals.
- Offer choices that matter to the youth.³⁰
- Recognize acts of leadership, creativity, and kindness, not just compliance or performance.
- Celebrate examples of youth influence to reinforce agency.

Set expectations and standards that build resilience.³²

- Use language that communicates the belief: "I know this is hard, and I know you can do it."
- Break challenges into manageable steps, coaching youth through each phase and in managing frustration.
- Normalize setbacks as part of growth. Replace 'failure' with 'feedback'.
- Encourage peer collaboration so youth experience resilience collectively.

Embed support into everyday interactions.

- Be present and observant. Notice small changes. Check in with care.
- Create rituals of connection (morning check-ins, gratitude rounds, or 'shout-outs').
- Encourage youth to recognize one another's efforts - culture of care.³⁰
- Follow up after difficult moments—your consistency shows that love isn't conditional.³²

2. Facilitate connection.

How well am I connecting with youth in this moment?

Authenticity	Kindness	Respect
Care	Love	Self-Awareness
Empathy	Nonjudgment	Self-Acceptance
Full Presence	Nurturance	Self-Alignment
Honesty	Patience	Vulnerability
Humility		

Facilitators of connection lie at the foundation of a health-promoting relationship as they help form trust and emotional safety in relationships. These qualities must first be developed within oneself before they can serve as a foundation for building relationships with others. Trusted adults need to be willing to do a self-assessment and explore how they are living the facilitators of connection. For example, authenticity represents an honest process of becoming more of what one believes and values even when it is uncomfortable or goes against external expectations. Developing authenticity may include becoming more aware of personal beliefs and values around how to treat others and maturing one's ability to interact with others in ways that reflect those beliefs and values.

Alone, each facilitator offers its own benefit. For example, honesty from a trusted adult helps youth feel respected and valued,³⁴ and humility from a trusted adult increases a youth's openness to receiving messages.³⁵ Remarkably, all facilitators of connection build trust, which allows us to show up as our true selves and weather challenges within the relationship.

The **Facilitators of Connection** table²⁴ ahead is a comprehensive reference that serves a dual purpose: to **unpack and define** the core qualities that foster meaningful human connection, and to provide practical exercises that can **enhance or strengthen** these facilitators over time. For each facilitator, the table provides a clear **definition**, outlines **characteristics** that illustrate what each facilitator looks like in action and offers **specific practices** that individuals can apply in their day-to-day interactions with others to develop and reinforce these capacities. It is important to note that many of the exercises are intrapersonal – internal to oneself. It is vital that as trusted adults, we be willing to self-reflect on how we integrate the facilitators of connection into our being and actions in our daily lives. Through this process, we become more **aware** of our strengths and challenges in each aspect of facilitating connection, and can identify how we can **grow** and what is needed to get there. In setting our goals to strengthen our embodiment of the facilitators of connection, we strive to move forward with **intention** both internally and externally.

As you review the table ahead, we recommend first getting familiar with each facilitator's definitions and sample characteristics. Then head to the Assessments section of the toolkit and complete the Facilitators of Connection self-assessment. Identify the top 3–5 facilitators you identified as “needing work”. Return to the table and select at least one step you can take to enhance your ability with those facilitators. In doing so, consider the cultural, developmental, and other characteristics of the youth you work with and environment as you determine the most appropriate way to build and apply each of the connection facilitators. Routinely visit the table and guidance provided within as you work to strengthen each facilitator.

As you spend time with each facilitator of connection, reflect on the following:

- 1 Which of these facilitators feel more natural, and which are more challenging for me right now?
- 2 What would it look and feel like for both me and others if I practiced these more consistently?
- 3 How might others respond or benefit if I engaged these facilitators more often?
- 4 What barriers might I face in doing this, and how can I address them?

Table: Facilitators of Connection Definitions, Characteristics and Exercises

FACILITATOR & DEFINITION	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	ENHANCE YOUR ABILITY
Authenticity <i>Aligns actions with individual core values and beliefs with the hope of discovering, and then acting in sync with one's true self³⁶</i> <i>Represents an honest process of becoming more of what you believe and value.</i>	• Takes time to develop and share opinions • Responds to internal vs external expectations • Forges a unique path to fulfill their passion and purpose • Recognizes and admits faults in oneself • Not threatened by failure or need to have strong self-esteem • Less judgmental of others³⁶	1. Reflect on your values and what is most important to you. What changes can you make to live by them? 2. If you were a fly on the wall observing yourself, which actions and choices would seem authentic? Which would not? 3. Examine your belief systems and their origins (early childhood, spirituality, etc.). Which beliefs align with your values and which do not?³⁶
Care <i>Concern for the well-being of others; a moral ideal whereby the end is protection, enhancement, and preservation of human dignity³⁷</i>	• Compassionate³⁷ • Altruistic³⁷ • Emotionally intelligent³⁸ • Emotionally stable³⁸ • Exhibits personal integrity³⁸ • Optimistic³⁸ • Creates meaning with others³⁸	1. Show you care with actions, not words (ex: <u>actively listen</u>). 2. Ask how others are doing. Show genuine interest in their response. 3. Notice and remember the details people share with you. 4. Be intentional about observing the needs of others. 5. Express disagreement and concern when it matters. Do not nit-pick the little things. 6. Help when you can, even in small ways. 7. Be quick to apologize when appropriate. 8. Send notes of encouragement. 9. Check in regularly with those you love.³⁹
Empathy <i>An ability to understand and share the feelings of another⁴⁰</i>	• Identifies and understands emotions and intentions in self and others⁴¹ • Able to self-regulate emotions⁴¹ • Able to see situations through the eyes of others⁴¹ • Engages with others in ways they need⁴¹ • Displays care and compassion⁴¹	1. Practice a growth mindset. Recognize that empathy can be developed/enhanced.⁴² 2. Expose yourself to different emotions, perspectives, cultures, communities, etc. Paying attention to other people or things builds your concern or appreciation for them.⁴² 3. Read. Reading exposes you to characters, situations, interactions, and goals through stories which can improve your ability to understand people in the real world.⁴² 4. Use cultural understanding to guide you in promoting connection through behaviors such as eye contact.⁴² 5. Find similarities. When speaking with individuals, build on what you have in common, such as a shared goal, instead of focusing on differences.⁴² 6. Ask open-ended questions. Nod to encourage elaboration.⁴² 7. Understand areas of empathy that may be difficult for you and confront them through reflection and practice.⁴² 8. Refrain from assumptions and seek understanding.⁴²
Full Presence <i>Able and willing to deeply engage with life; a whole body way of being⁴³</i>	• Connects with the vitality and wisdom inherent in who they are • Is completely in the moment with something or someone • Experiences all the feelings of a moment • Shows gratitude⁴³	1. Engage in every aspect of an activity. Pay attention to what you see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. Take note of the verbal and nonverbal cues of those around you.⁴⁴ 2. See the importance of what you are doing. Set an intention and state why the activity is necessary. Give the activity meaning.⁴⁴ 3. Accept what you do not know and embrace uncertainty and change as part of the human condition.⁴⁴ 4. Cultivate curiosity and ask open-ended questions to foster engagement, awareness, and presence.⁴⁵

FACILITATOR & DEFINITION	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	ENHANCE YOUR ABILITY
Honesty <i>Free of deception and untruthfulness; sincere⁴⁶</i> <i>A trait which has both behavioral and motivational components⁴⁷</i>	- Communicates the truth even when uncomfortable - Trustworthy - Demonstrates integrity - Transparent - Reliable - Open - Authentic in interactions - Keeps promises and commitments⁴⁸ - Self-accepting⁴⁹ - Promotes meaning, trust, & relational connection⁴⁹	- Reflect on those you admire for their honesty. What do you strive to emulate about their approach?⁴⁷ - Build moral reminders of honesty into your day such as a daily reading or review of your personal values.⁴⁷ - Pay attention to situations or feelings when you are dishonest or have difficulty telling the truth. - Practice sharing the truth in appropriate ways even when it is uncomfortable. Start being honest in small situations and work up to bigger truths. - Reflect on the importance of honesty in your relationships.
Humility <i>A type of growth mindset representing a modest or low view of one's own importance^{20,50}</i> <i>Comprised of 3 parts:</i> ·Accurate self-perception ·Modest self-portrayal ·Other-oriented relational stance⁵¹ <i>Sub-types: general humility, intellectual humility, cultural humility, relational humility, spiritual humility, political humility etc.⁵¹</i>	- Views others with appreciation⁵² - Aware of and aspiring towards something much greater than self⁵² - Teachable, seeks self-knowledge and continuous improvement to overcome shortcomings⁵² - Empathetic⁵³ - Easier to observe in others than in self⁵⁴ - Engages in self-reflection to assess for the presence of personal biases when working with culturally diverse individuals, groups, and communities⁵⁵ - Strives to be open and curious about the experiences and desires of others that come from and hold diverse perspectives⁵⁵ - Participates in lifelong learning to continuously develop and reinforce skills for working effectively and inclusively with diverse individuals, ideas, beliefs, practices, and desires⁵⁵	- Build humility through external feedback. - Seek honest feedback from a trusted source in your life. Ask them how humble they perceive you to be and to identify areas for growth. - Resist the temptation to be defensive as building humility requires openness to learning. Listen fully to the feedback you hear. Affirm yourself and embrace the process as an opportunity to learn and grow, appreciating that cultivating humility requires time as well as effort. - Maintain a focus on empathy, as it is the key to humility and helps us break a pattern of self-focus and connect with others. Ask yourself: Why might other perspectives I am hearing be right? How would I respond if I treated the other person as if they were trying their very best?⁵³ - Questions to ponder and react to: - Am I open to the views, beliefs, and opinions of others? - Do I make assumptions about others, feel superior to others, or overvalue my knowledge and talents?⁵⁰ - Am I willing to see myself truthfully, with a low self-focus? - Is my perception of my place accurate? - Am I able to acknowledge my mistakes and limitations? - Do I appreciate the value of all things?⁵⁶ - Express gratitude to others. Think about the people who have influenced you positively in your life, appreciate their contribution, and verbalize or demonstrate your gratitude.⁵⁰
Kindness <i>Of a good or benevolent nature or disposition⁵⁷</i>	- Friendly⁵⁸ - Generous⁵⁸ - Considerate⁵⁸ - Gentle⁵⁸ - Respectful⁵⁸ - Amiable⁵⁸ - Helpful⁵⁹ - Loving⁵⁹ - Does good for others⁵⁸	- Reset your stress. Stress can hinder a desire to be kind and prevent you from offering words or acts of kindness. Engage in self-care by deep breathing, walking, and other activities. - Stop and pay attention to what is happening within and around you. Be mindful of how you are feeling, what you are thinking, and what is happening in the environment, without judgment. Being in tune with our emotions helps us to be more empathetic to others. - Purposefully create and savor opportunities for fostering positive emotion in others. Smile at people you pass on the street. Give someone a warm hug when you walk in the door. - Do favors for others, and thank others for their kindness.⁶⁰

FACILITATOR & DEFINITION	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	ENHANCE YOUR ABILITY
Love <i>Feel or show deep affection or great care for⁶¹</i>	• Invests in the well-being of another⁶² • Desires for another to be happy and healthy⁶³ • Compassionate⁶³ • Caring⁶⁴ • Safe⁶⁴ • Comforting⁶⁴	1.Focus on the good you see in others and want for others.⁶³ 2.What are you grateful for in others? Make a gratitude list and spend time each day embracing one or more items on your list. 3.Brainstorm how you can care more and do more for others (even in regular, everyday activities) and then intentionally build time into your schedule to complete these activities.⁶⁵ 4.Seize spontaneous or random opportunities to make someone happy or support their well-being in some way (e.g., spending quality time together, offering words of encouragement or appreciation, helping out in some way, lingering longer in a hug).⁶⁶
Nonjudgment <i>Avoids judgments based on one's own personal or moral standards⁶⁷</i>	• Values what others think even if they disagree • Respects individuals • Promotes feeling seen and heard • Open-minded • Does not let personal biases influence the treatment of others • Unconditional positive regard⁶⁸	1.Observe and do not react. Observation may be enhanced by asking: - a.Am I judging based on appearances, someone else's opinion, or events of the past? - b.Am I being biased? Do I have all of the information? - c.Are my views or understanding of what's happening limited in any way? Consider compassionate explanations for why someone acted the way they did. - d.Are my emotions clouding my judgment? 2.Put yourself in their shoes. Counter misjudgment or negative judgments with empathy. 3.Open your mind. Take a moment and listen to broaden your perspective and become more accepting of others. 4.Stimulate your brain/create new insights in your conversations.⁶⁹
Nurturance <i>Caring for and encouraging the growth and development of others⁷⁰</i>	• Provides opportunities for learning, safety, and security • Notices, understands, and responds to signals in a timely and appropriate manner • Recognizes that every interaction or absence of an interaction contributes to a foundation for learning • Provides safe and secure environments (physical, emotional, and environmental safety, access to food and water)⁷¹	1.Offer kind, constant, and honest communication. 2.Be willing to work through difficulties and disagreements. 3.Share feelings and thoughts. 4.Offer emotional support, validation, and sincere compliments. 5.Practice compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness. 6.Embrace and discuss mistakes.⁷²
Patience <i>The propensity to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering⁷³</i> <i>Depends on both behavioral (i.e., waiting) and emotional (i.e., low arousal) factors</i> <i>Must be aware of and accept impatience first before it can transform⁷⁴</i>	• Slow to anger⁷⁵ • Active listener⁷⁵ • Seeks understanding⁷⁵ • Thoughtfully chooses words and actions⁷⁵ • Exudes calm when delayed or hindered⁷⁵	1.Practice patience by practicing mindfulness. - a.Focus on the present moment and recognize when impatience surfaces, without judgment. - b.Get curious about the experience. What are my common triggers that test my patience? Are my expectations out of sync with reality? - i.Am I expecting the environment or others to conform to my expectations? - ii.Are my expectations for myself realistic? - iii.Are my thoughts and feelings realistic?⁷⁴ 2.Allow yourself to feel impatient to promote acceptance. - a.When impatient, how do my mind/body feel? 3.Practice transforming impatience into patience. - a.Notice you are impatient. - b.Pay attention to how that feels. - c.Ask yourself: "Is there anything I can do to change the situation without making matters worse for myself or others?"

FACILITATOR & DEFINITION	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	ENHANCE YOUR ABILITY
		i. If not, make a choice backed up with effort to pay attention to everything that's going on around you and find something that arouses your curiosity or interest. 4. Ask yourself: Can I hold unwelcome thoughts or emotions more lightly, maybe even with humor? 5. When you come face to face with impatience, tell yourself, "No problem". Calmly accept the presence of impatience knowing that conditions will change over time – and so will your mind.⁷⁴
Respect <i>Feeling or showing deference, admiration, or due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others.⁷⁶</i> <i>Also includes respect for self, environment, situation, and things.⁷⁷</i> <i>Can be a behavior, attitude, or feeling that may or may not be expressed in the behavior.⁷⁷</i>	• Treats others with dignity, which is the inherent value and worth of a person. Dignity is not earned. Rather, it is an intrinsic part of being human. • Values others' opinions • Acknowledges the rights, feelings, and perspectives of others • Actively listens • Demonstrates accountability – acknowledges mistakes and genuinely apologizes • Inclusive⁷⁸	General ways to cultivate respect: 1. Listening: Practice being genuinely interested in and open to what others share with you. Seek to understand others' experiences, ideas, and perspectives even if you do not agree with them or choose something different. 2. Acting: Speak with and show respect. Reflect on a recent moment of discomfort or tension with someone. Ask yourself: How could I have tapped into respect through my actions or words to resolve that disagreement, conflict, or tension? 3. Showing: Create a culture of respect. Seek to understand the perspectives of others and how respect is given and received in other cultures and groups of those you encounter. Exhibit an appreciation for the knowledge, skills, and abilities of others. a. Communicate in ways that show regard for others. b. Take concerns seriously, empathize, and genuinely apologize if you hurt someone.⁷⁹
Self-Awareness <i>Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.⁸⁰</i>	• Comprised of two types: internal and external⁸¹ • Understands one's values, preferences, resources, goals, and intuitions, & how they change over time⁸⁰ • Notes sensations, thoughts, and emotions as they occur⁸² • Is promoted by an understanding of 1) one's beliefs, values, thoughts, feelings, physiological responses, personality traits, and motivations, and 2) others' perceptions⁸³ • Knows who they are⁸¹ • Seeks out and values opinions from people who are willing to tell them the truth and have their best interests in mind⁸¹	1. Start a log of your thoughts. Document the thoughts that pop up as automatic reactions to experiences. a. Describe what was happening at the time (internally with your thoughts and feelings as well as externally). b. Note your level of emotion. c. If able, note the underlying reason for the emotion. 2. Practice the capacity to be present and to notice without judgment your internal experiences. 3. Ask someone you trust who also has your best interests in mind to share what they see as your strengths and development areas.⁸⁴
Self-Acceptance <i>Complete acceptance of one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.⁸⁵</i>	• Willing to acknowledge and accept one's feelings, values, and other aspects of the self⁸⁵ • Receptive and open to oneself⁸⁵ • Meets one's experiences as they are without trying to change them⁸⁵ • Requires self-awareness⁸⁶	1. Practice self-regulation. a. Recognize, reframe, and redirect negative emotions (self-hatred, self-doubt, etc.). b. Refocus on the positive aspects of yourself. c. Reframe negative situations in a way that highlights the opportunities within them. 2. Brainstorm ways you can contribute to your family, work, or community to promote an "unforced" sense of connectedness with the world. 3. Consciously make an effort to engage with an experience, system, or person in an authentic way.⁸⁶

FACILITATOR & DEFINITION	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	ENHANCE YOUR ABILITY
Self-Alignment <i>Behaving in ways that are consistent with one's internal states, preference, resources, and intuitions⁸⁵</i>	• Acts in ways that authentically reflect oneself • Demonstrates one's values and priorities in their lives through their behaviors, including the way they treat people, take care of themselves, and manage situations⁸⁵	1. Make a list of your values and highest priorities in life. 2. Reflect on your behaviors & activities over the past week. a. Did your behaviors and activities align with your lists of values and highest priorities? b. For those that did not, did they draw out a value or priority you need to add to your list? Ask yourself: i. Is continuing this behavior enhancing my well-being? ii. What is the opportunity cost by me continuing this behavior? 3. Brief exercise: At any moment in time, pause and ask yourself "Am I feeling connected right now"? a. Am I focused on this connection? b. Is this connection meaningful to me? c. Is this connection consistent with my goals and values?⁸⁷
Vulnerability <i>Authentic and intentional willingness to be open to uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure in social situations in spite of fears.⁸⁸</i> <i>This toolkit focuses on elements that ultimately promote well-being. Therefore, vulnerability in this context is defined and presented as the kind of vulnerability one can choose to participate in as opposed to the kind which is not within our control.⁸⁹</i>	• Understands the interplay of vulnerability with unpleasant feelings (i.e., sadness, shame, helplessness, anger, embarrassment, disappointment, frustration) and chooses to tolerate, experience, move through, and express these feelings⁸⁹ • Engages in activities one might enjoy even when hesitant to do so⁸⁹ • Allows self to share important personal history elements when appropriate to develop deeper emotional connections⁸⁹ • Open⁹⁰ • Honest⁹⁰ • Trusting⁹⁰	1. Become more self-aware (see exercises above for Self-Aware).⁹⁰ 2. Cultivate courage. Ask yourself: a. Do I have the strength and courage to be vulnerable? b. How can I be more open with myself and others? c. How can I be more authentic in my relationships or activities? 3. Dare to be your most authentic self, fully aware of your strengths, skills, and gifts – as well as your flaws and insecurities. Understand fear and criticism will always be possible. Put language to your fears, insecurities, or doubts and embrace and face them head on. Stand up to negative forces or hindrances. 4. Practice confidence in your authentic self.⁹⁰ Know you have what it takes to overcome what you may face. 5. Seek to excel and not to perfect. Focus on realizing excellence in every opportunity to be vulnerable. Did you bring forward the best version of yourself despite having flaws?⁹⁰ 6. Practice, practice, practice.⁹⁰

3. Engage micro-skills.

What small intentional words or actions am I using with youth to cultivate protective beliefs?

Micro-skills in trusted adults is the third strategy for a health-promoting “way of being”. In the context of health-promoting relationships, micro-skills in trusted adults refer to concrete words and actions that strengthen connection and activate or reinforce protective beliefs in youth. These micro-skills, when combined with meaningful connection, can foster protective beliefs and create the foundation for youth to be more receptive to skill development, which will be discussed in the next section.

Within the micro-skills, there are common, universal ways of being that are present across all beliefs. These micro-skills and their descriptions are listed here:

Full Presence, Open Attention & Curiosity

Committing to being fully in the moment, conveying attentiveness, acceptance and deep curiosity in each interaction with youth. Allowing yourself to be fully present without distractions and to show a spirit of openness in your ability to express meaningful curiosity. These facilitators of connection are foundational to cultivating belonging and relational development.

Mirroring and Reflections

Mirroring back to youth in conversations parts of what they have shared with the goal of enhancing their self-awareness. Using observations to serve as reflections for youth, highlighting their values and goals, and potentially how their choices align (or don't) with those values and goals. Both mirroring and reflecting promote self-awareness, an essential ingredient for reaching one's full potential.

Activating Agency

Honoring someone's autonomy in making choices for themselves and demonstrating faith in their ability to do so. A common approach in working with youth that honors their autonomy and promotes agency is to provide a “menu of options” after asking an open-ended question. If you ask a youth an open-ended question and they respond with “I don't know” or “I'm not sure” or “What do you mean?”, you can offer a range of possible options or responses. For example, you may ask a youth “What values are most important to you?” and they respond with “What do you mean?” You can follow up by showing them a list of values and ask them to pick up to five values that they feel are true for them.

Modeling and Inspiring

Being a positive model for the youth with whom you interact. Consistently demonstrating and living patience, kindness, respect, and other prosocial traits establishes a foundation of trust with youth and teaches them ways of being that promotes healthy relationships.



3. Engage micro-skills. (cont.)

What small intentional words or actions am I using with youth to cultivate protective beliefs?

Below is a figure that presents a broader list of micro-skills organized within each of the five core protective beliefs. Several of these micro-skills draw from therapeutic approaches such as Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy and William Miller and Stephen Rollnick's motivational interviewing.^{91,92}

I am seen and loved.	FOCUS: Give your full attention, showing you care. EXPRESS: Communicate your acceptance of and belief in them. EXPLORE: Open a doorway for youth to explore their spirituality or other ways they find strength and hope.
I matter.	NOTICE: Truly see and hear the youth as they are. AFFIRM: Share with youth how their unique gifts have a unique impact. EXPRESS NEED: Show youth how they're relied on, indispensable, and essential.*
I can influence my life and health.	RECOGNIZE: Help youth clarify their values and goals. ENCOURAGE: Guide youth towards independent problem-solving and decision-making. SUPPORT: Reinforce the ability to have influence over one's life and health.
I can overcome hard things.	EMPOWER: Grow youth's sense of their strengths and skills. COACH: Let youth know they are not alone and they can get through hard times. BUILD: Increase youth's use of positive coping behaviors.
I have support.	NAVIGATE: Help youth navigate challenging situations and build support networks. FUEL: Fuel youth agency and confidence. ADVOCATE: Be ready to advocate for youth when they need it.

**Adapted with permission from Zach Mercurio, Ph.D., The Power of Mattering.*

The table ahead provides ideas on how to put each micro-skill into practice through your actions (Actions to Implement) and your words (Example Statements & Questions). As you review the micro-skills, we encourage you to identify the behaviors and language that feel authentic to you within each micro-skill area, and to generate additional ideas that fit the unique needs and context of the youth you work with. Consider which facilitators of connection you may need to engage to support the application of each micro-skill.

As you review the micro-skills, actions and example verbal statements below, consider how you may or may not already practice each of the skills. Ask yourself:

1. What contexts support me in being more likely to use this micro-skill?
2. What works well in my application of each micro-skill?
3. What could I do more of, and what are my greatest opportunities for development?

In the Assessments section of this toolkit you will find a *Micro-Skills for Trusted Adults* self-assessment. This self-assessment provides an opportunity to reflect on your use of each micro-skill. As you complete it, notice where your strengths lie and where growth opportunities exist. Your results can guide you in creating a plan to develop your micro-skills with youth intentionally. We encourage you to repeat the self-assessment periodically (e.g. quarterly) to measure your progress and growth over time.

Table: Micro-Skills, Words, and Actions for Trusted Adults

Belief #1: I am seen and loved. <i>(By others, self, and higher power)</i>	
MICRO-SKILL	FOCUS: Give your full attention, showing youth you care. ^{93,94}
ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT • Let go of distractions to give yourself the chance to focus deeply on the youth in front of you. Put away or turn off screens and other distractions that split your attention. • Before meeting with youth, give yourself one minute to center your focus– become aware of your breathing, inhaling deeply, exhaling slowly. Focus on relaxing and calming your body. Allow yourself to be in the moment, mentally letting go of all that has come before and what may come after. Do this for 60 seconds. • Convey to youth the priority of their presence, the importance of what they choose to share, and how deeply they are cared for. • Explore with youth who they are and guide them back to this as needed. Ask about and listen for their interests, goals, preferences, and values. • Be curious – when you think you have a picture of what they are telling you, ask one more open-ended question to go deeper. Curiosity shows interest. • Reflect back the challenges, strengths, and underlying values they share. Reflecting the strengths and values you hear not only increases self-awareness but also promotes confidence and clarity in who youth want to be. • Express empathy and understanding before offering advice or problem-solving. EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS • “I’m putting everything else aside to be here with you.” • “Nothing else is more important to me right now than this moment with you.” • “I’ve turned off distractions so I can really be with you.” • “I’m listening and I really want to understand.” • “I trust your perspective – help me see the world through your eyes.” • “You deserve to be heard, fully and without judgment.” • “What does it mean to you to feel seen and loved?” • “Is there a time when you felt seen and loved by someone? What did you notice and how was it different from other experiences you might have had where you did not feel seen or loved?” • Examples of questions that explore who youth are and convey curiosity: “What values are important to you?”, “How might other people describe your strengths?”, “What goals do you have for yourself?”, “I know this may seem like an obvious question but what do you love about doing [name activity, hobby or interest]?”, “What’s it feel like for you when you do well on something?”, “How do you spend your time?”, “What kinds of things do you like to do?” • Example reflections to help youth feel seen and highlight values: “Being able to get along with your family is really important to you.”, “Showing others that you’re a hard worker matters to you.”, “Not making the team felt pretty bad and at the same time, you were able to quickly figure out that joining the intramural club would be fun for you.” • Example of expressing empathy before problem solving: “It’s not easy to talk about – I can see that and I want you to know its ok. I’ve got you. What you shared is pretty stressful. It’s really tough that you are going through that right now.” [pause for youth’s response] “Would it be helpful to talk through some things you could do to try to feel better? It’s also ok if you feel like you want to talk about it some more. It’s up to you.”	
MICRO-SKILL	EXPRESS: Communicate your acceptance of and belief in them. ⁹⁴
ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT • Ask youth how they want to receive validation from you and others. People vary in how they prefer to receive positive regard and validation from others and exploring these preferences can support trusted adults in their choice of actions to develop and reinforce this belief. • Show youth you accept them for who they are, without judgment and/or trying to change them. • Avoid criticizing, judging, disapproving or shaming. • If youth engage in concerning behavior, focus feedback on their behavior (not on them as a person). • Affirm positive behaviors and attitudes, especially when the youth tackles a difficult situation or problem. • Notice your internal mood state when you are with youth. Remain calm, do not take youth’s words and actions personally, and maintain patience. If you have an interaction where you struggle with this, apologize. • Express confidence in youth’s perspective, attitude, abilities, and/or actions. Let them know you believe in them. • When challenged, let youth know they are not alone and are capable of making a healthy choice for themselves. • When a youth is hard on themselves, ask what they would tell a friend in the same situation. EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS • “When I see you doing something well, how do you want me to acknowledge it?” [If youth doesn’t know, you can offer choices] “Do you want me to call it out when we are one-on-one, with the whole team or group, or something else?” • “Tell me about a time when someone told you that you were doing something well. What did they say or do that you liked?” • “I care about you and am here for you no matter what.” • “You don’t have to filter anything. I’m here for all of it.” • Example of focusing feedback on behavior: “Skipping class seems like it’s making it harder for you to keep up with all the schoolwork. What are your thoughts about it all?” • Example of apologizing to youth: “Listen, when I saw you the other day, I was pretty distracted and didn’t really give you a lot of time. I’m sorry. I have time today if you want to meet. I’d really like to hear how you are doing and what is going on for you.”	

Belief # 1: I am seen and loved. (Cont.)

MICRO-SKILL **EXPRESS:** Communicate your acceptance of and belief in them.⁹⁴

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS (CONT.)

- Example affirmation: "It is so neat to watch you set a goal, work through any challenges getting there, and celebrate achieving it! I admire your determination!"
- Example affirmation: "You did not want to leave that party to be home on time and you still did it and respected your curfew. That says a lot about the love and respect you show your parents."
- "You have such a healthy perspective and positive attitude. You keep showing up and doing what you need to do. That is going to go a long way. I believe in you and know you will reach your goals!"
- "It stinks that you are in this situation. You are not alone though. You've got me and the other people in your life. We believe in you and know you will figure out what the best choice for you is."
- "If your best friend had just experienced what you did and was being hard on themselves, what would you tell them?"

MICRO-SKILL **EXPLORE:** Open a doorway for youth to explore their spirituality or other ways they find strength and hope.⁹⁵⁻¹⁰¹

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Assess your readiness to foster the development of spirituality in youth alongside and separate from your personal views on spirituality and how those may align (or not) with the youth.⁷⁶ While we focus on spirituality, if a youth does not identify with a specific spiritual belief, you can broaden the conversation to other ways they find strength and hope in their lives.
- Create an open space for youth to explore their own spirituality by defining what spirituality is and asking what it means to them.
- Ask youth how spirituality fits in their life and what it looks like for them.
- Acknowledge and accept their perspective.
- Let youth know that you are open to talking about their spirituality at any time if they want to.
- Help find ways for youth to be in nature or experience the natural world.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "When people talk about spirituality, it's not a single path or belief system. There are many ways to experience spirituality and the benefits of a spiritual experience. For some people, it's the belief in a higher power or a specific religious practice. For others, it may involve experiencing a sense of connection to a higher state or a sense of inter-connectedness with the rest of humanity and nature. What are your thoughts about what I'm saying?"
- "Spirituality can often be a source of strength and hope for people, including people your age. I'm wondering if we could take a little time to talk about your spirituality – maybe even starting with what does spirituality mean to you?"
- "How does spirituality fit into your life if at all? What does it look like in your day-to-day?"
- "Spirituality can be a very personal part of our lives. I completely respect whatever your perspective is because ultimately, it's your life."
- If youth does not identify with spirituality: "I hear you. Everyone has to find what works for them. What are some other ways you find hope and strength in your life?", "When you are feeling challenged, what or who do you seek out to help you keep going?" [if youth does not know, offer a menu of options] "For some youth, it's being in nature, for others it's the lyrics in music – kind of like poetry, or for others it's listening to stories of other people who overcame hard times in their life."
- "I wanted to raise the topic because it's important you know that you can talk about it with me if you want to – at any time. At the same time, it's totally up to you based on where you are at in your perspective."
- "Being in nature can also bring a sense of peace, hope and feeling restored or refreshed. What are some ways you like to experience nature?"

Belief #2: I matter.

MICRO-SKILL **NOTICE:** Truly see and hear the youth as they are.¹⁰²

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Ask about, remember, and check on the details of youths' lives.
- Ask youth for their opinions. Share that you are interested in what they have to say and value their voice. Reflect and follow up to make sure they feel heard.
- Notice youths' moods and when they might be struggling. Seek understanding and offer action to help.
- Check in on youths' energy levels.
- Assess if negative behaviors (e.g., excessive social media use or gaming) may be related to an unmet need to matter.
- Pay attention to youth and let them know they are important. Even when you may disagree with them.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "Last week you were going to do [name event] – you seemed [state emotion] about it. How did it go?"
- "What do you think about what should happen? I really want to hear your perspective."
- "Your voice is really important. What do you think?"
- "Thanks for letting us know what you think. It's really important."
- "I wanted to check in – I noticed you seem a little off today. What's going on?" [if youth shares struggle] "I'm sorry. I get why you're upset. What do you think might help right now?"
- "How've you been doing lately? How has your energy been?"
- "Listen, I know we don't agree on this one and that's ok. You are such an important part of this community so regardless of whether we agree all the time, we so value you being here!"

Belief #2: I matter. (Cont.)

MICRO-SKILL

AFFIRM: Share with youth how their unique gifts have an impact.¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁸

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Consistently convey authentic unconditional appreciation, drawing out the unique gifts of youth such as strengths, purpose, perspective, and wisdom.
- Share with youth how they and their efforts impact others.
- Describe to youth the difference it makes before asking them to do something.
- Provide opportunities for youth to use and develop their gifts.
- Support and reinforce engagement in activities that are meaningful to them.
- Express gratitude to youth.
- Convey positive expectancy by making it clear you have faith in them, you know they can be successful and state that by sharing the hopes and potential you see in them.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- Examples of conveying appreciation while highlighting unique gifts: "You are always looking out for your friends. It's really great to see how caring you are.", "You have been practicing so hard for your upcoming concert. Its clear music is important to you, and you care about doing well. That is awesome to see!"
- Examples of reflecting the impact of youth's efforts: "It was so great how you were with everyone there today. You really offered some great ideas and energy to get the group moving forward in a solid direction.", "You were so positive during the game today and it really boosted the energy across the whole team. You showed great leadership in that way!"
- Examples of describing youth's impact before asking them to do something: "Having you there just makes it go that much better. Would you be willing to come this week?", "The seniors always love seeing people your age. It really brings them such joy. Would you be willing to come to the cafeteria for the senior day lunch next week?"
- "I'm so grateful for you."
- Thank you for doing all that you are doing. It means a lot."
- "You got this! I have no doubts."
- "You will get through this. You have faced harder things before and figured it out."
- "You have so many great skills and you are so hardworking. You are going to reach your goals, no question!"

MICRO-SKILL

EXPRESS NEED: Show youth how they're relied on, indispensable, and essential.¹⁰⁵

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Tell youth they matter to you.
- Tell youth how you rely on them.
- Tell youth you missed them when they were not present.
- Remind youth how you and others/organization need them and their contributions.
- Ask youth for help.
- Tell them it's better when they're around.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "You matter to me."
- "I really appreciate you being here."
- "I look forward to seeing you each week."
- "Your being here matters. We rely on your perspective and energy."
- "I noticed you weren't here last week. We missed you! It's really great to see you this week."
- "We really need youth like you. You do so much for this group. It wouldn't be the same without you."
- "Would you mind helping with this? Your help will make such an impact on what we are trying to do."
- "That went so well and was a lot of fun. It's better when you are here."

Belief #3: I can influence my life and health.

MICRO-SKILL

RECOGNIZE: Help youth clarify their values and goals.¹⁰⁹

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Ask youth what is important to them and what values are important to them.
- Listen for and reflect values you hear.
- Ask youth what goals they have for themselves – both short-term and long-term.
- Connect youth's values and goals through reflections.
- Support them in breaking down goals into manageable steps by getting their ideas on how to do this first.
- Check in on how working towards goals is going, offering support as needed.
- Ask youth about any health and mental health-related values and goals they might have.

Belief #3: I can influence my life and health. (Cont.)

MICRO-SKILL

RECOGNIZE: Help youth clarify their values and goals.¹⁰⁹

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "What matters to you?"
- "What are some of the things you care about most?"
- "What values are important to you?"
- *Examples of reflecting values:* "Standing up for the people you care about is a core value for you.", "Honesty and dependability are big ones for you – you want to know where you stand with people and that you can count on them."
- *Example of a reflection connecting values and goals:* "You want to be able to get along with people better – to not react with anger. Having people be honest with you. Given honesty is one of your core values, having people be honest with you will help you get feedback on how you are doing."
- "What goals (for your life, health, or other) do you want to set for yourself over the next couple of months and over the next year?"
- "What kinds of things do you do that support your mental health/help you feel good/calm anxiety/etc.?"
- "Now that you have this goal, what do you think your first step will be?", "What steps do you think you need to take to reach your goal?"
- "What would it look like to you to break your goal down into action steps?"
- "How have you been doing with your goal?"
- "What is going well in working towards your goal?"
- "What feels hard about your goal right now?"
- "As you work on your goals, I'm here to provide support if you want."

MICRO-SKILL

ENCOURAGE: Guide youth towards independent problem-solving and decision-making.^{103,110}

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Emphasize youth's autonomy – it's up to them what they want to do.
- When a youth is experiencing a challenge or decision, ask them for their ideas on how they want to tackle it, eliciting from them the pros and cons of each option.
- If you have ideas to offer, use the Ask-Offer-Ask approach: Ask permission to share your idea, Offer the idea, Ask youth what they think about it.⁷⁷
- Let youth identify solutions and action plans with your support as needed (guide them, and resist telling or directing).

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "It's up to you what you want to do."
- "Ultimately, it's your choice."
- "What do you want to do about this situation?", "What do you think might help?"
- "What good things do you think would happen from taking that step?", "What not-so-good things might happen from taking that step?"
- Example of Ask-Offer-Ask: Ask permission: "Can I share another idea you might think about?", Offer idea: "I was wondering if it might help if you set your alarm across the room so you had to get out of bed to turn it off.", Ask youth's reaction: "What are your thoughts about that?"
- "Let's brainstorm as many solutions as you can think of. We can look at each one and based on which ones you choose, we can create an action plan of the next steps you want to take. I'm here to ask some questions and to offer ideas and be a resource if you get stuck. You know yourself best. What do you know works for you to help you feel healthier and centered?"

MICRO-SKILL

SUPPORT: Reinforce the ability to have influence over one's life and health.¹¹¹

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- When setting goals or making decisions, help youth anticipate things that could get in the way.
- Help them identify ways they can overcome any obstacles or barriers.
- Normalize that everyone hits road bumps and it can be helpful to see them as learning opportunities.
- Express belief in youth's values, goals, and, importantly, their ability to achieve their vision.
- Take notice of and celebrate all successes!

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "If you start to take those steps, what do you think might get in the way or make it harder to follow through?"
- "These things may not even come up, but it can be helpful to think through them ahead of time so if they do, you are ready."
- "If these things were to come up, what could you do to tackle them?"
- "What help might you need to get through them?"
- "If you hit a road bump or have to slow down, I want you to know that is normal. Everyone faces setbacks from time to time; I definitely have. That's why they sometimes say, 'two steps forward, one step back.' What I've learned is that it can be helpful to think about these moments as learning opportunities that can help you figure out your next move. You still have the power to choose what comes next."
- "You are clear on your values. You've made some great goals for yourself and carefully thought out how you want to achieve them. You can reach these goals in a way that also is consistent with your values!"
- "You completed that first step! That is HUGE because you have started and you are working hard to get there. Nice work!"

Belief #4: I can overcome hard things.

MICRO-SKILL **EMPOWER:** Grow youth's sense of their strengths and skills.¹¹²

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Ask youth what their strengths are and what other people would say their strengths are.
- Ask youth what they can do to grow their strengths.
- Ask youth about a time when they got through something hard including what they did to make it through. Listen for how to reflect strengths and positive coping skills.
- Ask youth what they can tell themselves when things get hard to help them to keep going.
- Express confidence in youth's ability to navigate hard things well.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "What would you say your strengths are?"
- "What would other people close to you say your strengths are?"
- "What would other people who know you say you are good at?"
- "What do you think you could do to build even more strengths?"
- "Tell me about a time when you got through something hard? Could be a family conflict, a hard class or exam, a challenging time with a friend, not getting something you wanted or needed. What did you do to get through it?" [pause] "Looking back at it, what do you feel your strengths were that helped you to overcome it?"
- *Example of reflecting strengths and positive coping skills:* "What I'm hearing is that even though you were hurt, you didn't lash out and you figured out how to take care of yourself. You also started spending more time with people you really, really trusted. Those are some great coping skills."
- "What can you say to yourself when things are hard to keep you focused and motivated? For example, when I am facing something hard, I will tell myself "You got this. Just focus on what is in front of you. It will work out."
- "You have some really strong skills. You're smart and you're really determined. I know you will figure this out, get through it and be more than ok!"

MICRO-SKILL **COACH:** Let youth know they are not alone and they can get through hard times.¹¹¹

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Normalize that problems are unavoidable for everyone – life will still challenge them and present stressors. Building resilience does not mean problems go away. Rather, it provides the strength and tools to navigate the challenges more successfully.
- Give empathy and understanding when youth go through hard times.
- Express optimism and hope when youth go through hard times.
- Encourage youth to give themselves patience, compassion, and understanding when going through hard times.
- Provide consistency by meeting regularly, having a consistent structure, and other constants.
- Let youth know they don't have to do it alone – we all need support sometimes and you are there for them.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "You are not alone. As much as it doesn't seem like it at times, everyone has problems. Figuring out how to navigate our problems doesn't mean we get to be problem-free. It means that we have better ways of figuring out how to solve those problems without feeling stuck or getting as upset as we used to."
- "You are in such a tough spot. It makes sense that you would feel this way."
- "It will work out."
- "You will be ok and come out the other side of this stronger and in a better place."
- "This won't last forever and once you are through it, you will feel so relieved."
- "When things are difficult, try not to be hard on yourself. It's so important for you to be patient with yourself and others, show yourself some kindness and understanding. Try to treat yourself the same way you would treat your best friend."
- "You don't have to do this alone. Everyone needs help sometimes or someone to stand by their side. I'm here for you in whatever way you need."

MICRO-SKILL **BUILD:** Increase youth's use of positive coping behaviors.¹¹³

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Increase youth's self-reflection on the ways their current coping may cause challenges and what might be driving negative coping behaviors.
- Encourage youth to focus on things they can control and let go of things they can't.
- Help youth find healthy ways they can take care of themselves.
- Encourage youth to reframe negative thoughts and statements about themselves to more accurate, situation-based statements.
- Support youth to keep building this skill of finding more accurate, helpful ways of interpreting situations.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "What do you do to cope with stress and challenges now?"
- "What are the ways what you are doing now to cope is helpful?"
- "What are the ways what you are doing now to cope keeps you stuck or prevents you from reaching your goals or living by your values?"
- "It can be really hard but also pretty freeing if you can get to a place where you let go of the things you can't control and only focus on what you can control. For example, a person can't control if their parent yells at them. They can control how much of that yelling they pay attention to and let in and how much they ignore."

Belief # 4: I can overcome hard things. (Cont.)

MICRO-SKILL

BUILD: Increase youth's use of positive coping behaviors.¹¹³

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS (CONT.)

- "What healthy things do you do to take care of yourself when you are in a negative place?" [if youth does not know, offer a menu of options] "For some people, listening to music helps, for others it's working out, and for others it might be calling a friend or doing some artwork."
- "When you look at the people in your life that you feel get through hard times in healthy ways, what do you see them doing to do that?"
- "When you start to tell yourself something negative about what happened, try to look at all the factors that might have contributed to what happened. What else was going on in your life? Who else was involved? What behaviors were you doing or not doing? What did you have control over? As you look at these questions, it might help you to see what happened more clearly."
- "For example, instead of 'I'm stupid because I failed that class.', ask yourself, 'What are some other ways of looking at this situation? Is there evidence pointing to other factors that might have led to that outcome?' For example, other evidence could include 'That was a really hard class and with everything going on in my life, I just didn't have the time I needed to put the work in. I'm not the first person that has had this happen.'"

Belief #5: I have support.

MICRO-SKILL

NAVIGATE: Help youth navigate challenging situations and build support networks.¹¹⁴

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Be fully present with and actively help youth work through difficult situations and systems.
- Model emotional regulation and thoughtful problem solving.
- Provide safe spaces for youth to rest, share, create, socialize, and think.
- Encourage youth to seek support from others.
- Encourage youth to offer support to others.
- Create healthy and welcoming events and opportunities for youth to gather within your community or program.
- Foster circles of support that match youth's identities.
- Talk about the importance of both vulnerability and boundaries in relationships.
- Consider barriers youth may face to accessing support communities and try to address those proactively. Be creative!
- Be assertive about engaging family in ways they can stand by youth, especially in difficult times.
- Partner with youth to foster healthy online behaviors and promote critical thinking skills to mitigate the negative effects of their virtual world. Model healthy online behaviors and social interaction.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS

- "I'm here for you. If you want, we can work together to figure out how you want to overcome this challenge."
- "Let's slow down. Take a few deep breaths. Take a step back from it. Maybe we can even take a walk around the block if you think that would help."
- "I know it's tempting to act on the first solution we think of, but maybe we can come up with a few more solutions, take a look at the good and not-so-good things about each option, and then you can choose which one you think will work best. Would you be willing to try it?"
- "Have you thought about asking your parents or other family members for support on this one?"
- "Who would you feel comfortable asking for help?"
- "When you have gotten support in the past and it was helpful, who gave it and what did they do that you liked?" Followed by "What would it be like for you to reach out to that person for what you are going through now?"
- "What would it be like for you to ask others for help once in a while?"
- "How do you feel when someone asks you for help and you can support them?"
- "One of the best ways to build up our support circles is to provide support to others. When we do that, often we feel good that we can help someone out AND it helps to build relationships where people support each other."

MICRO-SKILL

FUEL: Fuel youth agency and confidence.¹¹⁵

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT

- Incorporate youth goals, wants, and interests into activities.
- Offer choices. Involve youth in decision-making and/or encourage independent decision-making.
- Encourage problem-solving.
- Provide opportunities where youth can demonstrate responsibility.
- Recognize and celebrate achievements.
- Provide reassurance.

Belief # 5: I have support. (Cont.)

MICRO-SKILL	FUEL: Fuel youth agency and confidence.
EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS (CONT.) • “What do you want to do?” • “What activities do you think we could do that feel in line with your goals?” • “It’s so important that you are involved in as many decisions as possible. Each time we have choices to make, when we can, we want to involve you, get your input and have you make the decision.” • <i>Example of offering choices:</i> “You have a few options. You could get involved in this fight between your two friends by taking a side, you could totally avoid it, or you could let them both know that you care about them, you hope they can resolve it, and that you aren’t going to take sides. What do you think?” • “Congratulations! What you just did is so awesome. I hope you feel proud of yourself.” • “You can do this.” • “Believe in yourself. We believe in you and are confident you can achieve whatever you set your mind to!” • “You are ready and capable to achieve this.”	
MICRO-SKILL	ADVOCATE: Be ready to advocate for youth when they need it.
ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT • Assess when youth may need you to speak up on their behalf (vs. when they can utilize their skills to navigate the situation independently). • Stand up for them when they need it. • Advocate for youth rights and opportunities. • Put limits in place that assist youth in achieving their goals and well-being. EXAMPLE STATEMENTS & QUESTIONS • “How are you feeling about addressing this issue on your own?” • “At what point, if any, might you want some additional support?” Followed by “What would that look like?” • “How do you feel that support would be helpful compared to you trying to resolve it on your own?”	

Additional Considerations

The Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm offers a way of thinking about the full potential of relationships and how trusted adults can maximize their relationships with youth to help them thrive and flourish. The paradigm acknowledges that relationships do not exist in isolation, that there are multiple influences on youth at any given time, and that youth come from varied backgrounds (as do trusted adults). We also acknowledge that substance use prevention is a primary outcome of health-promoting relationships, and conversations about substance use or other risky behaviors may naturally arise when trusted adults engage with youth.

It is essential that trusted adults feel ready to address substances and other risk-related conversations. To navigate these conversations most effectively, adults can proactively prepare themselves with knowledge about adolescent development, effective communication strategies, and awareness of local resources for referrals when professional help may be needed.^{108,116}

Start by approaching risk-related conversations with empathy, curiosity, and a focus on understanding the youth’s perspective rather than judgment. These discussions should reinforce safety, trust, and the youth’s strengths and potential, rather than focusing solely on consequences or discipline. Youth are more likely to continue to engage your support and be receptive to advice when they feel respected, supported, and genuinely heard.¹¹⁷ It is also essential to normalize asking for help and to reassure youth that seeking support is a sign of strength.

Creating a plan or protocol for handling disclosures of risky behavior such as substance use can help adults feel more confident and reduce the chance of reacting with surprise or alarm. These situations, while sometimes challenging, can be pivotal teachable moments to affirm youth autonomy, provide guidance, and reinforce healthy decision-making.¹¹⁸ By remaining calm, supportive, and informed, adults can connect youth with appropriate resources and turn difficult conversations into meaningful opportunities for growth and connection.



4. Develop skills in youth.

How am I seizing or creating opportunities for youth to learn or practice skills that build or reinforce protective beliefs?

The toolkit has introduced you to ideas for strengthening facilitators of connection and engaging micro-skills in your interactions with youth to develop protective beliefs in them. Now we introduce an approach to support youth in developing their own set of protective skills that serve to build and reinforce the five core protective beliefs. This is the fourth and final strategy in the *way of being* in health-promoting relationships.

Protective beliefs are not static; they can be challenged and may waver over time, particularly during difficult life events. This is why building skills is essential. Skills provide the concrete tools youth need to maintain, strengthen, and restore beliefs throughout life's ups and downs. By fostering skill development, you help youth build and take ownership of their belief systems and their capacity to strengthen those beliefs over time. Like the effect of trusted adults using micro-skills, skills developed in youth can support a support a growth mindset^{119,120} including both a decisive shift from "I can be..." to "I am..." in their beliefs and actualization of the protective beliefs in their lives.

Opportunities for skill development will present naturally in everyday moments when the time seems "right" to teach or reinforce a skill, as well as through intentionally created skills practice sessions. Regardless of the circumstance in which the opportunity arises, trusted adults can be prepared with an approach to guide them in fostering protective skills in youth.

If helpful for guiding your work in fostering skills in youth, below are three interconnected steps to move youth learners from initial understanding to real-world application of new skills.¹²¹

1. LEARN

- **Provide a Rationale.** The trusted adult makes learning relatable by providing a personalized rationale for how the knowledge and skills can support and benefit the youth in their everyday life. By doing so, motivation is built to sustain engagement in the learning process.
- **Engage in Collaborative Teaching.** Rather than delivering information through one-way instruction, effective skill development requires interactive, step-by-step teaching. This collaborative approach draws out the youth's existing knowledge, identifies and corrects misunderstandings, and creates space for questions and concerns to surface naturally during the learning process.

2. PRACTICE

- **Facilitate Guided Practice.** Creating opportunities for youth to practice and receive instructive feedback is essential for developing new skills. Where applicable, model or demonstrate the application of the new approach or skill through demonstration. The trusted adult may role-play the skill and/or walk through the steps of the skill offering guidance and clarification along the way. Giving youth a safe space to practice a skill while receiving corrective feedback can build both competence and confidence. These practice sessions also enable trusted adults to assess whether genuine skill development has occurred and identify where continued learning or practice is needed.

3. APPLY

- **Connect to Real-World Contexts.** Ask youth about real-world opportunities where they can meaningfully apply the skill in everyday life and within specific situations and/or contexts. They will be more likely to apply the skills when they view them as relevant, potentially beneficial, and have clarity on when and how to use them.
- **Elicit a Commitment.** Encourage youth to make detailed commitments about how they will apply their new skills. These commitments should include specific details about what will be done, when it will happen, and how often the skill will be used. This specificity helps to mentally prepare for skill application and increases the likelihood of successful skill development.

Throughout your work in developing skills in youth, remember that fostering protective skills requires intentional effort to guide youth in applying and developing these skills within trusted relationships - relationships where adults consistently practice the connection facilitators and micro-skills outlined earlier.

The table ahead presents a sampling of skills that can be developed to promote the cultivation of the five protective core beliefs. These skills represent a starting point and are not an exhaustive list. They are included here as they have demonstrated evidence of achieving prevention, protection, and/or flourishing outcomes. Many of these skills are routinely used in therapeutic and coaching contexts and therefore, resources to support the implementation of many of these skills can be found online if additional guidance could be helpful.

Within the table below, skills are organized by each of the five core beliefs. Each belief is presented alongside general considerations and ideas for how trusted adults can promote development of these beliefs. While many of the general considerations and skills can support multiple beliefs, they have only been noted once in the table. Lastly, when fostering protective skills, it is vital to attend to context. For example, consider the linguistic, developmental, cultural, and other relevant characteristics of the youth you work with as you determine the appropriateness of application of these skills and where adaptation may be needed.

Table: Protective Skills for Youth

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
Belief #1 I am seen and loved. (By self, others, and higher power) Interrelated Beliefs • I am safe. • I am respected. • I am cared about. • I can trust you. • I am accepted for who I am. • I like who I am. • I have people in my life that enjoy being with me. • I believe in myself. • I have people in my life that believe in me. • I am worthy. • I am loved unconditionally. • I am capable of being seen and loved through faith in myself and a higher power. • My faith is a source of strength for me. • I have a purpose in life. • I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful. • I feel like I belong. • I feel connected with others.	General Considerations • To feel seen and loved is to feel recognized, accepted, respected, and deeply cared for as an individual by self, others, and a higher power. The opposite of feeling “seen” and “loved” includes feeling invisible, unheard, disliked, or neglected. • This belief can be cultivated through a focus on self, relationships with others, and spiritual connection to a higher power. Sample skills for each of these mechanisms of belief development are provided below in the Skill Development in Youth section. • As you prepare to support youth in developing this belief, you may need to guide them on getting clarity around what it means to be seen and loved by them, from the perspective of self, other, and a higher power.¹²² • Consider gaining self-awareness around your own belief that you are seen and loved. It will be important to manage your own beliefs and perspectives, particularly if this is a belief that could use strengthening, to maintain an open, nonbiased space for youth to explore and question theirs.⁹⁷ Skill Development in Youth Self: Develop Positive Self-Awareness⁹⁴ 1. Introduce youth to the benefits of self-reflection in developing their understanding of the best parts of themselves (values, interests, goals, personality, affect). 2. Support youth in developing positive self-awareness through conversations you have with them (probing them on their values, interests, goals), reflective writing (journaling in response to prompts you provide them), and completing free web-based character strengths, values, and interest questionnaires. 3. Encourage youth to think comprehensively about their values, interests, and goals across domains (self, family/friendships, school, hobbies). Ask them how they show these positive attributes to themselves and to others. 4. Mindfulness practice can also be taught to promote self-awareness. Find and share online resources youth can use to practice mindfulness meditation (spending a few minutes each day focusing on breathing and observing thoughts and emotions without judgment) or journaling about one’s thoughts and feelings that day (try using prompts such as, “What felt good today?” and “What challenges came up for me?”). Meeting our Own Needs 1. Introduce youth to the idea that people often look around to see where they can get their needs for being seen and loved met through external sources. Yet we as individuals can also take responsibility for helping to meet this need. 2. Ask the youth to create a visual of a tank or container of some sort. Have them label the container as their “Loved/Cared For” tank, or equivalent relatable language. Encourage them to identify a few actions they can take on a daily/weekly basis that would help them to feel loved, appreciated, and cared for. Examples may include many of the skills presented below, such as daily positive self-affirmations, self-compassion, and self-gratitude.^{113,123–126,113} Positive Self Affirmations¹²³ 1. Share with youth the protective role that routine practice of positive self-statements about one’s identity, values, and other internal experiences can have in creating a positive mindset and cultivating beliefs about feeling seen and loved. These are called positive self-affirmations and include aspirational and validating statements like many of the core beliefs and interrelated beliefs in this table. 2. Introduce various ways positive self-affirmations can be practiced. Youth can be encouraged to adapt or modify these approaches as they maintain the practice of ongoing regular reading or stating aloud of their self-affirmations. 3. Mirror activity. Using a hard-copy printout of a mirror, ask youth to write statements of self-praise, self-acceptance, and self-love within the mirror. Then build in daily reading (silently or aloud) of these affirmations. This can also be done while looking at oneself in a mirror. 4. Create a daily affirmation challenge by generating a list of affirmations and integrating review of them into one’s daily routine. Use resources like a phone alarm, school agenda, or daily task reminder to serve as prompts. 5. Free printable resources with sample positive affirmations can be used to support youth in identifying affirmations.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	<u>Self-Compassion</u>^{124,125} 1. <i>Learn to be kind to yourself.</i> People are generally not as kind to themselves as they are to others. A commonly used exercise to develop self-kindness is to help youth identify how they can be friends to themselves by treating themselves as they would treat a friend. ◦ Ask the youth to think about a common challenge kids their age have (e.g., failing a test, getting into trouble at school, not getting on a sports team). Encourage them to imagine this challenge just happened to a friend they care about. ◦ Ask them to think about what steps they could take, or what they could say, to show their friend kindness. The youth can write out or share aloud their response. ◦ Now ask them to share how they might treat themselves if they were to have experienced this same challenge. Discuss whether their approach to self-kindness was as supportive as it was to their friend. Explore opportunities where they could be kinder to themselves, as they would be to a friend. ◦ Ask youth to notice the next time they are not kind to themselves and to pause, identify how they would treat a friend in that same situation, and practice applying the same kindness to themselves. 2. <i>Mindful self-compassion.</i> The practice of self-compassion is grounded in developing a balanced, mindful approach to how we experience and make sense of life challenges.¹²⁷ Many activities can be found online to support youth in developing mindfulness. One way to get started practicing mindfulness with youth is through a sense-based eating activity that activates all five senses. ◦ Share with the youth one way of practicing mindfulness is to get used to paying attention to all of our senses. Eating food offers one way to do this. Give the youth a small piece of food they can place in the palm of their hand. Ask them to hold the food and close their eyes. ◦ Using their fingers (touch), have them feel the food, noticing the texture and shape. ◦ Then ask them to open their eyes (sight) and observe what they see. ◦ Next have them use their nose to smell the food and note if it has an odor and if so, what kind. ◦ Activate hearing by then guiding the youth to put the food next to their ear while squeezing it or moving it in their fingers, noticing any sound it might make. ◦ Lastly, have the youth use their tongue to taste the food. Guide them to slowly put the food on the tongue, taste it, then take a bite, noticing how the taste changes as they chew. <u>Grow Gratitude</u>^{113,126} 1. Gratitude and self-appreciation are part of treating oneself with kindness and can help youth to be more mindfully self-compassionate. 2. Share with youth the importance of growing gratitude, both to self and others, in the development of mindful awareness of our appreciation for different experiences and kindness to self/others. Ask the youth to make 5 headings on a page: Family, Friends, Home, School, Hobbies/Interests. 3. Then, generate a list of 5-6 things (big and small) that they appreciate within each category with a focus on both self-gratitude and gratitude of others. 4. Encourage them to review this list routinely. They could also try daily gratitude practice, such as journaling on the topic of what they are grateful for each day, for approximately 3-5 minutes. 5. Gratitude can also be expressed to others, and this form of appreciation can strengthen relational connection. Youth can practice sharing gratitude by stating aloud their top areas of gratitude to trusted adults or by writing a letter of thanks to someone they are grateful for to express how that person made them feel appreciated or special, and the impact they had on them. Other: <u>Express Needs</u> 1. As youth achieve self-awareness, encourage them to identify how <u>they</u> prefer to receive recognition, acceptance, care, and love from you and other trusted adults. This can be done through conversation, written prompts, or other self-reflection activities as described above. 2. Ask them how they might share this with trusted adults so that those adults understand what they need to feel seen and loved. Offer to model or role-play how a youth might share this information. Encourage the youth to practice putting words to their expression of needs and offer constructive feedback.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	<u>Recognize Caring Words and Actions</u> 1. It is important for youth to recognize when the words or actions coming from trusted adults are because they care about the youth and want to keep them well even when the youth do not necessarily agree with or like what the adults have to say. 2. Youth can recognize external signs of caring in trusted adults by simply noticing if the adult is listening attentively, involving youth in decisions that affect them, and demonstrating warmth, empathy, patience, and honesty.¹²⁸ 3. Other vital signs of caring may be present in the messages delivered by trusted adults. Youth can ask themselves, “Does the message”: a. Encourage me or represent belief in me in some way? b. Challenge me to grow or take appropriate responsibility? c. Represent an opportunity for me to better myself? d. Support me in reaching my full potential? e. Inspire me to see possibilities for my future? f. Offer a healthy response to a challenging situation? g. Praise my efforts and achievements? h. Hold me accountable for my actions?¹²⁸ Higher Power: <u>Explore Spirituality</u> 1. Engage youth to think about what spirituality means to them.⁹⁷ This could include looking up definitions of spirituality or having them ask people they are close to what spirituality means to them. Group settings can help further this discussion as youth can voice their perspectives to one another. 2. Challenge youth to consider, as they gather information, what feels true for them. Where might they have more questions or doubts? How is spirituality helpful for them? In what ways is spirituality a challenge for them? 3. Assist youth in exploring their thoughts and feelings about spirituality. If needed, guide them to a trusted adult or friend with whom they feel close and could further talk through their thoughts, feelings and questions to get a sense of clarity about their own spirituality. 4. Once the youth has defined what spirituality means for them, encourage them to identify how they could nurture their spirituality. 5. If appropriate, create opportunities for youth to engage in self-identified spiritual practices. <u>Engage Spirituality as a Coping Strategy</u> 1. Have youth brainstorm spirituality-based activities they could use in times of need or stress. If the youth gets stuck, offer examples such as⁹⁸: a. Spend time with others who share their spiritual beliefs b. Engage in artistic expression (e.g., writing, music) c. Attend spiritual meetings, celebrations, classes, or retreats d. Help others through acts of service (e.g., volunteering, donating) e. Participate in prayer or meditation f. Learn or practice martial arts 2. Once youth identify spiritual activities that feel supportive for them, work with the youth to set a goal for how they want to practice that activity. How often? When? With anyone else or by themselves? What do they need to be able to do it? 3. Encourage youth to follow through on their commitment to their goal by checking in with them in a supportive way. 4. As the youth engage in spiritual activities, have them reflect on how the activity impacts their view of themselves, their connection to others and the larger world, their sense of purpose, gratitude, and their place in the world. <u>Facilitate Hope</u>¹²⁹ 1. Trusted adults play a significant role in facilitating hopefulness in youth through positive role modeling as well as by helping youth to find purpose and meaning in their lives, often through spiritual connectedness.¹³⁰ Spirituality can foster a sense of connection, acceptance without judgment, and identity which can support positive expectations and a hopeful perspective.¹³¹ 2. Encourage youth to identify and connect with their spiritual beliefs. 3. Ask youth in what ways their spirituality has supported their understanding of who they are in this world and how they make sense of their experiences in life. 4. Ask youth to identify how a higher power provides hope in their life. 5. Encourage youth engagement with spiritual practices that offer them hope and a belief in a promising future and positive outcomes.¹³² 6. Through conversation, identify opportunities to inspire hope through their relationship with a higher power. This may include developing stronger faith in that higher power’s ability to guide them to solutions and positive outcomes. Seeking spiritual guidance and collective input from others with whom they share a spiritual practice may also be beneficial. 7. Encourage youth to spend time in nature and other natural environments to foster a sense of awe, wonder, and optimism.¹³³

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
Belief #2 I matter. (To self and others) Interrelated Beliefs • I am worthy. • I am capable. • I am needed. • I have something to offer. • I add value. • I feel valued. • I am taken seriously and treated fairly.	General Considerations 1. Mattering is a two-part construct that includes feeling valued by self and others (“others care about me and I feel seen and known by them”) and adding value to self and others (“I can act for myself and contribute to others”).⁹⁵ 2. This belief can be cultivated through a focus on self as well as relationships with others. Skill Development in Youth Self: Develop a Sense of Mattering 1. Ask youth to think about a moment in their life when they felt they mattered to someone else. 2. Explore what happened, what was said, what it felt like, and what they thought at the time. Listen attentively then reflect back to them a summary of their experience. 3. Elicit their thoughts about mattering today. Explore the value of looking back to moments when they felt a strong sense of mattering and accessing those memories when needed in the present. 4. Ask the youth to generate a list of mattering self-statements if they believe doing so could serve as valuable reminders and daily positive affirmation practice. 5. Be attentive to statements suggesting anti-mattering (e.g., being invisible, being a burden, not being needed, having no impact on others).¹³⁴ Counter these with the youths previous examples of mattering and encourage routine recollection of moments of mattering or practice of mattering self-statements. Recognize One’s Value¹³ 1. Further develop a sense of mattering by encouraging youth to take time to intentionally recognize the value they offer to self and others. 2. Reflecting on their relationships and internal experiences, youth can answer prompts such as: ◦ My friends like me because... ◦ My parents are happy when I... ◦ I am happy when... ◦ My teachers are happy when I... ◦ I am special because... 3. Youth can regularly review the ways they feel they add value and if comfortable, share that information with their trusted adult(s). If they share, reinforce their sense of mattering by expanding on the youth’s perspective and letting them know any additional ways the youth has brought value to you. Other: Build Connectedness 1. Support youth to seek out healthy places, activities, and people that can help them increase their sense of community. For specific steps, consider the skills described for <i>Cultivate Curiosity to Learn New Things and Build Social Support</i> (later in the table). 2. As youth engage in these activities and build relationships, support them in identifying their needs to develop a sense of trust in these relationships. Support them in transforming these needs into actionable asks of others. Offer to practice or role-play how they might express their needs (e.g., “Sometimes when I’m stressed I don’t need you to try to fix it; I would rather you listen without jumping in to help or getting upset. I feel heard then and respected.”) 3. Encourage youth to be willing to take risks in voicing their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives with others. 4. Coach youth to express curiosity and interest in others too. Mattering goes both ways – we all want to feel seen, heard, understood, and valued. Help youth focus on what they can do to help make that true for others. 5. Brainstorm with the youth what they can do to show they accept others for who they are and that they do not judge them. What might they say or not say? What might they do or not do? How can they make people feel as comfortable as possible? 6. Normalize that people generally benefit from receiving encouragement. Encourage youth to consider how they can notice and tell others when they do something well, cheer others on as they pursue their goals or tackle a challenge, and let others know they believe in them. 7. Invite youth to reflect on opportunities to be thankful. a. Have them identify someone in their life who has made a positive impact or has been helpful in some way. b. Ask them to think through what the person did, when and where it occurred, and what the impact was on them and others? c. Reflect to the youth the strengths, perspective, or other elements for which they seem grateful. d. Elicit how they could share their gratitude with the person directly, and what a commitment to do so would look like.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	<u>Develop Community Connection</u> 1. Assist youth in brainstorming topics and issues in the community that are important or of interest to them. 2. For each idea, support them in identifying how they might get involved, the roles or responsibilities they are interested in taking on, ways to get started, and their desired level of involvement/engagement. 3. Guide them to consider what support and resources they might need to support their involvement. 4. Partner with them to help establish goals and steps to achieving those goals around these interest areas.
Belief #3 I can influence my life and health. Interrelated Beliefs • I have a purpose in life. • I see possibilities for my future. • I can grow and succeed. • I am responsible for my actions. • I have goals for myself. • I have choices. • I am confident I can take charge of my life. • I am aware of my own strengths. • Learning is important to me. • I can learn from mistakes and setbacks. • My past experiences will help me in the future. • I have people in my life that create opportunities for me to take action and lead. • I have people whom I consider role models for me.	<u>General Considerations</u> 1. The belief that one can influence one's life and health is grounded in the development of agency and competence through self-efficacy, resilience, and clarity on one's meaning and purpose in life. 2. Developing this belief can be achieved through skills in the areas of values and strength exploration, goal setting, creating mastery experiences, fostering leadership, developing critical thinking and decision-making, and problem-solving.^{103,135-137,143} Examples of some of these skills are provided below. 3. Trusted adults cultivating this belief serve as guides, balancing the level of independence and support needed that will allow the youth to be successful. For example, know when to step back and let the youth navigate situations themselves and when to provide sufficient support.^{135,139-144} <u>Skill Development in Youth</u> <u>Discover Core Values</u> 1. Introduce youth to the idea that our values help guide us into growing into the person we want to be. If honesty is important to them, then they can work to grow to be an honest person by choosing to act in ways that are consistent with this value. Discovering core values is a helpful way of figuring out what matters most to someone. 2. Do a values exercise with the youth. This may include eliciting values through discussion from an insightful youth, completing a free online values survey, or reviewing online checklists of values and asking them to check off all the values that are important to them. Once a values list has been created, have them identify the top 5 that resonate most with them. These likely represent their core values. 3. Support the youth in generating a list of behaviors or actions that will help them to live out their core values daily. <u>Cultivate Curiosity to Learn New Things</u> 1. Foster a sense of wonder and curiosity by asking youth to explore their interests and questions about themselves, others, and the world around them. If appropriate, seek trusted people in their lives to ask these questions to.¹⁰⁹ 2. Encourage youth to identify new learning opportunities. Have them brainstorm hobbies, activities, and pursuits that interest them, or new skills they want to learn. Inspire them to think big and outside the box, not limiting their ideas. Youth can pick one or two items from their list and plan to pursue them. Invite youth to set a goal using the goal-setting skill below. 3. Discuss the importance of the youth finding a trusted adult with whom they can share their plan and rely upon for encouragement and support if they get stuck or need help. <u>Goal Setting</u> 1. Ask youth to visualize what they would like to accomplish in the short term and long term (ensure these outcomes are within their control). 2. Encourage them to write down a few important goals and specify WHY these goals are important. 3. Assist youth with clarifying their goals using the SMART principles (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound). 4. Help youth identify a reasonable amount of time to accomplish each goal. Ask what resources or support they may need to accomplish the goal(s) (e.g., parental support, money, transportation). 5. Support the youth in breaking each goal down into steps, each with an estimated amount of time they anticipate it will take to complete that step. As they accomplish steps, they can check them off to serve as a reminder of progress made.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	6. Support youth achievement of goals by encouraging them to share progress, providing guidance when facing obstacles, helping with accountability, and celebrating successes.¹¹¹ As youth pursue each step, check in with them to talk through how it's going and to offer helpful feedback and guidance as needed. If not with you, be sure to have youth identify another trusted adult with whom they can check in and create a plan for how they can ask that adult for support. 7. Coach youth that if they feel their voice is not being heard or that their involvement does not feel authentic and meaningful, to come to you or another trusted adult to talk through alternative ways of handling the situation. Be prepared to enter the arena as an advocate for the youth if they feel it would be helpful. 8. Remind the youth not to be discouraged by setbacks – they happen, and the youth can overcome them! <u>Cultivate Hope</u> 1. According to Hope Theory, hope is made up of three parts: goals, pathways, and agency. Goals provide a direction for where someone is heading, pathways serve as the roadmap for how to get there and manage detours along the way, and agency provides the determination for the pursuit.¹⁴⁵⁻¹⁴⁶ 2. Following goal setting, youth can generate hope by building skills in pathways and agency. One way to do this is through an activity called hope mapping. To do this, follow these steps: - Ask youth to make three columns labeled 'Goals', 'Obstacles' and 'Pathways'. - List a current goal and generate at least three viable pathways toward that goal. - Identify at least one obstacle or anticipated roadblock for each pathway. - Conduct a pros/cons analysis of the pathways/obstacles and select the most promising route. - Create a plan for how to overcome each obstacle along that pathway. 3. Activate agency by eliciting from youth strengths and aspirational statements they may wish to include around their columns/map to serve as motivation throughout their goal pursuit (e.g., "I know I can achieve this.") 4. Have youth post the image/document where they can see it daily. <u>Healthy Decision-Making and Problem-Solving</u> Teach youth an approach to making healthy decisions and problem-solving by walking them through the steps below. Explain each step and use a real example to demonstrate the process. Ask youth to practice applying the steps with another problem/issue and offer supportive feedback. - Identify a decision to be made (or problem to be solved) that is within one's power to influence. - Explore potential options for resolving that decision/problem. - Examine the pros/cons of each option in relation to core values. - Select the preferred decision/option. - Plan for acting on the selected decision/option and execute. - Evaluate how it went (including seeking feedback if helpful and appropriate) and be willing to accept consequences (negative or positive). If it didn't work out as intended, return to Step 2 and work through the process again. <u>Future Orientation</u> 1. The ability to imagine a future self has two parts: how you think and how you feel, or stay motivated. Support youth in building future-oriented thinking skills by having them practice imagining future situations, visualizing the steps they'll take to get there, and helping them learn skills to achieve these goals (e.g., planning, organization, time management). Build positive feelings and motivation for future goals by giving youth experiences that give them control over what happens next, and ask them to picture themselves reaching the goal.¹⁴⁷ 2. To develop thinking skills of a future orientation, try these activities: - Help youth visualize their future goals. Ask: In 5 years, considering your values, strengths, and what you have been through, what kind of life do you want to have? Where do you see yourself? What do you see yourself doing? Who do you see yourself surrounded by? - Ask youth to brainstorm and research potential role models. Role models are people who have achieved goals similar to their own. Have them consider ways to connect with these adults and identify goals for the relationship (i.e., what they would like to gain).

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	3. To develop the feeling/motivational skills of a future orientation, try these activities: - Ask youth to think about their core values and strengths. Consider these prompts: How would you describe your values and strengths? Why are they important to you? In what ways have they helped you so far? How do you feel they could help you in the future? - Have youth think back to a time in their life when they made it through a struggle. Ask them: What happened? What did you do to get through the struggle? Did anyone help you? What did you learn? Has anything changed over time (i.e., how did you grow by overcoming that struggle)? In what ways are you stronger now? What does this say about you? Based on what you have faced in the past, what do you want to do with your life moving forward?¹⁴⁸ - Encourage youth to generate mantras or statements they can repeat to tell themselves to remain positive and believe in their ability to achieve their goals.
Belief #4 I can overcome hard things. Interrelated Beliefs - When things are hard, I can find strength and hope in myself, others, and a higher power. - I can think of ways to get things in life that are important to me. - I can come up with many ways to solve a problem. - I am capable. - I can learn from mistakes and setbacks. - I can manage my emotions. - I have coping skills to use no matter what comes my way.	General Considerations - The belief in overcoming hard things extends beyond the previous belief that one has influence over their life and health, shifting into the specific context of managing life challenges. - Where appropriate, support youth by assisting their family in acquiring the resources needed to provide a safe, stable and supportive environment that promotes the youth's development and efforts to manage challenges (e.g., parenting skills training, family therapy).^{149–150} Skill Development in Youth Enhance Strengths - Ask youth to list their strengths. To help youth elicit strengths, you can ask: - What strengths have people told you that you have? - What problems have you solved or overcome? - What did you do to cope? - What positive things did you learn about yourself? About that type of situation? - How could you adapt that strength and skill to a new situation? - Recognize, identify, and reflect on the strengths you hear in the youth's responses.¹¹² - Encourage youth to remind themselves of one of their strengths every day by committing to putting one strength to use or reflecting on how they used that strength. - Ask them to identify areas for growing their strengths and write down how they can take one action to push themselves toward developing in that area each week. Build Self-Confidence - Ask youth to identify a past situation when they felt proud of a choice they made. - Guide them through a visualization of themselves that highlights the strengths that supported them in making that choice. - Help them translate that vision into a compliment for themselves. - Encourage them to write that compliment down and post it somewhere they can routinely see it to serve as a reminder of their ability to influence positive outcomes in their life. Maintain a Hopeful Outlook - Encourage the youth to explore past situations that seemed hopeless to them or too difficult to navigate, but which they now feel OK about. Be ready to offer a few general examples to help them reflect on their own life. - Once the youth have a situation(s) in mind, ask them to talk about how they were able to handle that challenge. What did they do? What positive thoughts, attitudes, perspectives, and actions helped them get through it? Did anyone help? What did they learn? What does this say about them? - Explore why the situation(s) no longer bothers them. - Encourage them to remember that challenging moments will pass. Help them develop ways to remind themselves of previous situations where they overcame challenges.¹¹² Embrace Change¹¹³ - Orient youth to the fact that change is inevitable and while we can influence some change, other change may be beyond our control. Having a plan for how to manage change leaves us better prepared when change occurs, reducing stress as a result. - Initiate learning of this skill by practicing for change. Have youth identify three example life changes of varying intensity: minor (e.g., delayed start time of band practice), moderate (e.g., a new teacher), and significant (e.g., moving to a new neighborhood or school). For each change, starting with minor and working up to major, ask the following questions: - How might you feel? - How could you maintain a sense of control? - What could make navigating this change easier? - What is something positive that can occur if you accept this change, or because of it? - Now apply this same line of questioning to a real-life change. Ask the youth to identify something that is about to change, or has recently changed, and answer the same questions above.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
<i>*Note: For meditation, it may be simpler to begin with deep breathing strategies like box breathing. Resources on box breathing, and other meditation exercises, can readily be found online.</i> <i>**Note: Thought processing worksheets for youth are widely available online and can provide a helpful structure for building this skill in youth.</i>	<u>Prioritize Self-Care</u> 1. Help youth learn about the connection between self-care and one's outlook, emotional health, ability to focus in school and on other tasks, and overall ability to be successful day-to-day. 2. Assess the degree to which they are adhering to these core self-care domains: a. Meditation* b. Exercise c. Diet/nutrition d. Sleep 3. If a youth is struggling in any of these areas, explore their readiness, willingness and ability to strengthen the identified area(s). 4. Work with youth to create SMART goals and a plan for how they can increase their self-care. <u>Manage Negative Thoughts and Emotions**</u> 1. Introduce the concept of how thoughts, emotions and behaviors are interconnected. Illustrate these connections using a hypothetical yet relatable example (e.g., getting a bad grade on a test). a. Ask what negative thoughts (e.g., "I'm a failure") and emotions (e.g., disappointment, anxiety) might come up for the person in that situation. Explore how those thoughts and emotions influence how that person might act (e.g., giving up on studying). b. Then ask the youth to consider a positive thought (e.g., "That was just a really hard test. I didn't study as much as I should have.") or emotion (e.g., motivated to do better) the person in that same situation may have had. Explore how these positive thoughts and emotions might influence that person's resulting behavior (e.g., take time to review what they got wrong, try studying more or differently next time). c. Summarize the two different outcomes based on differences in thoughts and elicit their perspective on the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. 2. Elicit an example of a recent problem or negative situation the youth has experienced. Partner with the youth to draw out what happened, their negative thoughts and the impact that had on their emotions and behaviors. 3. Next, elicit from them alternative more helpful/accurate ways of interpreting the situation and how that might drive more neutral or positive emotions and behaviors. If this is a recurring situation, youth can note their revised interpretations/thoughts somewhere accessible to them to pull out and review when needed. 4. Encourage the youth to continue to practice building this skill <u>Refocusing on Our Circle of Control</u>¹¹³ 1. Introduce the idea that at any given moment, there are things we can control and others that we cannot. Overly focusing on those things beyond their influence can leave us feeling stuck. Instead, it can be more productive to focus on those things that are within our control. Gaining clarity in the areas in which a youth can effect change helps to channel their efforts toward more constructive actions which can enhance personal empowerment and foster a positive mindset.¹⁵¹ 2. Using a pre-printed worksheet with two concentric circles (or make one with the youth on a piece of paper), label the larger inner circle 'Things I Can Control' and the thinner outer circle 'Things Beyond My Control'. Ask the youth to provide a list of things that fall into each of the two circles. 3. For the events they feel are within their control, explore previous scenarios where they were able to control or influence the outcome. Identify what they did to produce those outcomes. Explore how that approach might relate to other areas or situations in which they are currently feeling challenged. 4. Encourage the youth to focus on how they can continue to influence their life circumstances by focusing on those areas within their sphere of control and focusing on present and future actions rather than revisiting the past. <u>Build Defenses</u> 1. In circumstances when a youth anticipates or is having recurrent stressors, support them to build their defenses so that they feel better prepared to respond and tolerate various challenges.¹¹³ 2. For each identified stressor, ask the youth to identify the various triggers (internal and external) that tend to bring about the stressor. 3. Next, have them visualize a shield and generate a list of all assets (e.g., strengths, skills) they possess or have access to (e.g., supports) that can help them manage, tolerate, or mitigate the impact of the stressor. Encourage them to think through how the shield looks, what it is made of, and the protective qualities it possesses. 4. Then have them visualize the outcome. Elicit what would happen next in some detail so that the youth truly feels that outcome as not only possible, but likely. Ask what it feels like to have used their shield. 5. Identify cues to help them remember to activate their shield the next time they are in a challenging situation.

CORE BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
Belief #5 I have support. Interrelated Beliefs I have people in my life that... • Help me grow, succeed, and reach my full potential. • Believe in me. • Recognize my efforts and achievements. • Guide me through hard situations and systems. • Watch out for me and stand up for me when I need it. • Connect me to people who can help me grow. • Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. • Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.	General Considerations • Trusted adults are well-poised to be involved in the development of this belief. While there are skills the youth can learn to support this belief, there are also many opportunities for adult involvement in serving as facilitators of support for the youth, many of which are shared in the previous micro-skills section. Skill Development in Youth Interpersonal Skills¹⁵²⁻¹⁵³ Interpersonal skills are essential to the development of supportive relationships and for asking for support when needed. Each of the interpersonal skills below can be taught to youth by teaching them the skill, demonstrating that skill, engaging the youth in role-playing that skill, and offering constructive feedback. 1. Communicate effectively. a. Orient youth to the 4 primary communication styles (assertive, passive, aggressive, passive aggressive). For each style, ask them to describe what verbal and nonverbal cues are associated with that communication style. Encourage them to identify which styles they tend to use, keeping in mind this may vary across contexts (home vs school vs peers). b. Discuss the benefits of assertive communication. Review the core elements of being assertive: i. Take a moment to think before you speak. ii. Check in with your body and mind and get clarity on what you want to communicate. iii. Be specific and direct in what you say. iv. If saying no to something, have "No" be the first word out of your mouth. v. Make sure your voice is clear, firm and unhesitating. vi. Pay attention to your body language (use direct eye contact; face the person you are addressing). vii. If saying no to something, suggest an alternative or change the subject once you have made your wishes clear. viii. Be willing to compromise. ix. Do not feel guilty about saying no to something you are uncomfortable doing like substance use. x. Restate your assertion if you feel that you are not being heard. xi. Practice being assertive both when you are certain of your needs <i>and</i> when you may be less certain. When less certain, practicing asserting our needs can strengthen the delivery of our statements. xii. Reflect on the interaction to evaluate how clearly you expressed yourself and how others might have perceived what you said.¹⁵⁴ c. Demonstrate and practice assertive communication using a simple scenario (e.g., a friend asks you to borrow money again at lunch and you can't afford to lend it; you overhear someone being treated disrespectfully). After completing some practice, identify an upcoming situation in which the youth think they will need to use assertive communication. Practice that scenario and provide feedback to help them feel better prepared and have more confidence heading into that situation. 2. Actively listen.¹⁵⁵ a. Define active listening and listening with the goal of understanding. b. Teach how to ask open-ended questions for further elaboration or clarification. c. Demonstrate reflective listening or rephrasing what's been said to check for understanding. 3. Receive feedback. a. Teach youth a process for how to receive feedback. Steps include: i. Ask yourself if you are willing to be influenced by a positive adult or peer, and receive feedback with an open mind. ii. Evaluate if the feedback received is constructive or destructive (if the latter, walk away). iii. Avoid acting defensively or arguing. iv. Check in with the other person to really understand what they are saying. v. Look for something in the feedback you can agree with and let the person know. vi. Propose a compromise. vii. Reject unfair criticism.

BELIEFS & INTERRELATED BELIEFS	SKILLS THAT CAN BE FOSTERED IN YOUTH
	Build Social Support¹⁵³ <i>Note: This activity can be done visually by asking the youth to generate a network map of their sources of support demonstrated by three concentric circles. They can start by placing themselves in the middle circle and then work outward, adding the various support persons they might engage in different situations or with different needs.</i> 1. Ask the youth to brainstorm current people who are supportive in their live. 2. Then, identify the different types of support each of these people offer (e.g, physical, emotional, information, crisis, and other types of support). 3. Elicit the qualities and values youth want in their support people by looking at what they like about their current supports and what they feel is missing. 4. Have youth evaluate the pros and cons of each support in relation to how well it supports them in flourishing or being their best self. 5. Invite youth to identify ways in the immediate future they will need support and partner with them to develop a plan for how to ask for this support, using their assertive communication skills to support this request. 6. Teach youth how to receive support. For example, express appreciation and offer feedback when others provide support. Share what worked well, and what you might want to be different about the support they give next time. 7. When appropriate, support youth in building their support system. Explore ideas such as reaching out to connect with someone they know and would be interested in getting to know better or joining an organization or club with people who share their interests. Have them consider volunteering for a cause they care about to meet people with shared interests and provide support to others.

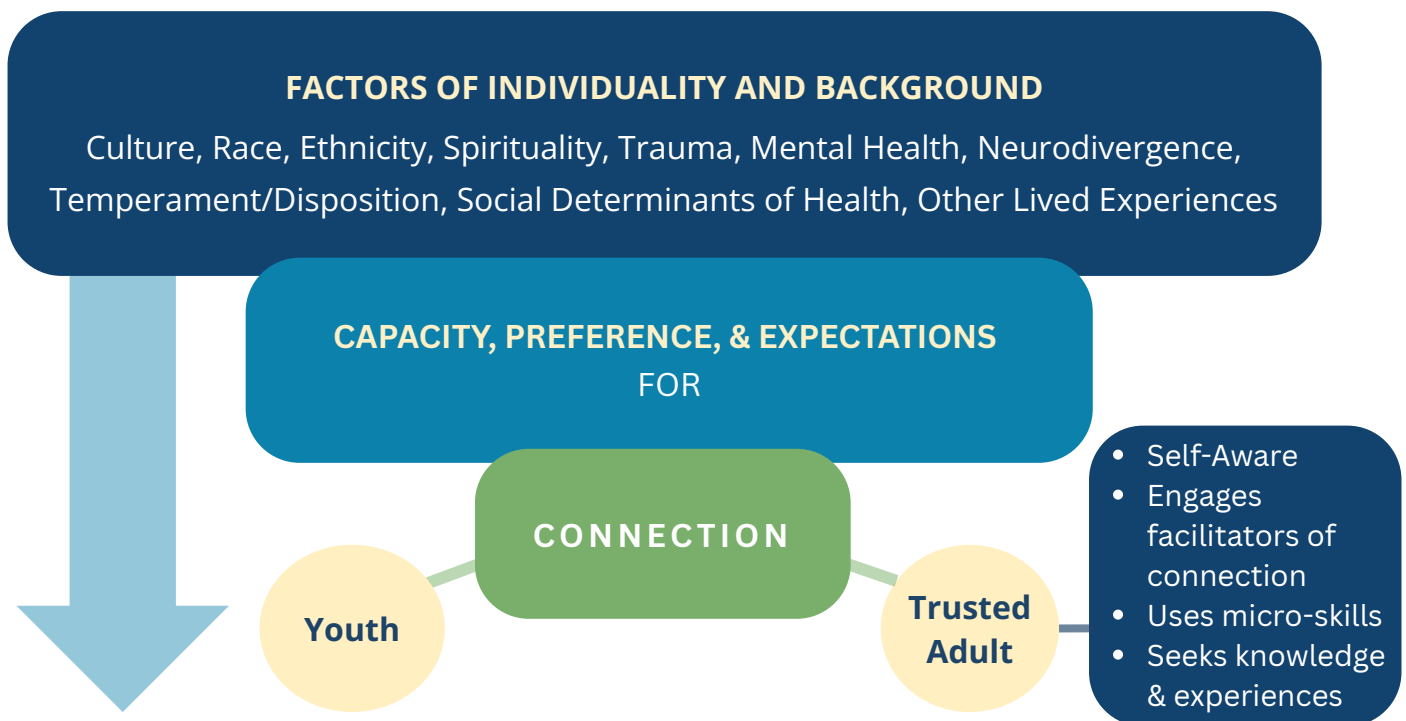


REACHING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS

Individuality and Background

People are healthiest when we feel safe and supported by others. Biologically, we are wired for social connection and our interconnectedness meets several fundamental needs while also promoting health and well-being.^{156, 157} Naturally, humans are diverse and vary in their capacity, preference, and expectations for social connection and relationships. The **Health-Promoting Relationship Paradigm** offers a synthesized approach to connection and relationship development aimed at fostering youth well-being through the cultivation of protective belief systems. For this paradigm to achieve widespread application and maximal benefit, it is important to consider how its approaches may need to be adapted across diverse groups to meet the varied needs of youth.

In developing the guidance within this section, we assume you are familiar with the youth you work with, and a deep dive into the nuances of relational connection across special populations extends beyond the focus of this toolkit. Thus, what we share below is a process and considerations for thinking through how **Health-Promoting Relationships** can achieve their fullest potential with all youth.



The figure above offers a comprehensive visual of reaching the full potential of health promoting relationships starting with the various factors that make up a person's individuality and background. These factors impact human capacity, preference, and expectations for connection, for both youth and adults. We, as trusted adults, can help shape youth experiences of connection as well as our own experience of connection through our own insight and actions. We can enhance our self-awareness and personal development through exposure to new experiences and knowledge. Additionally, we can embody the facilitators of connection and use micro-skills and creative, positive actions to engage youth.

Considerations for Reaching the Full Potential of Relationships

Youth from different backgrounds may differ in their ability and desire to connect with others, build relationships, and develop protective beliefs and skills. Recognizing and responding to these differences can build trust and help relationships achieve their greatest impact. Indeed, self-knowledge, insight into others, and respect and appreciation for differences are fundamental to connection and relational development.

Given that no two people are alike, successful relationships across all contexts involve the development of self-awareness, gaining an understanding of others, and finding ways to bridge differences through authentic connection. And yet when we look at the many dimensions of human difference, particularly those involving cultural background including race and ethnicity, neuro/psychological variations, traumatic experiences or childhood adversity, mental health, temperament, hardships such as food insecurity or poverty, other lived experiences, and spirituality (among others), we discover just how impactful these differences can be. These different facets of identity and lived experience can substantially shape a young person's capacity, preference, and expectations for connection, and the ways in which they interact and form bonds with others. Recognizing and thoughtfully considering these differences as we cultivate health-promoting relationships demonstrates empathy, compassion, and humility – all essential qualities for meaningful connection. **But perhaps most importantly: Adults using strategies to connect across differences have better relationships with youth, and youth perceive them as being more supportive.**¹⁵⁸

Connecting across Cultures

Culture can be defined as a dynamic system of knowledge, concepts, rules, and practices that are learned and transmitted across generations and change over time. Culture encompasses language, religion and spirituality, family structures, life-cycle stages, ceremonial rituals, customs, and moral and legal systems. Culture is also profoundly connected to other social identities such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.¹⁴⁹ Culture fundamentally influences connection and relationship development. For example, one's culture may inform how relationships are perceived, expectations within those relationships, and resulting relational behaviors such as eye contact, physical contact and touch, and verbal expression.¹⁵⁰ Culture also influences how certain protective factors such as autonomy, self-worth, and community are viewed, valued (or disapproved), experienced, and expressed.

Becoming “competent” in another's culture or background is not the goal. Instead, the goal is to become aware of differences that can influence one's ability to connect with another. Recognize the unique strengths and cultural assets youth hold, bring them into your relationship, and engage in ways that make youth feel seen and respected for who they are – this is essential for building strong relationships with youth.^{146–148}

Neuropsychological Diversity and Relationship Development

Youth experiencing some of the most common neuropsychological differences, including depression, anxiety, trauma, autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and others, may be more likely to struggle to develop and maximize their friendships and relationships. These youth may also vary in their ability to tolerate and respond to distress, understand and express their feelings, remain present and focused in social interactions, contribute to social exchanges, and may engage in atypical social behaviors. Misunderstanding these visible social behaviors as lack of interest or effort can result in lost opportunities for connection and/or frustration when working with youth to cultivate protective beliefs and foster corresponding skills. As trusted adults, it is important to remember that youth come from diverse backgrounds that may influence their ability to engage and participate in relationships.

Responding to Differences: Challenges and Opportunities

Within the health-promoting relationships paradigm, where the relationship serves as the primary tool for change, differences are to be expected. And yet, when we don't share experiences or backgrounds with the youth we work with, we may have to work harder to connect. Differences that are more complex may challenge our ability to cultivate protective beliefs and skills, and possibly even drain the energy we might otherwise direct toward efforts to connect. This is partly because aspects of difference influence our communication styles, values, emotional expression, and our ability and desire to connect. **When we and the youth we serve differ in these areas, it becomes crucial to enhance our efforts to engage the facilitators of connection as mechanisms for achieving connectedness.** Depending on the differences present, it may at times also be beneficial to engage other trusted adults with professional experience in meeting the unique needs of youth (e.g., trauma, neurodivergence).

When youth present with different communication styles, values around emotional expression or differences in their ability or desire to connect, we can experience these differences as off-putting or even offensive. As trusted adults, we may have negative or unhelpful responses based on unchecked assumptions. These reactions can happen to anyone, particularly under stress or time constraints, and are more likely in the context of differences when true understanding of another person is lacking. The problem with responding in reactionary ways is that it can drive us toward disconnection. The goal is not to halt internal thoughts and feelings, but to recognize them as they arise and take a moment to craft a more positive or helpful response. To put this into context, we have created a table below to share several scenarios that could trigger a counterproductive reaction within a trusted adult. Alongside these connection-hindering reactions are alternate responses that work to build stronger connection. Notice the many facilitators of connection (in bold) within the third column describing sample connection-building responses.

SCENARIOS	CONNECTION-HINDERING REACTIONS	CONNECTION-BUILDING RESPONSES
A youth interrupts you with a negative statement about what you are sharing to a group of their peers.	Respond reactively "They're not going to talk to me like that." "If I let this slide, I'll lose control." "I can't believe they just did that!"	- Practice self-awareness and patience by pausing before responding. Utilize empathy to consider differences in communication styles driving your and the youth's reactions. - Show humility by recognizing that strong emotions may signal something important the youth is trying to communicate. - Respond with respect: "I can see you're upset. Help me understand what's happening for you right now."
A youth that's been selected for a leadership role gets into a fight with another student from the program.	Shut down opportunities for the youth "They're not ready for this opportunity." "I'm done trying with them." "They lost their chance."	- Demonstrate empathy and nonjudgment, recognizing that setbacks are part of growth. - Show nurturance: "This didn't go as planned. Let's talk about what happened and how to move forward from here." - Approach with curiosity and full presence, considering what may have influenced their choices.
A youth perceives your comment about their "interesting" way of thinking or speaking as putting them down for being different.	Say things that cause harm without realizing it "I didn't mean it that way. It's not a big deal." "They're overreacting, kids today are too sensitive." "I've worked with kids like this for years, I know what they need." "It's just how I talk. I wasn't trying to hurt you."	- Practice self-awareness and humility to recognize the harm that may have been caused. - Practice self-acceptance for inadvertently causing harm, while developing empathy for the youths' experience of harm. - Show care by being quick to apologize and acknowledging the impact of your actions: "I hear that my words hurt you, and I'm sorry. Help me understand how I can do better."
A youth routinely arrives 10-minutes late to your meetings and then doesn't make eye contact and appears disinterested.	Assuming negative intent "They're just trying to push my buttons." "They're being manipulative." "They don't care about this program." "They're always difficult."	- Show nonjudgment and full presence by staying curious about the youth's experience. - Utilize empathy and respect to consider the youth's unique capacity, preference, and expectations for how they show up. - Practice self-awareness by considering how your interpretations are affecting you. - Approach with kindness and care: "I wonder what's making being on-time and engaging difficult for you. How can I help best support you?"

Each young person brings with them a distinct mix of qualities and life experiences that shape how they express themselves, build relationships, and engage with the world. These facets reflect the ways they've been shaped by their environments, communities, and past interactions. By tuning into aspects of difference and gaining the ability to pause connection-hindering reactions before they occur, trusted adults can take time to understand the meaning behind youth behavior better and respond in ways that promote connection. **When we can move beyond focusing on behavior alone to comprehend a young person's circumstances, values, and personal history, we allow ourselves the gift of cultivating the trust and connection that makes health-promotion more probable.**

As a trusted adult, you can also take steps to intentionally develop your capacity to create connection despite differences, enabling your relationships with youth to serve as pathways for nurturing their well-being. Start by taking an open and honest look at your challenges and strengths in building relationships with young people whose backgrounds, beliefs, or lived experiences are different from your own.

Strategies to Connect across Difference

Your own facilitators of connection and micro-skills, discussed earlier in this toolkit, offer a fundamental and universal way of being with youth that fosters connection, even when differences are present. In addition, when connecting and building relationships with youth from varied backgrounds and supporting their development of protective belief systems, consider opportunities to enhance your approach. We encourage you to take time to reflect on how you currently connect with youth from different backgrounds. Below are a few reflection questions that may help you uncover the unique challenges and opportunities that currently exist when connecting with youth from different backgrounds. As you reflect, we invite you to consider your strengths and where more focused attention would help you better connect with youth. Perhaps think about the youth you have struggled to connect with and look for any patterns that may hinder connection.

Reflection Questions

1. **What facets of difference (e.g. culture, neuro/psychological variations, economic hardship including food insecurity, family structure and dynamics, traumatic experiences or childhood adversity, racial and ethnic identity, spirituality, etc.) are central to the youth you work with?**
2. **In what ways do you share these aspects with the youth you serve, and in what ways do you differ?**
3. **How do these similarities and differences influence your (and their) ability to build trust and connection with one another?**
4. **How might thoughtfully recognizing and respecting these dimensions of difference, whether through direct conversation or other ways, affect your relationships with youth?**

On the following page are three strategies that can facilitate relational connection in the context of difference.¹⁵⁹⁻¹⁶² Try to identify 2-3 growth areas as next steps to support your relationships in reaching their full potential. As you review these strategies, take note of the many ways in which the facilitators of connection can be leveraged to support connection across differences.



1 SELF-AWARENESS

(Facilitator of Connection: Self-Awareness)

- ▶ Explore the role of your own background and identities on your values and assumptions.
- ▶ Identify your beliefs, attitudes, and biases about youth from different backgrounds or abilities.
- ▶ Assess your comfort with connecting through differences and identify ways to decrease any discomfort or address any of the growth opportunities identified in your self-reflection. Ways to get started could include doing research/watching videos to reduce unknowns, or increasing exposure to people different than you, then reflecting on your internal reactions.

2 EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON'S BACKGROUND(S)

(Facilitators of Connection: Humility, Care, Nonjudgment, Respect, Vulnerability)

- ▶ Cultivate an attitude of openness, curiosity, and non-defensiveness toward learning about others. Ask the youth, "What do you feel is important for me to know about you?"
- ▶ Attend events and gatherings where you will have an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds.
- ▶ Set an intention to establish connection and relationships with people from different backgrounds.
- ▶ Seek out knowledge and information about the backgrounds of the youth you work with. Ask them, "What are the most important aspects of your background or identity? Are there any aspects of your background or identity that make a difference in how you manage school?"
- ▶ Observe and ask questions about differences in communication styles and values, interests, and beliefs.
- ▶ Observe communication patterns among youth and their families and reflect on how mismatches between your communication patterns, beliefs, values and experiences and those of the youth you work with could impact your ability to form health-promoting relationships with them. Ask, "How can I show up in a way that is most useful for you?"

3 POSITIVE ACTION TO FACILITATE SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH A PERSON FROM A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND

(Facilitators of Connection: Care, Respect, Nurturance, Patience, Full Presence, Self-Awareness)

- ▶ Acknowledge and celebrate strengths and interests.
- ▶ Create a space that feels safe and supportive.
- ▶ Initiate conversations with a focus on the interests of the youth.
- ▶ Exercise patience if it takes a while for a youth to warm up or engage, or if they engage minimally in a conversation.
- ▶ Reframe and/or simplify questions if needed. Try asking one question at a time.
- ▶ Be mindful of your body language and the body language of others. Ask questions if you are having a hard time reading someone's body/social cues.
- ▶ Embrace and accept what may seem like atypical social behavior (e.g., lack of eye contact, quirks, repetitive movements).
- ▶ Seek out relationships with youths' families; inquire with curiosity to learn more about the family and their backgrounds.
- ▶ Ask youth questions with humility and curiosity if you don't understand where they are coming from.

Beyond the Individual: Applying the HPR Paradigm across Systems of Influence

The **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** provides an approach to fostering youth well-being through relationships. In addition to the paradigm's one-on-one application between trusted adults and youth, it can be applied at organizational or systems levels—spanning classrooms, schools, social services, behavioral health systems, and community coalitions. By embedding a health-promoting relationships approach into organizational missions, policies and practices, programs and services, and institutional cultures, organizations can foster collective well-being among larger populations.¹⁶³

Organizations that embrace and implement this approach are experienced by youth as places of trust and safety where the five core beliefs are strengthened because they are seen and loved, they matter, they can influence their lives and health, they are offered help to overcome hard things, and they have support.

Research in education, juvenile justice, and social services suggests that when entire organizations and systems prioritize preventive, protective, and flourishing factors, they:

- Create safe and health-promoting environments for all youth, with coordinated engagement of trusted adults across developmental stages and across ecological domains¹⁶⁴ and
- Enhance resilience across a wider network of youth, reducing adverse outcomes such as delinquency, substance use, and school disengagement.¹⁴⁰

To achieve collective well-being, trusted adults within an organization, agency, or community must communicate and model the same facilitators of connection, beliefs and messages. Rather than potentially conflicting messages from different messengers, both staff and the youth they interact with see the messages reinforced within a supportive environment. Adults promote youth agency and model the facilitators of connection in their interactions with youth and other adults. When this health-promoting relationships approach becomes institutionalized in ethos and action within and across organizations, the power and impact are amplified¹⁶⁵ and the ripple effects extend beyond the immediate youth-adult dynamic: 1) Youth begin modeling positive relationships with one another, creating a culture of wellness and support that is self-sustaining,¹⁶⁶ 2) Parents/caregivers, school staff, and other community members internalize and reinforce relational values such as authenticity, care, empathy, and trust,¹⁶⁶ and 3) Schools, probation agencies, healthcare organizations, and other systems prioritize relationships and help normalize connection as a foundation for well-being, ultimately contributing to public health and safety goals at the community level.^{166–168}

Achieving and Sustaining Organizational Practice and Culture Change

Just as individual adults can move from awareness to intention to growth in their capacity and skills to develop and reinforce protective belief systems that help youth flourish, organizations, systems, and communities also undergo a comparable process in their work to become relationship- and health-promoting.

Organizations are complex systems resistant to change, making it difficult to implement and sustain changes in organizational practice and culture. Fortunately, there are theoretical frameworks and evidence to guide careful planning of such change efforts. While initiatives often focus on visible shifts—such as new policies, regulations, or funding streams—authentic and sustainable transformation also requires shifting the underlying beliefs and assumptions that hold the system together.¹⁶⁹

There are several interrelated conditions that operate at different levels within a system.

- ▶ At the most visible level are the **structural conditions**: policies (formal rules and regulations), practices (everyday routines and norms), and resource flows (how money, information, and other assets are distributed). These are tangible and often the first focus of change efforts.
- ▶ Beneath that are the **relational conditions**, which include the quality of relationships, levels of trust and collaboration, and how power and influence are shared – both formally and informally. These are less visible but crucial for meaningful, sustained change.
- ▶ At the deepest level are the **transformational conditions**, which are the mental models people hold. These include beliefs, assumptions, and cultural narratives that shape how problems are defined, who is seen as credible, and what solutions are considered acceptable. Changing mental models is challenging, but it's where the most lasting impact happens.

For change to stick – especially when the goal is to strengthen health-promoting relationships – you need to address all three levels: structures, relationships, and mindsets. They're interconnected, and progress depends on working across the whole system. For organizations, schools, and systems interested in integrating the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm**, an intentional and reflective approach can help support meaningful and sustainable adoption.^{169,170} The following suggestions serve as starting points for organizations looking to embed relational strategies into their culture, policies, and daily interactions.

1 ESTABLISH A VISION AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Organizations may benefit from taking time to reflect on how relationships currently fit within their mission and organizational priorities. Build a shared understanding of why health-promoting relationships matter and are central to the organizations' goals of promoting youth well-being. Tie this vision directly to the organization's goals and to the key youth outcomes the organization aims to impact. This includes articulating a vision, engaging stakeholders, and aligning leadership around long-term goals.

2 EXAMINE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policies and procedures establish specific parameters for what is and isn't possible in an organization's day-to-day operation. Review these policies and procedures to assess how they might reinforce or undermine opportunities for staff to connect with youth and build safe, trusting relationships that promote protective belief systems.

3 ALIGN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Create an inventory of the programs and services in the organization's portfolio that offers adults opportunities to interact with youth. For each program or service, assess the degree to which opportunities are being fully utilized to cultivate connections, relationships, and protective beliefs. Identify gaps and opportunities to better align programs and services with the Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm.

4 ASSESS WORKFORCE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Consider what additional training staff may need on the micro-skills to cultivate connection, trust, and protective beliefs in youth, as well as the support to develop awareness, set intentions, and grow in their abilities both individually and as a team or organization. Do staff have the training and support needed to prioritize health-promoting relationships with youth? Are they empowered and consistently encouraged to model the facilitators of connection with one another and the youth they serve through training, organizational culture, and reflection on their own awareness, intention-setting, and growth?

5 CONSIDER YOUTH EXPERIENCE AND FEEDBACK

The best way to know how youth experience the organization and its staff is to assess their own feelings and experiences. Create structures and opportunities for youth to tell you how much they trust and feel connected to adults. Seeking youth feedback through focus groups, surveys, or interviews, or creating youth leadership opportunities to influence can strengthen youths' trust in the organization and provide valuable information about how the organization can better foster health-promoting relationships. Do youth in the organization think adults' words and actions help cultivate the five core protective beliefs?

6 ASSESS DATA AND OUTCOMES

Incorporate connection and relationships into the organization's performance metrics and outcomes. Look for opportunities to include data points that not only measure progress in achieving connection, building relationships and beliefs, and promoting thriving. Utilize these data for continuous quality improvement at both the individual and organizational levels. What data do you already collect or could you collect to help guide decisions about improvements to the organization's ability to support health-promoting relationships among adults and youth? What specific interventions could your organization implement that target low areas you find in your assessments?

The *Organizational Self-Reflection and Planning Tool* included in the Assessments section of this toolkit can guide your agency or organization in identifying opportunities for action and creating a plan to adopt a health-promoting relationships approach to its work with youth.

A Collective Journey Toward Well-Being

Shifting toward a health-promoting relational approach at an organizational level requires ongoing reflection, dialogue, and adaptation. By taking initial steps – however small – organizations can begin to create environments where youth experience the protective, preventive, and flourishing benefits of strong, trust-based relationships. Each organization, classroom, school, or system will have its own unique path in this work. Still, the core idea remains the same: When relationships are prioritized as an intentional pathway to promoting youth prevention, protection, and flourishing, the entire system becomes more capable of moving towards well-being at a population level.



PLAYBOOKS



This section offers practical strategies for how trusted adults in different roles can cultivate health-promoting relationships with youth. Examples in the toolkit thus far have illustrated how any trusted adult can facilitate connection, use micro-skills, and foster protective skills in youth. The following six playbooks build on this foundation with additional ideas and guidance for how adults in specific roles can adapt these strategies to their contexts and relationships with youth: parents/caregivers, educators, healthcare professionals, coalitions, law enforcement/corrections, and sports coaches. These roles were selected due to their high-frequency contact with youth, unique opportunities for a more nuanced application of a health-promoting approach, and requests received by ADAPT for more support when putting this toolkit into practice in these roles.

The science supporting the importance of each role is found in the table below along with unique opportunities each role has for cultivating youth well-being. This table may be helpful as you communicate the importance of health-promoting relationships to adults within these roles and advocate for them to prioritize health-promoting relationships with youth.

Table: Supporting Evidence for Playbook Roles

1. PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Positive parental/caregiver involvement is one of the strongest protective factors for youth well-being, with warm, supportive parent-child relationships providing the foundation youth need to thrive from childhood through emerging adulthood.¹⁷¹⁻¹⁷⁵ This is because parents and caregivers have a unique influence in shaping youth well-being through consistent presence, unconditional love, intentional modeling, and evolving support that balances connection with growing independence. Opportunities for parents and caregivers to embody a health-promoting way of being and cultivate protective beliefs and skills in youth can be found in every aspect of parenting.

- **Parents and caregivers create the foundational environment for development.** The family serves as a laboratory where youth practice and develop essential skills, abilities, and competencies, such as navigating social interactions, forming their identity, achieving autonomy, and developing healthy coping.
- **Healthy family dynamics and parent-child relationships achieve protection, prevention, and flourishing.** Positive family and parental relationships and activities lead to youth well-being and prevention of problem or risk behaviors, including mental health concerns and substance use risk.^{171,176,177}
- **Parents and caregivers offer a unique influence.** Often the primary and most consistent adults in young people's lives, parents and caregivers are uniquely positioned to provide unconditional love and cultivate the protective belief "I am seen and loved" in ways other relationships don't or can't.
- **Parents and caregivers shape beliefs through words and actions.** Youth often observe parents/caregivers more closely and consistently than any other adults, seeking guidance and learning from what parents say and do. Parents influence their children's values, morals, beliefs, and behaviors through direct teaching and indirect modeling, making everyday interactions powerful teaching moments. Positive family role models in adolescence can lead to safe behavior choices, higher interest in education, and greater reported happiness.¹⁷⁸
- **The parental role evolves through adolescence.** As youth eventually spend more time with peers and explore their identities, the parental role shifts to encouraging autonomy. Parents remain essential by serving as both anchors of support and guidance as well as launching pads for fostering independence while maintaining emotional connection and availability in ways that meet everyone's changing needs.¹⁷⁵

2. EDUCATORS

Many factors that support students' **academic success**, prevent harmful behaviors, protect them in the context of risk, and support their ability to flourish can be cultivated through relationships with the trusted adults they interact with in the **school environment**. Decades of research have established the impact of students' relationships with teachers and other school staff on school engagement, school behavior, and academic achievement¹⁷⁹, showing that trust, warmth and empathy are key characteristics of these protective relationships.¹⁸⁰ and the resulting positive impact is long-lasting.¹⁸¹

(continued on next page)

- **Teachers and other adults in the school are key figures in the lives of youth due to the amount of time youth spend in school.** It is estimated that school staff interact with 95% of school-aged children (K-12) for around 6 hours per day¹⁸². Schools are second only to families in the amount of time and influence they have on students' development, including the formation of healthy (or unhealthy) beliefs.
- Because nearly every child attends school at some point, **schools have a near-universal potential to reach almost every youth and their parents/caregivers.** This opportunity has a significant impact when educators and staff are trained to create a culture of well-being.
- **Schools offer continuity in the lives of children,** making them instrumental in supporting healthy youth development and well-being from early childhood through young adulthood (K-12, i.e. ages 5-18).
- **All school staff** – including teachers, administrators, student services professionals, and support roles such as bus drivers, cafeteria worker, and custodians – **can serve as trusted adults for students** and have opportunities to cultivate protective beliefs in students.
- **School staff and teachers have typically chosen to work with students in a school environment because they care about youth.**¹⁸³ They are MOTIVATED not only to educate but to support youth development and cultivate healthy beliefs in students through role modeling, conversations, skill-building, and creating supportive environments. (*Learn more about how to create a positive school climate within the context of a broader school-based prevention strategy [HERE](#).*)

3. COALITIONS

Community coalitions serve as both a coordinating mechanism and a living model of the power of relationships to promote health, safety, and thriving through shared purpose, mutual accountability, and authentic partnerships with youth. Coalitions play a unique role in cultivating health-promoting relationships across systems and within communities.¹⁸⁹ They not only bring together organizations that serve youth, but also model the relational qualities that those organizations aim to foster with young people.¹⁸⁴ Coalitions align and strengthen the systems that shape young people's daily lives and contribute to reductions in youth substance use, violence, delinquency, and other problem behaviors, while promoting positive development, resilience, and thriving.¹⁸⁵⁻¹⁸⁶ By coordinating efforts across multiple sectors, domains, and developmental stages, coalitions help communities adopt consistent approaches that emphasize connection and the relational foundations of prevention and flourishing.¹⁸⁷ The coalition itself serves as a living demonstration of the principles it seeks to promote, modeling these relational values during meetings and events, and creating opportunities to activate youth development, engagement, and agency.

- **Coalitions model youth engagement and empowerment** and offer a venue and applied example for member organizations and sectors to witness youth leadership in action, where youth can contribute ideas, design or co-design solutions, and advise member organizations.¹⁸⁸
- **Coalitions foster collective impact through shared language and unified action.** By convening multiple sectors around common goals, coalitions help align prevention strategies, policies, and communication. A shared language about connection, safety, and health-promoting relationships enables each sector—schools, law enforcement, behavioral health, faith communities, and others—to reinforce consistent messages and approaches. This unity amplifies the impact of each organization's work and builds a community-wide culture of care and connection that youth can see and feel.¹⁸⁸
- **Coalitions build adult capacity for relational approaches.** When young people are invited into authentic leadership roles, adults learn to share power, listen deeply, and integrate youth perspectives into system-level decisions. Coalition partnerships offer opportunities for members to learn and grow with each other in various ways, supporting connection and cultivating health-promoting beliefs. Coalitions offer dedicated time and space for member organizations to learn and grow together. Regular meetings, joint trainings, and shared reflection help partners build skills in relational practice and apply these within their respective sectors.¹⁸⁹

4. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

Adults working in law enforcement and justice system roles occupy uniquely influential positions in the lives of young people. They play a vital role in shaping not only public safety, but also youth development and broader community well-being.¹⁹⁰⁻¹⁹² Relational approaches support long-term behavior change. When authority is exercised through connection, respect, and fairness, it models the very beliefs that protect youth from harm and guide them toward thriving futures. In doing so, officers and justice staff help communities become safer not only through enforcement, but through relationships. The quality of their interactions can profoundly influence youth trajectories, shaping not only compliance and behavior in the moment, but also longer-term beliefs about self-worth, resilience, safety, fairness, belonging, and trust in authority.^{190,191} Research shows that when justice professionals demonstrate empathy, procedural fairness, and respect, youth are more likely to comply with laws, engage positively with authority figures, and pursue prosocial behaviors.¹⁹³ Conversely, when interactions convey hostility, fear, or unfair treatment, they can reinforce shame, mistrust, and defiance, or bring up past traumas, they undermine both individual well-being and public safety.¹⁹³ **Law enforcement and justice system professionals thus have a dual opportunity and responsibility: to protect and serve the public while modeling the kinds of health-promoting relationships and beliefs that help youth thrive.** Their daily interactions as well as their responses in high-stakes or emotionally charged contexts can either strengthen or erode young people's belief that adults in authority can be trusted and that they themselves are capable, valued, and redeemable.¹⁹⁴

(continued on next page)

- **Positions of authority carry relational power and responsibility.** Unlike educators or healthcare professionals, law enforcement and justice staff often interact with youth in moments of crisis, discipline, or perceived wrongdoing, and in locations away from their family and friends. These encounters carry heightened emotional and psychological impact, amplifying the importance of relational skills. The way an officer speaks to a young person during a stop, or how a probation officer frames accountability or consequences, can either embed a belief of “I am bad and unchangeable” or foster “I am capable and supported.” This relational power is both a privilege and a responsibility that can shape life trajectories and community trust.
- **Law enforcement officers and justice staff shape critical beliefs about safety, fairness, and self-worth.** Youth form enduring perceptions about justice and authority through their direct experiences with officers, probation staff, or correctional personnel.¹⁹³ When adults in these roles act with fairness, transparency, and respect, they promote connections that support the development of protective beliefs. These experiences not only improve behavior and reduce recidivism but also contribute to community trust and legitimacy in policing and the justice system. Conversely, inconsistent or punitive interactions can increase fear, alienation, or shame – beliefs that increase risk for aggression, disengagement, and continued justice involvement.
- **Connection builds adherence, accountability, and transformation.** Youth are more likely to follow rules and internalize accountability when they feel respected, heard, and valued. Officers and other justice professionals who take time to listen, explain decisions, and convey care, even while communicating accountability and consequences, help young people feel seen and capable of change.
- **Relational policing and supervision improve safety for youth, officers, and communities. Interactions grounded in trust and empathy de-escalate tension, reduce aggression, and increase officer and youth safety.** Programs that train officers and justice staff in adolescent brain development, trauma-informed practices, and relational communication show decreases in use-of-force incidents, disciplinary infractions, and staff burnout, alongside increases in youth engagement and cooperation.^{195–198} These outcomes show that relational approaches are not “soft” alternatives; they are essential strategies for effective, safe, and sustainable practice.
- **Agencies can institutionalize relational practice.** In the paramilitary structure of law enforcement and justice systems, authority is communicated clearly from leadership. Departments and justice agencies can endorse and foster health-promoting relationships by building relational principles into policies, training, and supervision. Trauma-informed policing curricula, de-escalation and mental health first aid training for first responders, procedural justice coaching, reflective supervision, and wellness initiatives help officers maintain empathy and perspective under stress, enabling them to practice and model those skills to youth and the community.^{195–200} Performance measures can also include indicators of trust-building, communication quality, and youth perceptions of fairness, signaling that relationship quality is integral to effective policing and justice system practice.^{192,196,201–202}

5. HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

“When I walk into the room, I am thinking, ‘What can I do to make this patient’s life better and make this visit more valuable? To understand where they are coming from.’ There was a program that brought people together with a chronic disease, so they can share and talk with each other. One patient, who had been resistant to attending, stated that, ‘Nobody has ever offered me this, I always felt so alone.’ Connecting him with others made a huge impact on his health and well-being.” ~Family Nurse Practitioner

Healthcare professionals – such as doctors, nurses, behavioral health providers, and counselors – are well-positioned to build protective beliefs and skills in youth. Given the often ongoing and trusting foundation of these relationships, providers can extend beyond the essential preventative care and treatment they provide to actively promote youth well-being.

- **Regular, structured touchpoints create consistent opportunities for influence.** Healthcare professionals often have multiple interactions with a young person throughout their development, including during well-child visits, sports physicals, sick visits, and behavioral health appointments. The greatest number of touchpoints occur in primary care, with 86% of U.S. youth ages 0–17 having at least one well-child visit annually.²⁰³ Collectively, healthcare offers ongoing opportunities to develop meaningful connection and build protective beliefs and skills throughout a youth’s development.
- **Healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned to serve as trusted adults.** Youth identify healthcare providers as among the most credible sources for health-related information.²⁰⁴ Trust is strengthened when providers demonstrate confidentiality, honesty, respect, and empathy—qualities consistent with a health-promoting approach.²⁰⁵
- **Trust is essential for youth engagement and positive health outcomes.** The quality of the provider–youth relationship directly influences whether youth engage in care and their overall health outcomes. This is especially important for adolescents who may be navigating healthcare more independently for the first time and worry about embarrassment, judgment, confidentiality, or pain.²⁰⁶ Healthcare professionals can address these fears by creating safe, nonjudgmental spaces where youth feel heard, respected, and empowered in their healthcare decisions.
- **Healthcare professionals can be equipped to promote whole-child health and well-being.** Beyond diagnosing and treating illness, providers can teach coping skills, model healthy communication, validate concerns, and help youth connect health behaviors to their personal values and goals—all of which cultivate protective beliefs that support resilience and flourishing. Additionally, asking about and exploring spirituality and integrating this into care aligns with standard and best practices across behavioral health disciplines (nursing, social work, psychology, medicine).

6. SPORTS COACHES

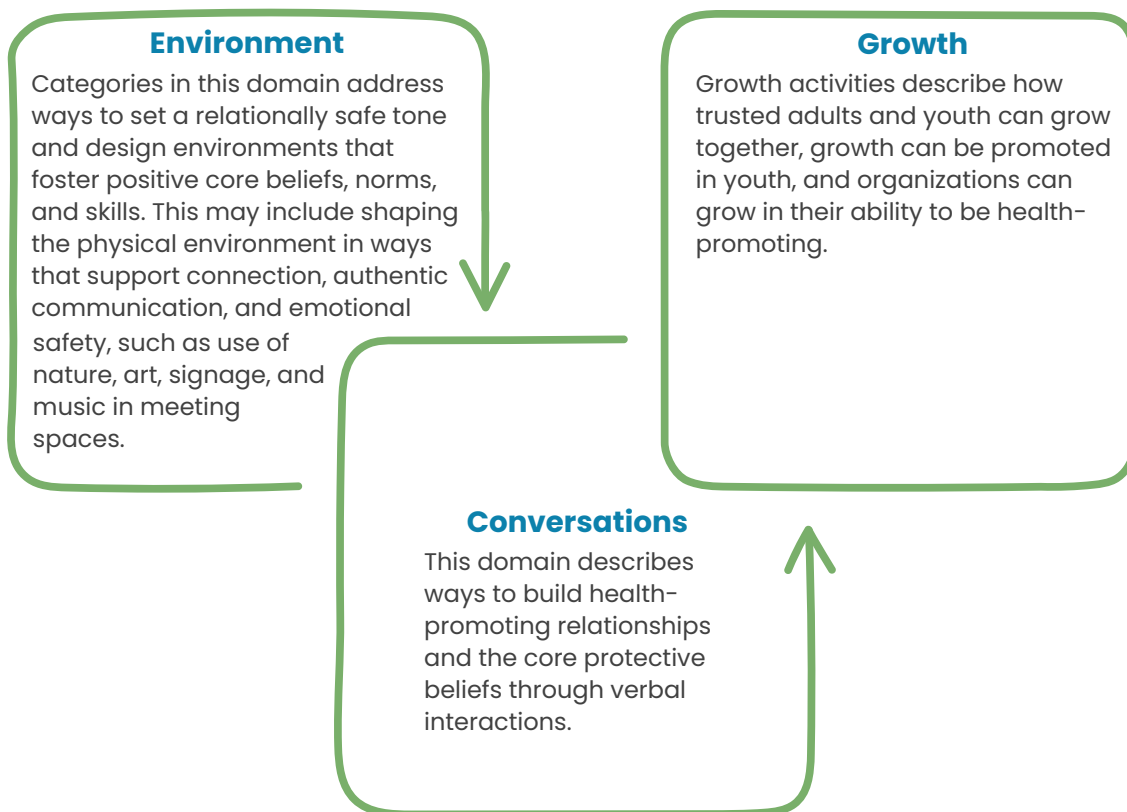
Youth sports offer a uniquely powerful context for promoting positive developmental and behavioral outcomes when coaches move beyond technical skill instruction and a sole focus on competition, to intentionally foster connection, belonging, and psychosocial growth in young athletes.^{207,208} A substantial body of research demonstrates that coach-athlete relationships grounded in trust, empathy, and consistent support can enhance self-esteem, resilience, emotional regulation, teamwork, leadership, and life skills that can go beyond sport.^{209–212} Coaches who adopt relational and developmentally informed approaches emphasizing social-emotional learning, psychological safety, and shared agency create conditions in which youth not only perform better athletically but also thrive personally and socially.^{208,213–215}

- **Relational coaching promotes core developmental outcomes.** High-quality coach-athlete relationships strengthen self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being, all central to resilience and positive identity formation. Relational environments foster competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (the “Five Cs” of Positive Youth Development).²¹⁶
- **Coaches have a unique opportunity to create psychologically safe and supportive environments.** Coaches play a primary role in creating safe spaces that allow youth to take risks, make mistakes, and learn without fear of judgment. Consistent routines, clear expectations, and genuine care help athletes feel seen, supported, and emotionally regulated, enhancing both performance and personal growth.
- **Coaches can foster connection and protective beliefs through sports-related conversation.** Meaningful conversations, about effort, teamwork, setbacks, and respect help athletes develop internalized protective beliefs such as self-worth, belonging, and optimism. “Connection moments,” such as pre- or post-practice check-ins, affirm athletes’ value beyond performance and support identity development.
- **Coaches can integrate life skills and socio-emotional learning into coaching practice.** Coaches can intentionally embed life skills, such as goal setting, problem-solving, empathy, and communication, into drills, reflections, and team discussions. Programs emphasizing life skill transfer (e.g., Play It Smart, First Tee) demonstrate long-term benefits in school, personal relationships, and community participation.
- **Coaches can model growth mindset and co-agency for development beyond sport.** Coaches who model humility, perseverance, and empathy help normalize learning through failure and cultivate resilience. Emphasizing development over winning fosters autonomy and self-determination, helping athletes internalize motivation and apply lessons across life domains.

Each playbook illustrates the application of specific facilitators of connection, core beliefs, and/or micro-skills are for adults in different roles. For example, educators are naturally positioned as long-term role models and can engage kindness and curiosity, practice self-reflection, and grow self-awareness through classroom assignments and interactions. Law enforcement officers, such as school resource officers, uniquely integrate safety and care when promoting youth well-being, and often have opportunities to exercise nonjudgment while helping youth develop the beliefs “I can influence my life and health” and “I can overcome hard things.”

We encourage all readers to use the core content of the toolkit to support their development of the environmental strategies, connection facilitators, micro-skills, and skill promotion in youth. The guidance and examples provided are universally appropriate for trusted adults and provide an ideal foundation for using a health-promoting relationships approach.

The following playbooks begin with a description of how the health-promoting relationships approach applies to the specified role and offers concrete strategies for creating the environment, facilitating connection, and engaging micro-skills in that role's context. Playbook examples are organized into three primary domains: environment, conversations, and growth.



Playbook examples reinforce a *way of being* that reflects the environmental strategies, connection facilitators, and micro-skills trusted adults use to cultivate the core protective beliefs or their interrelated beliefs. Since the specific protective skills youth need to develop are different for each person, the playbooks do not emphasize selecting which skills to develop in youth. Many of the examples shared DO create opportunities to support the development of protective skills, so we encourage you to refer to the *Develop skills in youth* section of the toolkit to identify the most appropriate skill for any particular moment.

We know that each adult and each youth vary in their capacity, preference, and expectations for connection and also experience different levels of risk vs. flourishing. Therefore, each adult's and youth's background should inform how the examples are adapted. Please look at the *Reaching the Full Potential of Health-Promoting Relationships* section of the toolkit for guidance on adapting the paradigm's strategies to meet the varied needs of youth.



Playbook: Parent & Caregiver

(Page 1 of 2)



Parents and caregivers are often the most consistent, invested, influential, and trusted adults in the lives of youth. They provide youth a foundation for overall development including basic needs, emotional support and security, guidance, protection, education, socialization, independence, and role modeling of moral values and life skills.

Create the environment.

1. Ground your home in a shared mission, values and clear expectations.

- Establish, live out, and discuss family values (e.g., kindness, service, respect, faith, integrity) as a guide for daily choices.
- Co-create house rules that reflect shared values and promote well-being.
- Maintain consistent routines for meals, homework, and check-ins to provide stability.
- Help youth link daily decisions to their longer-term goals and beliefs.
- Create a family "I see you." message board to highlight and celebrate positive actions and words. Bring the messages into family discussions, such as at mealtimes.
- Engage in creative interests like art or music to express appreciation and strengthen bonds.

2. Create rhythms of connection and belonging.

- Develop routines (shared meals, nightly check-ins, weekly rituals) that reinforce both love and meaning. Try a mix of broad questions (e.g., "How was your day?") and more specific ones (e.g., "What made you laugh today?").
- Build in spiritual or reflective practices: expressing gratitude, family prayer, sharing what you've noticed about your child's strengths or growth, or brainstorming long-term hopes or callings and revisiting how everyday actions can help them reach their goals.
- Schedule service opportunities you can do together as a family that bring your family's mission and goals to life, such as volunteering at a homeless shelter once a month.
- While getting ready in the mornings play music everyone enjoys to set the tone for a positive day.
- Leverage music or spiritual practices during times of stress as an opportunity to re-center on what is important to the family.

3. Model shared responsibility, coping strategies, facilitators of connection with youth and others, and how to navigate conflict individually and as a family with empathy and clarity.

- Role model facilitators of connection that may be particularly important for parents & caregivers, including self-awareness, respect, patience, love, nurturance, and vulnerability.
- Make it a priority to highlight the unique strengths of youth and how those strengths benefit the family unit.
- Be mindful of the emotional environment you create and the beliefs you are cultivating when working through conflict as a family unit. Ground discussions in family strengths, such as perseverance, honesty, and commitment to resolve the concern. Practice being politely assertive with youth and offer reassurances when appropriate.

Examples of Family Values

Character

- Integrity
- Honesty
- Courage
- Kindness
- Faith
- Health

Home

- Quality family time
- Sharing meals
- Service/Giving
- Punctuality
- Doing one's best
- Unconditional love

Social

- Respect
- Connection
- Trust
- Compassion
- Gratitude
- Listen to understand

Playbook: Parent & Caregiver

(Page 2 of 2)



Have conversations.

1. Practice honest and caring communication.

- Share your perspective on what is healthy, even when it challenges youth.
- Balance honesty with compassion and show that your guidance comes from a place of care and not control.
- Reinforce that your love is unwavering even when you disagree.
- Connect decisions to what is meaningful and builds on their purpose.

"I believe in your ability to make good choices. I'll always be honest with you about what is healthy and what could harm you, because I want you to have every chance to thrive."

2. Show support and love in meaningful ways.

- Express love through words, gestures, and acknowledgement of achievements.
- Offer tangible reminders of care through notes, messages, or small acts of kindness.
- Be fully present and responsive during stressful times (at school, with friends, or other challenges).
- Advocate for youth in different ways such as when a sibling has wronged them or a school situation could benefit from parental involvement. When appropriate, ask them in what ways you can best advocate for them.

"I notice how much thought and effort you put into that. It means a lot to me to watch you grow into your own person."

3. Build connection, voice, and belonging.

- Share daily conversations about highs, lows, and something you are looking forward to.
- Reflect with youth on when they feel most connected or supported.
- Give youth meaningful choices and responsibilities in family decisions.
- Listen actively and respectfully to youth perspective.
- Create tech-free moments for uninterrupted connection (meals/walks).
- Give space for doubts, questions, and exploration of purpose and spirituality without judgment. Affirm that their voice matters in making family decisions.
- Ask about and share with each other what excites you about life.

"You've got this, and even when things are overwhelming, I will be here with you, not just for the easy parts."

"Your perspective matters to me, even if it's different from mine. It is important to me that you feel like this is your space to share honestly. You first and then we'll decide together."

"When you share your ideas, it helps us grow as a family."

4. Model and celebrate strengths, growth, resilience, & values.

- Notice and praise effort, persistence, and positive behavior.
- Honor youth interests, talents, and values.
- Model vulnerability by sharing your own challenges and growth when managing setbacks.
- Encourage supportive relationships with mentors, spiritual leaders, or peers who affirm their worth and growth.
- Reframe mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Highlight each youth's unique contributions to the family.
- Support problem-solving and coping skills during tough times.

"I notice how you didn't give up, even when it felt impossible. That determination will carry you far."

"The way you care for and serve others reflects a deep part of who you are. That gift is something the world really needs and is part of your purpose."

Grow together.

1. Participate fully in your youth's life.

- Respond promptly and attentively when youth seek your attention – make eye contact, minimize distractions, and show genuine interest.
- Engage in their hobbies and creative interests.
- Attend their events to show support.
- Plan shared experiences one-on-one or as a family to build connection.

2. Foster talents, skills, and responsibilities.

- Support youth in exploring their strengths and spirituality, reflecting on what matters to them and applying it in real life. Invite mutual feedback to foster growth.
- Assign meaningful responsibilities to build skills and confidence. Provide youth space to work through challenges and make mistakes. Support them in identifying lessons learned and solutions.
- Promote creativity, leadership, and service as ways to discover personal and family purpose.

3. Set shared goals and reflection practices as a family.

- Make connection, growth, and mutual support explicit family goals.
- Building habits of reflecting together on progress, challenges, and growth.



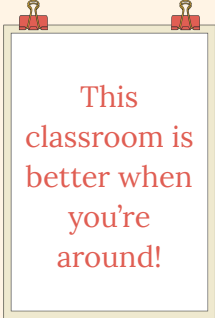
Educators and school staff are uniquely positioned to be trusted adults in the lives of youth given their consistent and structured contact with them throughout formative developmental periods. These touchpoints help educators and school staff observe changes, offer guidance, and create environments where students feel seen, safe, and valued. Their distinct role bridges home, school, and community contexts, positioning them as accessible mentors and role models whose influence enhances rather than replicates the influence of other trusted adults in the lives of youth.

1. Establish a safe, respectful, and empowering classroom and school culture.

- Co-create classroom norms that reflect shared values like respect, kindness, and responsibility. Invite students to shape school culture and share feedback with school leadership.
- Display messages that reinforce core beliefs (e.g., “This classroom is better when you’re in it” to affirm “I matter”).
- Model fairness and consistency to show students they are valued and capable.
- Connect classroom rules to bigger life lessons such as seizing the opportunity to learn and the long-term benefits of learning, keeping the classroom community safe and healthy, and that following the rules helps them engage with the world outside of the classroom.
- Offer opportunities for students to positively influence school environment (e.g., student councils, advisory groups, peer mentoring and mediation programs)
- Advocate for students when there are additional services they can benefit from or when they can benefit from teacher or staff involvement.
- Increase students’ sense of agency in communicating their needs. Find ways for them practice this in everyday situations, such as learning how to write a professional email, how to request something or advocate for themselves in conversation, or how to offer a genuine apology and ask for forgiveness when they have hurt someone.

2. Create rhythms of self-awareness, connection, and belonging.

- Invite students to reflect on how their actions align with their values and personal growth.
- Use consistent classroom rituals (i.e. morning huddles, daily check-ins, reflection circles) that signal that every student matters, stability, and opportunities for honest discussions in a safe environment.
- Incorporate reflection activities such as gratitude sharing or silent journaling with prompts about growth, purpose, or resilience.
- Keep a growth portfolio for each student to track and share moments of resilience and contribution.
- Celebrate students’ unique talents and effort that have contributed to the collective success of the class.
- Model humility, kindness, care, empathy, nurturance, and authenticity, as it is important for students to experience these facilitators of connection from educators.
- Apologize and ask forgiveness when needed to build trust.



This
classroom is
better when
you're
around!

SET THE TONE

“In this room, everyone’s voice carries weight. Even different opinions are valued. It’s okay to take risks here, because trying and failing is part of learning.”

“The expectations we have created together will help us all even beyond this school, because they help us grow into the kind of people who build trust with others and build community.”

SET THE TONE

“Let’s build some traditions as a class – maybe weekly shoutouts or reflections – so everyone has a chance to be seen and appreciated.”

“Before we leave today, share one thing you learned about yourself.”

“I know life outside of these school walls can be a lot, but I want you to know you have support here through myself and other resources available at the school.”



1. Normalize honest dialogue and listen deeply.

- Integrate brief check-ins focused on students' personal growth, challenges, or successes.
- Start class with a quick share, like one word or sentence about how students are feeling.
- Use a question box for anonymous student inquiries and respond weekly.
- Create space for personal storytelling of moments of resilience or overcoming challenges, encouraging active listening and presence among peers.
- Discuss common stressors (e.g., doing poorly on a test, worry prior to a test, or trying out for something new like a sports team, club, or council), strategies for gaining awareness on feelings as stress triggers (e.g., body sensations, thoughts), and share healthy coping strategies as a class.

2. Speak truth courageously and with respect, compassion and hope.

- Share hard truths about risks, boundaries, or consequences with empathy, reinforcing students' ability to grow and make wise choices.
- Discuss real-world case studies to explore short- and long-term consequences.
- Balance affirmations (e.g., naming a strength) with accountability when giving feedback.
- Use role-play to help students practice handling peer pressure and risky situations.
- Invite guest speakers to share stories of resilience and spark honest dialogue.
- Facilitate respectful debates to build empathy and evidence-based thinking.

3. Explore purpose, meaning, and values.

- Lead students through a "values exploration" exercise where students choose their top five personal values. Ask them to save their list somewhere they will remember and reference the list in future discussions and/or assignments.
- Assign a "passion project" tied to something meaningful to them (e.g., music, advocacy, community service, faith), with a presentation on their experience.
- Encourage reflection on moments of feeling most alive or strengths they admire in others and may want to grow in themselves. Have them talk about it in pairs or share with the class.
- Recognize and share each student's unique contributions and how they enrich the classroom.

"I may not have all the answers, but I'll always take your questions seriously."

"Let's pause. What I hear you saying is.... Did I get that right?"

"The truth is, choices have consequences – but so does courage, and you have it. I believe you're capable of making decisions that honor the person you want to become."

"This may feel uncomfortable, but leaning into it helps us grow and understand each other better. Let's practice slowing down and asking questions in a curious way. Even when we disagree, the way we treat each other matters – it's what makes our community strong."

"What are 3 things you need to start doing now to move towards the person you want to become in five years?"

"You are really strong at putting together arguments for or against a case. Have you thought about how you might use this in your future?"

"Purpose does not have to be grand – it just has to mean something to you and can start with something as simple as how you show up for people in your everyday life."

1. Co-create meaningful and purposeful learning experiences.

- Ask students how a project can be designed to reflect what matters to them.
- Let students lead assignments or project planning with educator guidance and connection to purpose.
- Link class work to shared values or future aspirations.

2. Be an active participant in students' worlds and interests.

- Attend student events or ask about their extracurricular activities.
- Integrate real-life examples from students' experiences into lessons.
- Invite students to present aspects of their outside life that are connected to classroom learning.
- Co-create safe after-school activities that reflect student interests or guide students in developing community-based activities or supporting community outreach events that align with shared values.

3. Foster collaboration, responsibility, and skill-building.

- Assign and rotate leadership roles and responsibilities, and invite student reflection on personal growth.
- Design group projects that emphasize teamwork, accountability, and reflection.
- Challenge students intellectually and debrief on strategies and lessons learned.
- Encourage peer recognition through shout-outs and gratitude sharing.
- Highlight positive coping strategies (e.g., listening to calming music) and their impact on peer relationships.

Playbook: Coalitions

(Page 1 of 2)



While parents and educators can influence youth every day, coalitions unite diverse partners – such as community leaders, health providers, law enforcement, faith groups, businesses, and youth themselves – into a consistent network of care, creating a broader environment in which trust, safety, and opportunity flourish. This collective presence ensures that young people see not only individual adults, but entire communities committed to their growth, belonging, and future. Coalitions, by aligning resources and amplifying supportive and protective messaging, can serve as trusted adults at a systems level. Coalitions also serve a critical role by strengthening coalition members' competencies and their organizations' infrastructures to support youth and activate their agency. One of the ways coalitions can do this is by modeling support and agency in action through the youth's participation in the work of the coalition itself.

Create the environment.

1. Create safe, welcoming, and youth-centered spaces at coalition and community events.

- Co-create youth-led spaces (e.g., wellness zones) to show trust and partnership, with adults supporting behind the scenes.
- Design spaces that allow both extroverted and introverted youth to engage comfortably and demonstrate to youth that adults anticipated their needs. Post engaging messages (e.g., What values are important to you?) and have youth serve in expert roles that suit their interests and skills (e.g., more introverted youth may want to take on managing a social media account while more extroverted youth may want to attend outreach and fundraising events on behalf of the coalition).
- Affirm youth as valued contributors and leaders by creating a youth coalition/prevention club. Invite youth leaders to attend adult coalition meetings once a month, held at times and in locations (physical and/or virtual) that allow youth to participate.
- Communicate the coalition's acceptance of and belief in youth as valued and contributing members and community leaders whose voices and ideas are important. Be intentional about giving them space to contribute during meetings and ask for their input in deliberations. Don't single them out by always calling on youth first or last. Frequently ask them, "What do you think?" Limit use of their language/terms unless the relationship with them allows it.
- Model inclusion by uplifting voices from underrepresented groups.
- Onboard youth intentionally with mentorship, goal-sharing, and ongoing support.
- Provide space for youth to reflect on coalition work and share challenges and successes, and how coalition members can be sources of support.
- Offer letters of support and advocacy when youth need adult allies.

2. Ensure consistent language and positive messaging about youth across schools, health agencies, businesses, and media.

- Launch a "language matters" pledge to encourage strengths-based terms ("resilient youth") and share a community guide to unify messaging.
- Partner with local media to train journalists on positive, inclusive youth coverage that avoids stereotypes and includes youth voices.

3. Publicly recognize and celebrate youth contributions and achievements.

- Host a "youth impact festival" to showcase peer mentoring groups, cultural or advocacy initiatives, or other community projects with adults attending as supporters.
- Recognize youth contributions through awards, leadership roles, and public acknowledgment.
- Involve youth in key coalition tasks like event planning or data work.
- Create a visible legacy by displaying youth achievements in coalition spaces.

Playbook: Coalitions

(Page 2 of 2)



Have conversations.

1. Host youth-led forums and listening sessions where adults hear directly from youth.

- Launch a “youth cabinet session” where young people present policy recommendations directly to city officials.
- Hold a listening session on mental health including breakout groups led by youth facilitators. Adults rotate between groups and practice listening without interrupting. At the end, the youth compile themes into a report which the coalition then transforms into action items.

2. Integrate a health-promoting relationship (HPR) philosophy into the coalition’s approach to working with youth.

- Train coalition members on health-promoting relationships: definition of a health-promoting relationship, facilitators of connection, micro-skills for trusted adults, skills for youth, and how to share information about HPR.
- Discuss a new facilitator of connection and micro-skill at each coalition meeting.
- After each coalition-youth event, invite honest feedback from the youth for adult members: Examples – *Were we fully present? Were we nonjudgmental? In what ways did we help to cultivate the belief that you matter? How can we improve?*

3. Facilitate intergenerational conversations and community events that strengthen relationships and mutual understanding.

- Host a shared community service or civic action project such as a United Way Day of Caring.
- Hold a heritage or cultural exchange event to hand down stories and highlight a community’s history across generations.
- As a coalition icebreaker, hold an intergenerational “day in my shoes” discussion.

Promote growth.

1. Mobilize and align the community.

- Use coalition influence to align resources and policies that support youth.
- Invite youth and members to share sources of strength (e.g., spirituality) and engage partners like faith-based groups.
- Host youth-led discussions to explore ways members can enhance youth engagement; form a “youth first” advisory group.
- Promote shared measures of connection and thriving across sectors through collaborative planning and assessment.



Potential Discussion with Youth Coalition

1. Which facilitators of connection are most important to us as a youth coalition?
2. Which ones are we doing well at?
3. Which ones need work?
4. What ideas might you have to enhance our ability to connect with one another and others?
5. Where are some of the natural opportunities to practice connecting meaningfully with others in our work?

Authenticity, Care, Empathy, Full Presence, Honesty, Humility, Kindness, Love, Nonjudgment, Nurturance, Patience, Respect, Self-Acceptance, Self-Alignment, Self-Awareness, Vulnerability

Playbook: Law Enforcement & Justice System

(Page 1 of 2)



Adults working in law enforcement and justice system roles (e.g. community police, school resource officers, youth corrections and probation staff) are uniquely positioned to both protect public safety and promote the well-being of their community. Professionals in these roles can bridge these duties by serving as trusted adults, helping shape positive youth development in both everyday interactions as well as moments of stress, crisis, or consequence.

Creating environments where youth interact with law enforcement and justice system professionals works best when we use developmentally- and trauma-informed approaches. While a full review of these approaches extends beyond the scope of this Playbook, we offer key ideas to help you get started.

1. Build trust with youth.

- Strengthen connection and build trust through regular, friendly interactions. Greet youth by name and follow-up on past conversations.
- Show you are an available source of support by engaging youth in places they gather (e.g., school and community events, graduation ceremonies, cafeteria).
- Accept invitations to speak to youth about topics unique to your role (e.g., career path, safety tips, conflict resolution strategies).
- Where relevant, invite youth to help shape safety expectations in their environment (e.g., within classrooms, group therapy rooms).
- Be fully present during times of stress for youth and attempt to follow-up later and check in on how they are doing. This can offer the stability and care they may need.
- Keep your word as often as possible to cultivate the belief that "I matter.", and if you cannot, follow-up with them and let them know the reason why.
- If applicable, create a welcoming office environment (e.g., open door, youth artwork, positive messaging, fidget items) that feels accessible, safe, and supportive.

2. Model nonjudgment, fairness, and dignity in every interaction.

- When a youth makes a poor choice, show care and nonjudgment by seeking to understand what need they are trying to get met, and the context informing their decision.
- Acknowledge discomfort certain activities, such as discipline, monitoring, or searches, may cause. Foster respect by describing what you are doing and why and checking in to address concerns.
- Ask about strengths and connect youth with meaningful service opportunities that showcase those skills (e.g., art projects, vocational activities, mentoring younger kids).
- When appropriate, communicate at eye level to foster respect and connection.
- Lead by example, inspiring through authenticity rather than authority.

Create the environment.

Have conversations.

1. Use accountability conversations to build core beliefs and mitigate shame.

- Maintain a calm, deliberate tempo in your language and behavior to help youth fully understand what is being said.
- Let youth choose the time and setting for difficult conversations when appropriate.
- Recognize strengths before addressing harm, framing accountability as a form of agency.
- After a violation, explore their thought process, discuss impact on themselves and others, and invite them to propose a solution.
- When addressing minor issues, explain the issue clearly, listen fully, and affirm their value regardless of the decision they made.
- Use check-ins to affirm worth and cultivate the belief "I matter.", not to monitor behavior.

"How are you doing on the goals you set for yourself? What seems to be the hardest part right now?"

"We can write this as a violation, or you can take a corrective step by enrolling in the workshop. I personally believe in you, which is why I'd encourage you take the path toward growing through this. Which works best for you?"

"You are more than this choice. Here's why this matters, and here's how we can move forward."

Playbook: Law Enforcement & Justice System

(Page 2 of 2)



Have conversations, cont.

2. Normalize active listening and overcoming hard things.

- Be fully present, maintain eye contact, and show respect for what youth are experiencing.
- Share stories of youth resilience to inspire hope and growth.
- Remind them of the last time they overcame hard things.
- Pause and listen during emotionally charged moments, asking how they feel.
- Affirm strong emotions as valid and emphasize support over punishment.
- Acknowledge emotional regulation and decision-making are continuing to develop throughout adolescence and into adulthood.
- Model humility and self-regulation, showing that adults also work on emotional control.

"Way to go! You've completed two steps already – that proves you can handle tough things. Let's plan your next one. What do you think you need to get through this?"

"Let's both take a few deep breaths before we talk. It helps me think more clearly, and maybe it could do the same for you."

3. Reinforce hope and future orientation.

- Model and share your own moral values. Share why you got into law enforcement or justice system work and encourage them to talk about their own values and goals.
- Help youth write down a short-term personal goal (like finishing a program or applying for a job), revisit it at each encounter with them, and celebrate progress.
- Celebrate as many small successes as possible for a youth, even if that means celebrating a day, or a week without a write-up. This will foster competence, self-efficacy, and hope.
- End interactions with affirmation and connection.

"Even though you broke the rule, you still matter to this community. I hope to see you again this week."

"I'll check back tomorrow to see how you're doing. You're not on your own in this."

"There are many people in your corner, including me."

Promote growth.

1. Turn consequences into opportunities for growth, reflection, and repair.

- Frame challenges as growth opportunities. Discuss their sources of support and strength, and help them make a plan to lean on those assets.
- Model supportive behavior during tough times and help youth connect with resources they choose. Activate their agency by having them take the lead in selecting and/or engaging these resources.
- Introduce youth to mentors or programs, and follow up on their experience.
- Involve families in goal-setting or connect youth with ongoing community support.
- Use restorative conversations after incidents (e.g., shoplifting) to reflect on impact and choices.
- Include restorative practices like peer mediation or service projects in responses to violations.

2. Help youth practice coping, decision-making, and problem-solving skills in real time.

- Check in after a difficult moment. Listen, and offer support and validation.
- Acknowledge youth efforts, even small ones, to let them know they are seen and cared for.
- Teach and model stress resets like deep breathing. Allow youth time to self-regulate before engaging or responding.
- Invite youth to name and explore their emotions, using open-ended questions and empathetic listening to build trust. Supporting youth in naming their emotions and how to respond builds their skills for managing their feelings.
- When speaking and engaging with a youth that is angry, normalize their feeling and share that anger is often the outward expression of another internal emotion.
- Role-play common stress scenarios and let youth try different responses, reinforcing that they can handle making healthy choices in challenging situations.

"I know that situation was hard. How are you doing now?"

"I saw you take a deep breath and try again. That took a lot of strength. How did that work for you?"

Playbook: Healthcare Professionals

(Page 1 of 2)



Healthcare professionals – such as physicians, nurses, behavioral health providers, and counselors – provide essential preventative care and treatment to youth. Often, these relationships involve multiple interactions throughout a young person’s development, providing healthcare professionals with a unique opportunity to integrate a health-promoting approach that achieves protection, prevention, and flourishing across all aspects of youth development.

Create the environment.

1. Develop shared goals and expectations.

- Collaborate with youth to set meaningful care goals that support autonomy and positive development.
- Co-create treatment plans that reflect their values and preferences.
- Help youth link care decisions to broader life goals.
- Explore spirituality or reflective practices (e.g., journaling, mindfulness) as sources of strength, and integrate them into care when relevant. Doing so aligns with professional standards and best practices.

2. Foster a nurturing patient experience.

- Design welcoming spaces that reflect youth preferences (e.g., music, snacks, sensory tools).
- Share uplifting messages through media (e.g., television, posters) that reinforce protective beliefs.
- Offer flexible appointment times that respect youth schedules.
- Provide break areas with movement and self-directed activities (e.g., reading, puzzles, games) when peer interaction is limited.

3. Advocate for youth when appropriate.

- Communicate with parents/caregivers on behalf of youth (with their permission) when treatment adherence is an issue.
- Support youth preferences in care decisions that are consistent with clinical recommendations.
- Assertively pursue steps to ensure youth receive optimal care. For example, help secure access to needed specialist services by reaching out directly when necessary.

4. Innovate to meet patient needs.

- Develop new programs or unique solutions that align with the treatment focus and healing (e.g., healthy cooking classes, patient vegetable gardens).
- For providers in more traditional medical settings, advocate for longer appointment times to allow more time for relationship-building.
- Consider ways to streamline services received during appointments and who those services are provided by to allow as much face-to-face unstructured time for relationship building. For example, sending screening measures via a portal to be completed prior to the appointment.

Have conversations.

1. Practice honest and caring communication.

- Show full presence, patience, and respect to create a safe space for open dialogue, especially around sensitive topics.
- Be transparent about services, procedures, and confidentiality to build trust.
- Share professional insights honestly, linking risky behaviors to youth’s values and goals. In the spirit of the youth’s autonomy and collaboration, ask permission first.
- Balance honesty with compassion to show genuine care.
- Validate concerns with empathy (e.g., “I can see why that’s difficult”).
- Respond to disclosures of risky behavior with nonjudgment and appreciation for their trust (e.g., “Thank you for sharing this”).
- Ask permission to discuss healthier alternatives that align more closely with their values and goals.

“Thank you for trusting me with this. I know it’s not easy to talk about. How does taking care of this issue fit with what you want for yourself?”

“Before we start, I want to make sure you understand what we’re doing and why. Is that okay with you?”

“I am glad you are focusing on getting protein to help your muscles develop. Can I share my perspective as your doctor? I care about you and am concerned because this diet can really impact your kidneys.”

“What are some things you do when you feel stressed? Some youth your age prefer reaching out to a friend, going for a walk, or other social or physical activities. What are your thoughts about those options?”



2. Show support in meaningful ways.

- Use kind words and gestures to recognize progress and achievements. The more specific, the better.
- Communicate in age-appropriate ways, validate concerns, and support informed decisions.
- Reassure youth they're not alone—you're sharing responsibility for their care.
- Consider offering peer support groups for youth with similar needs.
- Problem-solve WITH the youth rather than FOR the youth. Ask them to come up with possible solutions, then offer to share your ideas.

3. Build connection, voice, and mattering.

- Build rapport by exploring interests and sharing appropriate personal insights.
- Reflect on when youth feel most supported in care.
- Emphasize their role in decision-making to the greatest degree possible.
- Welcome questions and feedback on how to improve, and incorporate the feedback they offer.
- Offer follow-ups when time is limited to ensure all concerns are addressed.

4. Model and celebrate growth and resilience.

- Notice and praise specific efforts, persistence, and positive behaviors.
- Reframe health-related setbacks as learning opportunities to strengthen problem-solving and coping skills.

"I noticed you've been consistent with [medication/ appointments/self-care]—that takes real commitment. That type of dedication will serve you well in life."

"I hear your struggles and see how hard you're working on this. Let's work on this together and see if we can come up with some next steps that feel right to you."

"It's really important to me that we get to know each other and you feel comfortable with me. What's something most people don't know about you?"

"What helps you feel heard when you're here? Is there anything I do that makes it easier or harder to open up?"

"You're the expert on your own body so you get to decide. I have some ideas, but I want to hear what you think first."

"It's okay to feel this way, a lot of people feel nervous about that. I'm really proud of you bringing it up so we can find ways to work through this."

"I appreciate how you handled that situation, and you didn't give up – that shows real strength and commitment."

"Mistakes are how we learn what works for us. We build resilience every time we try again after something doesn't work out. How might you approach this differently next time?"

1. Empower youth to take ownership of their health.

- Equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to actively participate in their healthcare decisions and self-management.
- When developmentally appropriate, invite parent/caregivers to step away during portions of the appointments and coach them on supporting their child's growing autonomy while balancing their need for guidance.

2. Cultivate a health-promoting workplace culture.

- Help staff build confidence in discussing tough topics (e.g., suicidal thoughts and actions, sexual health, substance use) by normalizing discomfort, modeling approaches, and offering practice with feedback.
- Promote staff well-being by recognizing their value, providing burnout prevention resources, and fostering team connection.

Playbook: Sports Coaches

(Page 1 of 2)



Coaches hold a distinct place in the lives of young people, guiding them through experiences that blend challenge, teamwork, and growth. Unlike many other adults, coaches witness moments of triumph and disappointment in real time, creating powerful opportunities to shape how young athletes respond to success, failure, and effort. Through this role, coaches can cultivate the core beliefs by creating a positive team environment, engaging in meaningful conversations, and fostering opportunities for growth and resilience. By modeling respect, integrity, and encouragement, coaches become trusted figures who affirm a young person's worth, strengthen their confidence, and inspire resilience on and off the field.

Create the environment.

1. Recognize and celebrate the whole person.

- Celebrate non-performance contributions like teamwork and empathy.
- Attend events outside sports (e.g., school concerts, other league competitions, volunteer activities) to show you value athletes beyond the game.
- Highlight assists and collaboration during scrimmages.
- Review and celebrate personal goals before each event.
- Build in time to debrief practices and games, emphasizing life lessons like humility and respect.
- Frame team rules as life skills.
- Collaborate with other coaches to model connection and relationship-building, providing athletes an opportunity to see first-hand how these facilitators can enhance relationships.

2. Build psychological safety and healthy norms.

- Reframe mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Find ways for each athlete to contribute meaningfully and feel valued (e.g., leading drills, coordinating ball pickups, keeping time for the team). Have youth rotate a position such as a "spirit" captain that helps mediate between teammates when needed and serve alongside the coach eliciting team feedback on how everyone is feeling following events.
- Communicate your belief and acceptance in youth in every interaction.
- Create team norms for constructive peer feedback.
- Explore sources of strength and hope, making healthy coping part of team culture.

3. Reinforce ethical behavior and empathy in real time.

- Highlight acts of fairness and teamwork to emphasize character over results.
- Share stories of sportsmanship and discuss real-life applications.
- Encourage team rituals that celebrate integrity and growth, like acknowledging a teammate who demonstrated humility during a game.
- Explore ethical choices through scenarios and discussions on values.
 - Pose scenarios to discuss various values and sportsmanship principles such as integrity and courage.
 - Discuss balancing competitiveness with respect for others, connecting choices to long-term character development.
- Help athletes set personal behavior standards and check in regularly.

"If you see a teammate bending the rules, how would you respond?"

"How does it make you feel when your team is overmatched and the opposing team mercilessly runs up the score?"

*"The other team is down a player. What should be our play here?
How does that choice fit with our team's values?"*

Playbook: Sports Coaches

(Page 2 of 2)



Have conversations.

1. Foster connection, reflection and self-awareness.

- After tough moments, invite athletes to reflect and share how you can better support them.
- Foster team discussions on personal growth and lessons learned.
- Reflect together on effort and mindset patterns.

2. Connect choices to health and performance.

- Discuss how sleep, nutrition, and mindset choices affect both sport and life outcomes.
- Help athletes link lessons from sport to school, work, or family challenges.

"What did you notice about how you reacted under pressure? I was really struck when you reached out to your team for support. In doing that, you showed courage and really lived up to our values of relying on one another."

"You seemed a bit off today. I'm curious what's going on for you? When you come back tomorrow, what strategies do you think can help?"

"You took on a tough role today in leading the team out there. What did that role teach you about yourself, and your impact on others?"

"Which of your personal strengths off the field do you bring to the team?"

"Your teachers shared that your grades are starting to dip a bit. Out here, all I see is grit and perseverance. I'm curious how your approach here can extend to your schoolwork."

Promote growth.

1. Empower leadership and agency.

- Allow athletes to design practice drills or lead team warm-ups.
- Create a rotating youth assistant coach role where athletes can explore different coaching positions.
- Facilitate team discussion and decisions on rituals, goals, or conflict resolution.
- Debrief leadership or other experiences with reflection questions.

2. Turn disappointment into structured growth opportunities.

- Discuss losses outside the moment. No team wins every match forever – disappointment will come, how will we face it and learn from it?
- Let youth know they can get through hard times as a team. Model shared responsibility.

3. Build peer support, mentoring, and life skills.

- Pair older athletes with younger teammates for skill-building and guidance.
- Use team accountability partners to check in on goals and well-being.
- Pairing weaker athletes with stronger ones creates powerful opportunities for both. It fosters agency and the belief that "I have support". This type of pairing approach can also be used within the coaching staff, normalizing humility and the practice of seeking and offering help, support, encouragement, and nurturing.

Sportsmanship Principles

- Respect everyone.
- Encourage teammates.
- Always do your best.
- Learn from mistakes and get back in the game.
- Play fair.
- End with a handshake.

"The team earns the wins, the coach takes the losses. I learn more about what I can coach them on from each loss."

—Soccer Coach

SHARING HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The **Health-Promoting Relationship Paradigm** offers an innovative perspective on the transformative role of relationships in promoting youth well-being. We hope that once you have been trained or received these resources you will feel better prepared to apply this comprehensive approach to fostering the beliefs and skills that cultivate prevention, protection, and flourishing in youth. If this approach and the skills within this toolkit resonate, you may be well-positioned to champion this paradigm to other trusted adults among whom you live and work.

Arguably, any trusted adult routinely engaging with youth either personally or professionally may benefit from understanding and applying the health-promoting relationship paradigm's approach. There are several ways you may consider sharing this paradigm and/or the content within this toolkit with others. A few ideas to get started are provided below.

SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE PREVENTIVE AND PROTECTIVE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS.

The need for human connection within relationships is vital to well-being. While this fact has been well-established, people vary in how purposefully they work to strengthen or enhance their relationships with youth. Fewer are likely to be aware of how to leverage these relationships to achieve youth health and well-being. Sharing the **Health-Promoting Relationship Paradigm** with others and guiding them through its components is one possible starting point. It may also be helpful to highlight the outcomes achievable through fostering protective beliefs and skills in youth.

EDUCATE ON A WAY OF BEING IN HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS

1. Creating the environment. The environment we create as trusted adults sets a tone that influences how youth engage with, experience and benefit from what is learned in that context. Share ideas with other trusted adults for how you have created an emotional and physical environment that facilitating health-promoting conversations and activities. Describe the impact of those efforts on the youth and the relationship. Encourage them to consider how they may also achieve a health-promoting environment in their unique contexts.

2. Facilitating connection. People may not be aware of the science of human connection. One solution is to encourage trusted adults to increase their awareness of how they are connecting with youth and consider opportunities to cultivate the facilitators of connection more intentionally. A strong connection will set the stage for trusted adults to be more effective in cultivating beliefs, activating agency, and equipping youth with skills.

Encourage trusted adults to complete the Facilitators of Connection brief self-assessment and choose exercises to enhance their abilities in connection attributes that may benefit from further development. Seek opportunities to share, receive validation, reinforce progress, and learn from one another's experience.

4. Engaging micro-skills. The ability to consistently engage micro-skills requires intentional practice and routine reflection on what is working well, and what can be improved upon. Encourage other trusted adults to complete the Micro-Skills for Trusted Adults self-assessment and set a commitment to develop specific micro-skills. Have follow-up discussions where you can each reflect and share your experiences. Offer mutual support by validating challenges and reinforcing growth.

5. Developing skills in youth. Introduce opportunities to build healthy beliefs and skills. Share ideas for how other trusted adults might cultivate protective beliefs in youth within their unique roles. Share general considerations and suggest concrete skills they can integrate into their work with youth to build or strengthen protective beliefs. Describe how you have done so within your role(s). Share an example that you have tried and discuss how it was received, what was learned through that process, and any observed outcomes.

MODEL HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS.

Allow your relationships with other trusted adults to serve as models for growing connection and strengthening beliefs and skills. For example, as you strengthen various connection facilitators, those attributes will present in the relationship and the impact of that attribute on the other person can be discussed. Also consider allowing others the benefit of observing your application of the relational skills in your engagements with youth.

MAIN MESSAGES

The following messages and table can be used to facilitate conversations with trusted adults related to power of relationships in fostering prevention, protection, and flourishing in youth.

- 1 Many factors that prevent harmful behaviors in youth and promote protection and flourishing can be **cultivated through relationships** with trusted adults.
- 2 A “health-promoting relationship” is a **way of being** that enables health and well-being in youth by cultivating protective beliefs.
- 3 A way of being in health-promoting relationships is how we show up and interact with youth to enable them to be well by cultivating core protective beliefs. It is comprised of four intentional strategies: **create the environment, facilitate connection, engage micro-skills, and develop skills in youth.**
- 4 Health-promoting relationships with youth **begin with work within YOU**, the trusted adult.
- 5 Trusted adults can help reach the full potential of their relationships with youth by considering how their approach may need to be adapted to best meet the youth’s **capacity, preferences, and expectations for** connection and relationships.
- 6 When health-promoting relationships are scaled in organizations and prioritized in youth, adults & communities, organizations, schools, and systems are more capable of fostering a **culture of well-being.**
- 7 Every interaction we have with youth is an **opportunity** to build or reinforce protective beliefs and skills.

BELIEFS & MICRO-SKILLS	SKILLS	
▶ I am seen and loved. FOCUS, EXPRESS, EXPLORE	• Develop positive self-awareness • Meeting our own needs • Positive self-affirmations	• Cultivate curiosity to learn new things • Goal setting
▶ I matter. NOTICE, AFFIRM, EXPRESS NEED	• Self-compassion • Grow gratitude • Express needs	• Cultivate hope • Healthy decision-making and problem solving
▶ I can influence my life and health. RECOGNIZE, ENCOURAGE, SUPPORT	• Future orientation • Enhance strengths • Maintain a hopeful outlook • Embrace change • Prioritize self-care	• Manage negative thoughts and emotions
▶ I can overcome hard things. EMPOWER, COACH, BUILD	• Recognize caring words and actions • Explore spirituality • Engage spirituality as a coping strategy • Facilitate hope • Develop a sense of mattering • Recognize one’s value • Build connectedness • Develop community connection • Discover core values	• Refocusing on our circle of control • Build defenses • Interpersonal skills • Build social support
▶ I have support. NAVIGATE, FUEL, ADVOCATE		

ASSESSMENTS

The assessments provided in the toolkit were created by the authors for the purpose of self-reflection, identification of growth opportunities, and application of the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** to organizations and systems. They are not validated screening tools. We encourage you to re-visit the assessments over time to monitor change and to continue to identify new opportunities for enhancement.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION

The following brief assessment offers opportunities for self-reflection and planning to strengthen one’s connection abilities within oneself. Using the Facilitators of Connection table from your toolkit to understand the full definition and characteristics associated with each facilitator, identify the facilitators you feel you are strong at as well as those you may need to work on. Think specifically about the context of building health-promoting relationships with the youth in your life. For facilitators you may need more time with, identify at least one specific way you will focus on applying or strengthening your skills with this facilitator in your encounters with youth.

FACILITATOR	STRONG	NEEDS WORK	OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP
AUTHENTIC	☐	☐	_____
CARING	☐	☐	_____
EMPATHETIC	☐	☐	_____
FULLY PRESENT	☐	☐	_____
HONEST	☐	☐	_____
HUMBLE	☐	☐	_____
KIND	☐	☐	_____
LOVING	☐	☐	_____
NONJUDGMENTAL	☐	☐	_____
NURTURING	☐	☐	_____
PATIENT	☐	☐	_____
RESPECTFUL	☐	☐	_____
SELF-AWARE	☐	☐	_____
SELF-ACCEPTING	☐	☐	_____
SELF-ALIGNED	☐	☐	_____
VULNERABLE	☐	☐	_____

SELF-ASSESSMENT: MICRO-SKILLS FOR TRUSTED ADULTS

The following self-assessment offers opportunities for reflection and planning to strengthen your use of micro-skills to foster the five protective core beliefs in the youth you interact with. Read through the Micro-skills for trusted adults table from your toolkit to understand the micro-skills for each belief along with the accompanying actions, sample statements, and questions. Think specifically about the context of building health-promoting relationships with the youth in your life.

		Often	Some-times	Rarely
I am seen and loved.	1.I let go of distractions and am fully present with youth.			
	2.I let youth know that they are a priority and I care about them.			
	3.When talking with youth, I listen for and reflect back their experience to help them feel seen and heard.			
	4.I express empathy and understanding.			
	5.I show youth I accept them for who they are without judging them or trying to change them.			
	6.I express confidence in youth's perspective, attitude, abilities and/or actions.			
	7.I let youth know they are not alone and that I am here for them.			
	8.I explore with youth what helps them find strength and hope, including by considering spirituality.			
	9.I invite youth to tell me about their culture and background.			
I matter.*	1.I ask about, remember and check on the details of youths' lives.			
	2.I let youth know their opinion matters.			
	3.I let youth know that their presence makes a positive impact.			
	4.I express gratitude to youth.			
	5.I let youth know I have faith in them and know they can be successful.			
	6.I tell youth they matter to me.			
	7.I tell youth I missed them if they were not present for something.			
	8.I tell youth that life is better when they are around.			
I can influence my life and health.	1.I help youth identify what their values are, reflect their values, and connect them to their goals.			
	2.I support youth to identify goals and steps to achieve them.			
	3.I emphasize youths' autonomy.			
	4.When I have ideas to offer, I use the Ask-Offer-Ask approach.			
	5.I help youth to anticipate obstacles and come up with ways of addressing them.			
	6.I express belief in youths' goals and ability to achieve their vision.			
	7.I notice and celebrate youths' successes.			
	8.I create ways for youth to share their perspectives on how the organization can better support them.			
I can overcome hard things.	1.I ask youth about their strengths and how to grow them.			
	2.I ask youth what they can tell themselves to keep going during difficult moments.			
	3.I express confidence in youth's ability to navigate hard things.			
	4.I express optimism and hope when youth are facing hard times.			
	5.I encourage youth to be patient, kind and understanding towards themselves during hard times.			
	6.I encourage youth to focus on what they can control.			
	7.I team with youth to help them find healthy ways of coping with stress and other challenges.			
	8.I encourage youth to come up with healthy ways they can take care of themselves.			
	9.I encourage youth to lean into their cultural/familial strength when they encounter challenges.			
I have support.	1.I offer youth my support to work through overcoming challenges.			
	2.I model regulating my emotions and engaging in thoughtful problem solving.			
	3.I encourage youth to engage in problem solving to come up with their own solutions.			
	4.I offer youth choices and find other ways to involve youth in decision-making.			
	5.I encourage youth to give support to others and seek out support from others.			
	6.I provide opportunities for responsibility.			
	7.I stand up for youth when they need it.			
	8.I advocate for youth rights and opportunities.			

**Adapted with permission from Zach Mercurio, Ph.D., The Power of Mattering.*

REFLECTION EXERCISE

1. Which actions and statements do I do most consistently? What micro-skills do they fall under?
2. Which actions and statements do I do rarely? What micro-skills do they fall under?
3. What patterns are there, if any?
4. What do I want or need to do next to boost my micro-skills?
5. What barriers might I face, and how can I address them?

ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-REFLECTION & PLANNING TOOL (Page 1 of 2)

Examining your organization's current alignment with the **Health-Promoting Relationships Paradigm** will reveal opportunities for increasing organizational awareness and enable staff and leadership to set intentions for growth and improvement. The six domains of organizational practice and culture, which reflect the three levels of systems change (structural, relational, and transformational), are presented below. Use the reflection questions within each domain to identify opportunities for action to strengthen the many ways your organization can work collectively to cultivate beliefs, activate agency, and foster protective skills in youth.

Organizational Values, Mission, Culture	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• To what extent are the principles of health-promoting relationships evident in our organization's mission, vision, values, and/or principles? • How clear would it be to someone reading our mission, vision, values, and/or principles that we prioritize and center health-promoting relationships to promote youth well-being and flourishing?	
Policies and Procedures	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• In what ways do our policies and procedures <u>reinforce</u> or <u>undermine</u> opportunities for adults to build safe, trusting connections with youth? • How are the facilitators of connection and five protective beliefs reflected in our policies and procedures, within our teams, and within us as individuals? • How well do our policies and procedures acknowledge and account for different needs of youth?	
Programs and Services	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• How are our programs and services embodying elements of a health-promoting relationship approach? • What aspects of our programs might create barriers to connection for some youth? • In what ways do our programs and services prioritize and offer opportunities to cultivate youth agency? • How are we approaching relational development across our programs and services in ways consistent with the health-promoting relationships approach?	

Workforce Training and Culture	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• What training and support do staff have to prioritize health-promoting relationships with youth, including youth who might require additional considerations or support? • How do we include language in job descriptions and interview questions that promote a culture of health-promoting relationships? • In what ways are staff enabled and consistently encouraged to model the facilitators of connection with one another and the youth they serve through training, organizational culture, and reflection on their own awareness, intention-setting, and growth?	
Youth Experience and Feedback	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• How do the youth we serve describe their trust in the adults in our organization? • In what ways do youth feel connected to us? • How do youth describe the ways we are cultivating the five protective core beliefs within them through our words and actions? ◦ Do youth feel seen and loved by us? ◦ Do youth believe they matter to us? ◦ Do youth believe they have our support? ◦ Do youth believe they have greater capacity to influence their life and health because of their experience with us? ◦ Do youth believe they are better able to overcome hard things as a result of our work with them?	
Data and Outcomes	
Reflection Questions	Opportunities for Action
• What data do we collect and meaningfully use that is relevant to priorities for building health-promoting relationships with youth and to help us improve? • How does our organization demonstrate that health-promoting relationships are essential to our organization through measuring our effectiveness at strengthening connection and cultivating protective belief systems within youth? • In what ways do our performance metrics reflect long-term outcomes of prevention of harmful behaviors, flourishing, and overall well-being of youth? • How are relevant data from the above questions broken down to understand the unique impact across the various subgroups of youth we serve? • Does our organization have a process for making sense of our data and utilizing it to plan for continuous improvement?	

ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-REFLECTION & PLANNING TOOL

PRIORITIZING ACTION ITEMS

After identifying some opportunities for action, your organization will likely want to prioritize which to work on first. This prioritization process might include considering:

- Are there “low-hanging fruits”, quick wins that might take little effort yet build momentum?
- If we accomplish the desired change, which opportunities will have the most significant impact on the youth we serve?
- Which are the most feasible to accomplish given the resources and buy-in necessary (could we break the opportunity down into stages to make it more manageable)?
- Will it be possible to measure the impact of the change?

ASSESSMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

After prioritizing your organization’s top few opportunities for adopting a Health-Promoting Relationships’ “way of being”, you’ll want to (1) assess your organization’s readiness for adopting each prioritized change, and (2) develop a detailed plan for implementation, assessment, and refinement. Like a community prevention planning process (such as the Strategic Prevention Framework), the steps might include:

Assessing Readiness/Capacity

- Assess organizational readiness and resources to pursue the prioritized change
- Take necessary steps to increase readiness and capacity before beginning implementation

Planning

- Establish goals and objectives for identified action item(s)
- Develop and document the rationale for each goal
- Develop a workplan (action steps, resources/partners needed)
- Develop an evaluation plan

Implementation

- Implement workplan
- Implement process evaluation

Evaluation and Refinement

- How will we know it’s working (indicators and accountability)
- Plan for adjusting the implementation to increase the likelihood of impact and sustained organizational culture and practice change

These changes don’t have to happen all at once, but a commitment to aligning organizational practice and culture with relational values can help ensure that cultivating health-promoting relationships remains central to the organization’s practice and culture. Rather than seeing this as a one-time initiative, think of it as a shift in mindset and practice that evolves.

REFERENCES

1. Murthy VH. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. Published online 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>
2. Holt-Lunstad J. Why Social Relationships Are Important for Physical Health: A Systems Approach to Understanding and Modifying Risk and Protection. *Annu Rev Psychol*. 2018;69(1):437–458. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-122216-011902
3. Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*. 2017;72(6):517–530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103
4. Pekel K, Roehlkepartain EC, Syvertsen AK, Scales PC, Sullivan TK, Sethi J. Finding the fluoride: Examining how and why developmental relationships are the active ingredient in interventions that work. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 2018;88(5):493–502. doi:10.1037/ort0000333
5. Bethell C, Jones J, Gombojav N, Linkenbach J, Sege R. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2019;173(11):e193007. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.3007
6. Kallapiran K, Suetani S, Cobham V, Eapen V, Scott J. Impact of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs): A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev*. Published online January 6, 2025. doi:10.1007/s10578-024-01807-x
7. Ashton K, Davies AR, Hughes K, Ford K, Cotter-Roberts A, Bellis MA. Adult support during childhood: a retrospective study of trusted adult relationships, sources of personal adult support and their association with childhood resilience resources. *BMC Psychol*. 2021;9:101. doi:10.1186/s40359-021-00601-x
8. Frederick J, Spratt T, Devaney J. Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision. *The British Journal of Social Work*. 2023;53(6):3129–3145. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcad107
9. YOUNGMINDS, UK YOUTH. Someone to Turn to: Being a Trusted Adult for Young People. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/by3o0aru/someone-to-turn-to-report.pdf>
10. Relationship. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2025. Accessed March 8, 2025. <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=relationship>
11. Health Promotion. World Health Organization. 2025. Accessed March 8, 2025. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/programmes/health-promotion>
12. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Focus on Prevention. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 10–4120. Published online Revised 2020.
13. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Surgeon General. Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health. Published online November 2016.
14. Developmental Relationships Framework. Search Institute. 2025. Accessed March 8, 2025. <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/developmental-relationships-framework>
15. Advancing Social and Emotional Learning. CASEL. 2025. <https://casel.org/>
16. Bethell CD, Gombojav N, Whitaker RC. Family Resilience And Connection Promote Flourishing Among US Children, Even Amid Adversity. *Health Affairs*. 2019;38(5):729–737. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05425
17. Moore KA, Bethell CD, Murphey D, Martin MC, Beltz M. Flourishing From the Start: What Is It and How Can It Be Measured? Published online March 2017. <https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017-16FlourishingFromTheStart-1.pdf>
18. Developmental Services Group, Inc. Protective Factors Against Delinquency. Published online 2015. https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/protective_factors_against_delinquency.pdf
19. Oxford University Press. Trust. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2024.
20. Oxford University Press. Belief. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2025.
21. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide. *Suicide Prevention*. April 25, 2024. Accessed March 9, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/index.html>
22. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Risk and Protective Factors. *Youth Violence Prevention*. March 12, 2024. Accessed March 9, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/risk-factors/index.html>
23. Davis T. What is Well-Being? Definition, Types, and Well-Being Skills. *Psychology Today*. May 21, 2024. Accessed September 4, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-for-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being-definition-types-and-well-being-skills?msocid=3c0dc0f6a8ff608715eed406a9e3613c>
24. Peppard L, American Psychiatric Nurses Association. Connection Paradigm Toolkit. Published online October 2024. Accessed March 11, 2025. <https://www.apna.org/connectiontoolkit/>
25. Belief. In: Merriam-Webster.Com. 2011. Accessed October 23, 2025. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
26. American Psychological Association. Dictionary of Psychology. 2023. <https://dictionary.apa.org/>
27. Padilla-Walker LM, Hardy SA, Christensen KJ. Adolescent hope as a mediator between parent-child connectedness and adolescent outcomes. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*. 2011;31(6):853–879. doi:10.1177/0272431610376249
28. Connors MH, Halligan PW. Revealing the Cognitive Neuroscience of Belief. *Front Behav Neurosci*. 2022;16:926742. doi:10.3389/fnbeh.2022.926742
29. Tamblyn A, Skouteris H, North A, et al. Physical and sensory environment interventions to support children's social and emotional development in early childhood education and care settings: a systematic review. *Early Child Development and Care*. 2023;193(5):708–724. doi:10.1080/03004430.2022.2152017
30. Sancassiani F, Pintus E, Holte A, et al. Enhancing the Emotional and Social Skills of the Youth to Promote their Wellbeing and Positive Development: A Systematic Review of Universal School-based Randomized Controlled Trials. *CPEMH*. 2015;11(1):21–40. doi:10.2174/1745017901511010021
31. Ferguson KT, Cassells RC, MacAllister JW, Evans GW. The physical environment and child development: An international review. *Int J Psychol*. 2013;48(4):437–468. doi:10.1080/00207594.2013.804190

REFERENCES

32. Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium, Komro KA, Flay BR, Biglan A. Creating Nurturing Environments: A Science-Based Framework for Promoting Child Health and Development Within High-Poverty Neighborhoods. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev*. 2011;14(2):111-134. doi:10.1007/s10567-011-0095-2
33. Jaffe J, Loebach J. Fostering Youth-Enabling Environments: A Participatory Affordance-Capability Framework for the Development and Use of Youth-Engaged Environmental Assessments. *Youth & Society*. 2024;56(1):164-192. doi:10.1177/0044118X221145713
34. Corry, M, Leavey, G. Adolescent trust in the healthcare provider relationship: A review of the literature. *Journal of Health Psychology*. 2017;22(10). doi:10.1177/1359105315624755
35. Bolton-King, M. I Am Not Any Greater than You Are": Cultivation of Humility in Higher Education through Mentoring. *Innovative Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-024-09759-9>
36. Authenticity. *Psychology Today*. July 22, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/authenticity#how-to-be-authentic>
37. Watson J. *Nursing: Human Science and Human Care: A Theory of Nursing*. National League for Nursing; 1988.
38. Kuntarti, Rustina Y, Umar J, Irawati D. Concept Analysis of Caring Personality for Nursing: A Review. *JSSH*. 2020;28(4). doi:10.47836/pjssh.28.4.01
39. Kristenson S. 13 Ways to be a More Caring Person. *Happier Human*. September 13, 2022. Accessed August 11, 2024. <https://www.happierhuman.com/be-caring/#:~:text=13%20Ways%20to%20Be%20a%20More%20Caring%20Person,media%20in%20a%20meaningful%20way.%20...%20More%20items>
40. Oxford University Press. *Empathetic*. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2024.
41. McLaren K. The 6 Essential Aspects of Empathy. *Psychology Today*. July 24, 2024. Accessed September 2, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/on-emotions-and-empathy/202406/the-6-essential-aspects-of-empathy>
42. Abramson A. Cultivating empathy. *Monitor on Psychology*. 2021;52(8). Accessed September 2, 2024. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/11/feature-cultivating-empathy>
43. Edelstein B. On Presence: Engaging Deeply with Life. *Psychology Today*. February 14, 2023. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/authentic-engagement/202302/on-presence>
44. Brenner A. 7 Ways to Practice Being in the Present Moment. *Psychology Today*. May 30, 2019. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/201905/7-ways-practice-being-in-the-present-moment>
45. Positive Mind Works. 7 Ways to be More Present When Talking to Someone. *Positive Mind Works*. October 16, 2023. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.positivemindworks.co/7-ways-to-be-more-present-when-talking-to-someone/>
46. Oxford University Press. *Honest*. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2024.
47. Aten J. Striving towards the Virtue of Honesty. *Psychology Today*. February 6, 2021. Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/202102/striving-towards-the-virtue-honesty>
48. ProWriting Aid Team. 100+ Character Traits of an Honest Person. *ProWritingAid*. September 19, 2023. <https://prowritingaid.com/honest-character-traits>
49. Le BM, Chopik WJ, Shimshock CJ, Chee PX. When the truth helps and when it hurts: How honesty shapes well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 2022;46:101397. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101397
50. Schaffner AK. What is Humility & Why Is It Important? *PositivePsychology.com*. August 27, 2020. Accessed August 17, 2024. <https://positivepsychology.com/humility/>
51. Worthington, Jr. E, Davis D, Hook J. *Handbook of Humility: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Routledge; 2017.
52. Maldonado T, Vera D, Spangler WD. Unpacking humility: Leader humility, leader personality, and why they matter. *Business Horizons*. 2022;65(2):125-137. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2021.02.032
53. Van Rongeren D. How to Become More Humble. *Psychology Today*. August 18, 2020. Accessed August 16, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meaning-making/202008/how-to-become-more-humble>
54. Davis, Jr. DE, Hook JN. Measuring Humility and Its Positive Effects. *Association for Psychological Science*. September 30, 2013. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/measuring-humility-and-its-positive-effects>
55. *Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*. 3rd edition. American Nurses Association; 2022.
56. Tangney JP. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press; 2009.
57. Dictionary.com. *Kind*. In: *Dictionary.Com*. Dictionary.com; 2024. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/kind>
58. Davis T. *Kindness: Definition, Ideas, & Examples*. Berkeley Well-Being Institute. 2024. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/kindness.html>
59. Miller K. What is Kindness in Psychology? *PositivePsychology.com*. May 21, 2019. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://positivepsychology.com/character-strength-kindness/>
60. Cousineau T. *The Kindness Cure: How the Science of Compassion Can Heal Your Heart & Your World*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc; 2018.
61. Oxford University Press. *Loving*. In: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press; 2024.
62. Hegi KE, Bergner RM. What is love? An empirically-based essentialist account. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. 2010;27(5):620-636. doi:10.1177/0265407510369605
63. Davis T. What is Love? Berkeley Well-Being Institute. 2024. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/what-is-love.html>
64. Nortje A. Harlow's Monkey Experiments: 3 Findings about Attachment. *Positivepsychology.com*. January 20, 2021. Accessed August 18, 2024. <https://positivepsychology.com/harlow-experiment/>
65. Little BR, Frost DM. Aspects of Love. In: Hojjat M, Cramer D, eds. *Positive Psychology of Love*. Oxford University Press; 2013:162-176. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199791064.003.0012
66. Chapman GD. *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Northfield Publishing; 2024.
67. Nonjudgmental. In: *Merriam-Webster Open Dictionary Online*. 2024. Accessed August 20, 2024. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonjudgmental>

REFERENCES

68. Why Should a Counselor be Non-judgmental? Processing Therapy. 2024. Accessed August 20, 2024. <https://processingtherapy.com/why-should-a-counsellor-be-non-judgemental/>
69. Asuncion M. 3 Ways to Practice Non-Judgment (and Why it Matters). Psychology Today. January 29, 2023. Accessed August 20, 2024. <https://www.trackinghappiness.com/how-to-practice-non-judgment/>
70. Oxford University Press. Nurturing. In: Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press; 2024.
71. Proulx K, Lenzi-Weisbecker R, Hatch R, et al. Nurturing care during COVID-19: a rapid review of early evidence. *BMJ Open*. 2022;12(6):e050417. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2021-050417
72. Goldsmith B. 10 Ways to Nurture Your Relationship. Psychology Today. May 4, 2012. Accessed September 4, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-fitness/201205/10-ways-to-nurture-your-relationship?msocid=076ae38b7c126a5732abf14e7d676b25>
73. Schnitker SA. An examination of patience and well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. 2012;7(4):263–280. doi:10.1080/17439760.2012.697185
74. Bernhard T. Impatient? Why and How to Practice Patience. Psychology Today. May 20, 2013. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/turning-straw-into-gold/201305/impatient-why-and-how-to-practice-patience>
75. Ohwovoriorle T. How to Be More Patient. verywell mind. August 25, 2022. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-be-more-patient-6361682>
76. Oxford University Press. Respectful. In: Oxford Dictionary. Oxford University Press; 2024.
77. Stanford University. Respect. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. July 2, 2022. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/respect/>
78. Hwang R. 15 Ways to Show Respect for Others (Professional & Personal). Science of People. August 9, 2024. <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/how-to-respect-others/>
79. Center for Creative Leadership. The Power of Respect. Center for Creative Leadership. November 20, 2022. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/the-power-of-respect/>
80. Goleman D. Emotional Intelligence. Iztok-Zapad Publishing House; 2005.
81. Eurich T. What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It). Harvard Business Review. January 4, 2018. Accessed September 1, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/what-self-awareness-really-is-and-how-to-cultivate-it>
82. Klussman K, Nichols AL, Curtin N, Langer J, Orehek E. Self-connection and well-being: Development and validation of a self-connection scale. *Euro J Social Psych*. 2022;52(1):18–45. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2812
83. Carden J, Jones RJ, Passmore J. Defining Self-Awareness in the Context of Adult Development: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Management Education*. 2022;46(1):140–177. doi:10.1177/1052562921990065
84. Miller K. How to Increase Self-Awareness: 16 Activities & Tools. PositivePsychology.com. March 13, 2020. Accessed September 1, 2024. <https://positivepsychology.com/building-self-awareness-activities/>
85. Klussman K, Curtin N, Langer J, Nichols AL. The importance of awareness, acceptance, and alignment with the self: A framework for understanding self-connection. *Eur J Psychol*. 2022;18(1):120–131. doi:10.5964/ejop.3707
86. Pillay S. Greater Self-Acceptance Improves Emotional Well-Being. Harvard Health Publishing. May 16, 2016. Accessed September 1, 2024. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/greater-self-acceptance-improves-emotional-well-201605169546>
87. The Key to a Life Well-Lived. TEDxNashville; 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBcBlf7sVZI>
88. Bruk A, Scholl SG, Bless H. Beautiful mess effect: Self–other differences in evaluation of showing vulnerability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2018;115(2):192–205. doi:10.1037/pspa0000120
89. Rosenberg J. How to Be More Vulnerable and Authentic. Psychology Today. August 15, 2020. Accessed September 2, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-mastery/202008/how-to-be-more-vulnerable-and-authentic>
90. Brown B. The Power of Vulnerability. TED. June 2010. Accessed September 2, 2024. https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?subtitle=en
91. Miller WR, Rollnick S. Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change and Grow. Fourth edition. The Guilford Press; 2023.
92. Carl Rogers R. Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory. Houghton Mifflin; 1951.
93. London M, Sessa VI, Shelley LA. Developing Self-Awareness: Learning Processes for Self- and Interpersonal Growth.
94. Ciarrochi J, Kashdan TB, Leeson P, Heaven P, Jordan C. On being aware and accepting: A one-year longitudinal study into adolescent well-being. *Journal of Adolescence*. 2011;34(4):695–703. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.09.003
95. Jackson LJ, White CR, O'Brien K, et al. Exploring spirituality among youth in foster care: findings from the Casey Field Office Mental Health Study. *Child & Family Social Work*. 2010;15(1):107–117. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00649.x
96. Pittman K, Garza P, Yohalem N, Artman S. Addressing spiritual development in youth development programs and practices: Opportunities and challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*. 2008;2008(118):29–44. doi:10.1002/yd.254
97. Benson PL, Roehlkepartain EC. Spiritual development: A missing priority in youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*. 2008;2008(118):13–28. doi:10.1002/yd.253
98. Scales PC, Syvertsen AK, Benson PL, Roehlkepartain EC, Sesma A. Relation of Spiritual Development to Youth Health and Well-Being: Evidence from a Global Study. In: Ben-Arieh A, Casas F, Frønes I, Korbin JE, eds. *Handbook of Child Well-Being*. Springer Netherlands; 2014:1101–1135. doi:10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8_41
99. Oman D, Flinders T, Thoresen CE. Integrating Spiritual Modeling Into Education: A College Course for Stress Management and Spiritual Growth. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 2008;18(2):79–107. doi:10.1080/10508610701879316
100. Ritt-Olson A, Milam J, Unger JB, et al. The protective influence of spirituality and “Health-as-a-Value” against monthly substance use among adolescents varying in risk. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2004;34(3):192–199. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2003.07.009
101. McConnell KM, Pargament KI, Ellison CG, Flannelly KJ. Examining the links between spiritual struggles and symptoms of psychopathology in a national sample. *J Clin Psychol*. 2006;62(12):1469–1484. doi:10.1002/jclp.20325
102. Prilleltensky I, Prilleltensky O. The Mattering Wheel. In: *How People Matter Why It Affects Health, Happiness, Love, Work, and Society*. Cambridge University Press; 2021:11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108979405.002>

REFERENCES

103. Davis AL, McQuillin SD. Supporting autonomy in youth mentoring relationships. *Journal Community Psychology*. 2022;50(1):329–347. doi:10.1002/jcop.22567
104. Damiani-Taraba G, Sky I, Hegler D, Woolridge N, Anderson B, Koster A. The listen to me project: Creating lasting changes in voice and participation for children in care through a youth-led project. *Child & Youth Services*. 2018;39(1):75–95. doi:10.1080/0145935X.2018.1446825
105. Flett GL. Mattering matters in youth suicidality: Implications for implementing in practice. *Child Protection and Practice*. 2024;2:100041. doi:10.1016/j.chipro.2024.100041
106. Carey RL, Polanco C, Blackman H. Black Adolescent Boys' Perceived School Mattering: From Marginalization and Selective Love to Radically Affirming Relationships. *J of Research on Adolesc*. 2022;32(1):151–169. doi:10.1111/jora.12706
107. Evans SD. Youth sense of community: Voice and power in community contexts. *Journal Community Psychology*. 2007;35(6):693–709. doi:10.1002/jcop.20173
108. Eccles JS, Gootman JA, eds. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. National Academy Press; 2002. doi:10.17226/10022
109. Pickhardt C. Adolescence and the Growing Power of Worldly Curiosity. *Psychology Today*. December 7, 2023. Accessed March 16, 2025. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/202312/adolescence-and-the-growing-power-of-worldly>
110. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tips for Encouraging Independence. Essentials for Parenting Teens. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2024. Accessed March 10, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/parenting-teens/tips-encouraging-independence/index.html>
111. American Psychological Association. Building your resilience. <https://www.apa.org>. 2020. <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience>
112. Korhonen M. Resilience: Overcoming Challenges and Moving on Positively. National Aboriginal Health Organization; 2007.
113. Phifer L, Crowder A, Elsenraat T, Hull R. CBT Toolbox for Children and Adolescents. 1st ed. PESI Publishing & Media; 2017.
114. Grossman JB, Bulle MJ. Review of What Youth Programs Do to Increase the Connectedness of Youth with Adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2006;39(6):788–799. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.08.004
115. Laursen B, Faur S. What does it mean to be susceptible to influence? A brief primer on peer conformity and developmental changes that affect it. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. 2022;46(3):222–237. doi:10.1177/01650254221084103
116. Arnold M. From Context to Outcomes: A Thriving Model for 4-H Youth Development Programs. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*. 2018;6(1). doi:10.54718/NBNL5438
117. National Academic of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. The National Academies Press; 2019.
118. Abuse S, Administration MHS. Talk. They Hear You.® Campaign. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2019. <https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>
119. Hecht CA, Yeager DS, Dweck CS, Murphy MC. Beliefs, affordances, and adolescent development: Lessons from a decade of growth mindset interventions. In: *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*. Vol 61. Elsevier; 2021:169–197. doi:10.1016/bs.acdb.2021.04.004
120. Jiang X, Mueller CE, Paley N. A Systematic Review of Growth Mindset Interventions Targeting Youth Social–Emotional Outcomes. *School Psychology Review*. 2024;53(3):251–272. doi:10.1080/2372966X.2022.2151321
121. Fisher D, Frey N. Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Framework. IRAE. Published online October 18, 2013:1–8. doi:10.1598/e-essentials.8037
122. Tenney ER, Vazire S, Mehl MR. This Examined Life: The Upside of Self-Knowledge for Interpersonal Relationships. Thornton-Wells TA, ed. *PLoS ONE*. 2013;8(7):e69605. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0069605
123. Escobar-Soler C, Berrios R, Peñaloza-Díaz G, et al. Effectiveness of Self-Affirmation Interventions in Educational Settings: A Meta-Analysis. *Healthcare*. 2023;12(1):3. doi:10.3390/healthcare12010003
124. Bluth K, Eisenlohr-Moul TA. Response to a mindful self-compassion intervention in teens: A within-person association of mindfulness, self-compassion, and emotional well-being outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*. 2017;57(1):108–118. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.04.001
125. Hobbs LM, Balentine AC, Neff K. *The Self-Compassion Workbook for Kids: Fun Mindfulness Activities to Build Emotional Strength and Make Kindness Your Superpower*. 1st ed. New Harbinger Publications; 2023.
126. South Southwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network. *Gratitude, Savoring & Self-Appreciation: Self-Compassion Exercises*. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://www.tiemh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/gratitude-1.pdf>
127. Neff KD, Dahm KA. Self-Compassion: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Relates to Mindfulness. In: Ostafin BD, Robinson MD, Meier BP, eds. *Handbook of Mindfulness and Self-Regulation*. Springer New York; 2015:121–137. doi:10.1007/978-1-4939-2263-5_10
128. Search Institute. Developmental relationships framework. <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/developmental-relationships-framework>
129. Shirinabadi Farahani A, Rassouli M, Yaghmaie F, Alavi Majd H. Hope, the Foundation of Spiritual Health in Adolescents: A Qualitative Study. *Iran Red Crescent Med J*. 2016;18(12). doi:10.5812/ircmj.29328
130. Chen E, Miller GE. “Shift-and-Persist” Strategies: Why Low Socioeconomic Status Isn't Always Bad for Health. *Perspect Psychol Sci*. 2012;7(2):135–158. doi:10.1177/1745691612436694
131. Hay SW, Lerner JV, Lerner RM, Tirrell JM, Dowling EM. Spirituality as a key asset in promoting positive youth development: Advances in research and practice. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*. 2024;46(2):121–137. doi:10.1177/00846724241235187
132. Benson PL, Roehlkepartain EC, Scales PC. Spirituality and Positive Youth Development. In: Miller LJ, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press; 2012:468–486. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199729920.013.0030
133. King PE, Carr D, Boitor C. Religion, Spirituality, Positive Youth Development, and Thriving. In: *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*. Vol 41. Elsevier; 2011:161–195. doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-386492-5.00007-5

REFERENCES

134. Flett GL, Nepon T, Goldberg JO, Rose AL, Atkey SK, Zaki-Azat J. The Anti-Mattering Scale: Development, Psychometric Properties and Associations With Well-Being and Distress Measures in Adolescents and Emerging Adults. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*. 2022;40(1):37–59. doi:10.1177/07342829211050544
135. Wallace TL, Sung HC, Williams JD. The defining features of teacher talk within autonomy-supportive classroom management. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 2014;42:34–46. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.04.005
136. Grolnick WS, Apostoleris NH. What makes parents controlling? In: *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. University of Rochester Press; 161–181.
137. Ryan RM, Deci EL. A Self-Determination Theory Approach to Psychotherapy: The Motivational Basis for Effective Change. *Canadian Psychology*. 2008;49(3):186–193. doi:10.1037/a0012753
138. Search Institute. Developmental relationships framework. <https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/developmental-relationships-framework>
139. Mageau GA, Vallerand RJ. The coach-athlete relationship: A motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 2003;21(11):883–904. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/0264041031000140374
140. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth: A National Agenda*. The National Academies Press; 2019. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25201>
141. Yan J, Han ZR, Tang Y, Zhang X. Parental Support for Autonomy and Child Depressive Symptoms in Middle Childhood: The Mediating Role of Parent–Child Attachment. *J Child Fam Stud*. 2017;26(7):1970–1978. doi:10.1007/s10826-017-0712-x
142. Maas J, Laceulle O, Bekker M. The role of autonomy-connectedness in the relation between childhood stressful life events, current posttraumatic symptoms, and internalizing psychopathology in adulthood. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. 2019;11(3):345–352. doi:10.1037/tra0000412
143. Williams GC, Lynch MF, McGregor HA, Ryan RM, Sharp D, Deci EL. Validation of the “Important Other” Climate Questionnaire: Assessing Autonomy Support for Health-Related Change. *Families, Systems, & Health*. 2006;24(2):179–194. doi:10.1037/1091-7527.24.2.179
144. Gagné M, Deci EL. Self-determination theory and work motivation. *J Organ Behav*. 2005;26(4):331–362. doi:10.1002/job.322
145. Snyder CR, Rand KL, Sigmon DR. Hope Theory A Member of the Positive Psychology Family. In: Snyder CR, Lopez SJ, eds. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press; New York, NY; 2001:257–276. doi:10.1093/oso/9780195135336.003.0019
146. Gallagher MW, Lopez SJ, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*. Oxford University Press; 2018. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199399314.001.0001
147. Johnson SRL, Blum RW, Cheng TL. Future orientation: a construct with implications for adolescent health and wellbeing. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*. 2014;26(4):459–468. doi:10.1515/ijamh-2013-0333
148. Hatala AR, Pearl T, Bird-Naytowhow K, Judge A, Sjöblom E, Liebenberg L. “I Have Strong Hopes for the Future”: Time Orientations and Resilience Among Canadian Indigenous Youth. *Qual Health Res*. 2017;27(9):1330–1344. doi:10.1177/1049732317712489
149. Algorani EB, Gupta V. *Coping Mechanisms*. In: *StatPearls*. StatPearls Publishing; 2025. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559031/>
150. Southwick SM, Bonanno GA, Masten AS, Panter-Brick C, Yehuda R. Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*. 2014;5(1):25338. doi:10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338
151. Schaffner AK. *Understanding the Circles of Control, Influence & Concern*. Positive Psychology Theory & Books. April 10, 2025. <https://positivepsychology.com/circles-of-influence/>
152. Hyde J, Torres M, Turner W, Cooper LR. *Integrated Motivational Interviewing and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (ICBT): A Practitioners Guide*. Wiley Press; 2024.
153. Sample S, Kadden R. *Motivational Enhancement Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Adolescent Cannabis Users: 5 Sessions, Cannabis Youth Treatment (CYT) Series, Volume 1*. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
154. Skeen M, McKay M, Fanning P, Skeen K. *Communication Skills for Teens: How to Listen, Express, and Connect for Success*. New Harbinger Publications; 2016.
155. Webb C, Scudder M, Kaminer Y, Kadden R. *The Motivational Enhancement Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Supplement: 7 Sessions of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Adolescent Cannabis Users, Cannabis Youth Treatment (CYT) Series, Volume 2*. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
156. Office of the Surgeon General. *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. Office of the U.S. Surgeon General; 2023.
157. Jordan JV. Relational-Cultural Theory: The Power of Connection to Transform Our Lives. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*. 2017;56(3):228–243. doi:10.1002/johc.12055
158. Lavigne AL, Henrichs L, Acosta Feliz JA, Shao S. Cultural responsivity and common conceptualizations of “good” teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary classrooms in the U.S. and the Netherlands. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 2022;118:103812. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2022.103812
159. Williams B. Accomplishing Cross Cultural Competence in Youth Development Programs. *The Journal of Extension*. 2001;39(6). <https://open.clemson.edu/joe/vol39/iss6/16>
160. Roysircar G. Cultural self-awareness assessment: Practice examples from psychology training. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 2004;35(6):658–666. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.35.6.658
161. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. *Building Relationships with People from Different Cultures*. Community Tool Box. n.d. Accessed March 26, 2025. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/building-relationships/main>
162. Tabern K. *How to Start Conversations with Neurodiverse Kids*. Kids Mental Health Foundation. 2023. Accessed March 26, 2025. <https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/starting-conversations/how-to-start-conversations-with-neurodiverse-kids>
163. Chan EW. Elevating well-being science to the population level. *Nat Rev Psychol*. 2024;3(8):507–507. doi:10.1038/s44159-024-00338-5

REFERENCES



164. Ross DA, Hinton R, Melles-Brewer M, et al. Adolescent Well-Being: A Definition and Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2020;67(4):472–476. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.06.042
165. Reupert A. From individuals to populations: approaches to promoting mental health and preventing mental illness. *Advances in Mental Health*. 2022;20(3):181–183. doi:10.1080/18387357.2022.2143205
166. Donlan AE, Gunning AL, Wentzel KR. Supportive Relationships With and Among Adolescents as Fundamental Building Blocks of CCI Success. In: *Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Positive Youth Development*. Routledge; 2015.
167. Zaff JF, Jones EP, Donlan AE, Anderson S, eds. *Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Positive Youth Development*. Routledge; 2015. doi:10.4324/9781315650883
168. Bumbarger BK. From Collaboration, to Action, to Implementation, to Impact, to Scale: Putting All of the Pieces of a Comprehensive Community Initiative Together. In: *Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Positive Youth Development*. Routledge; 2015.
169. Kania J, Kramer M, Senge P. *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG. May 15, 2018. Accessed March 14, 2025. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/
170. Beycioglu K, Kondakci Y. Organizational Change in Schools. *ECNU Review of Education*. 2021;4(4):788–807. doi:10.1177/2096531120932177
171. Ward PJ, Zabriskie RB. Positive youth development within a family leisure context: Youth perspectives of family outcomes. *New Directions for Youth Development*. 2011;2011(130):29–42. doi:10.1002/yn.395
172. Delgado E, Serna C, Martínez I, Cruise E. Parental Attachment and Peer Relationships in Adolescence: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022;19(3):1064. doi:10.3390/ijerph19031064
173. Ratliff EL, Morris AS, Cui L, Jespersen JE, Silk JS, Criss MM. Supportive parent-adolescent relationships as a foundation for adolescent emotion regulation and adjustment. *Front Psychol*. 2023;14. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1193449
174. Zhang Y, Qin P. Comprehensive Review: Understanding Adolescent Identity. *Studies in Psychological Science*. 2023;1(2):17–31.
175. Moretti MM, Peled M. Adolescent-parent attachment: Bonds that support healthy development. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2004;9(8):551–555. doi:10.1093/pch/9.8.551
176. Soares AS, Pais-Ribeiro JL, Silva I. Developmental Assets Predictors of Life Satisfaction in Adolescents. *Front Psychol*. 2019;10. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00236
177. Theokas C, Lerner RM. Observed Ecological Assets in Families, Schools, and Neighborhoods: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Relations With Positive and Negative Developmental Outcomes. *Applied Developmental Science*. 2006;10(2):61–74. doi:10.1207/s1532480xads1002_2
178. Atif H, Peck L, Connolly M, et al. The Impact of Role Models, Mentors, and Heroes on Academic and Social Outcomes in Adolescents. *Cureus*. 14(7):e27349. doi:10.7759/cureus.27349
179. Roorda DL, Koomen HMY, Spilt JL, Oort FJ. The Influence of Affective Teacher–Student Relationships on Students’ School Engagement and Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Approach. *Review of Educational Research*. 2011;81(4):493–529. doi:10.3102/0034654311421793
180. Learner-Centered Teacher-Student Relationships Are Effective: A Meta-Analysis – Jeffrey Cornelius-White, 2007. Accessed September 25, 2025. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/003465430298563?casa_token=6wz8JFj4Jt4AAAAA%3AImKP0qDRyKwVjEQ2yEhC2RQMEhd4BFuaRqW0vi5vHgpnHoS5znAlHgo7FS03RBHH3DABcv-PmQjC8A
181. Early Teacher–Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children’s School Outcomes through Eighth Grade – Hamre – 2001 – Child Development – Wiley Online Library. Accessed September 25, 2025. https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-8624.00301?casa_token=iTC4w-gjhYAAAAA%3Awy-fiFsoch2Kv_ENzqQkVIS_XpMT8i_2YhWJibh8g5MAgsitogDvHIE5wRBTxANJLM-tcv-FJEJRAE
182. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Healthy Schools. About CDC Healthy Schools. July 11, 2023. Accessed September 11, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/about.htm>
183. Frontiers | Understanding teacher emotional exhaustion: exploring the role of teaching motivation, perceived autonomy, and teacher–student relationships. Accessed September 25, 2025. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1342598/full>
184. Martin ST Kathy Merchant, John Kania & Ellen. Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 1 (SSIR). Accessed October 6, 2025. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact_1
185. Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities. National Academies Press; 2009. doi:10.17226/12480
186. Spoth R, Redmond C, Shin C, et al. Applying the PROSPER prevention delivery system with middle schools: Emerging adulthood effects on substance misuse and conduct problem behaviors through 14 years past baseline. *Child Development*. 2022;93(4):925–940. doi:10.1111/cdev.13746
187. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. A Guide to SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2019.
188. Zeldin S, Christens BD, Powers JL. The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: bridging generations for youth development and community change. *Am J Community Psychol*. 2013;51(3–4):385–397. doi:10.1007/s10464-012-9558-y
189. Campbell D, Erstein N. Engaging youth in community change: three key implementation principles. In: *Innovative Community Change Practices*. Routledge; 2015.
190. Fine AD, Padilla KE, Tapp J. Can working collaboratively with police on community service promote positive youth development? *Police Practice and Research*. 2021;22(7):1739–1759. doi:10.1080/15614263.2021.1959331
191. Anderson SA, Sabatelli RM, Trachtenberg J. Community Police and Youth Programs as a Context for Positive Youth Development. *Police Quarterly*. 2007;10(1):23–40. doi:10.1177/1098611106291372
192. Marks M, Wood J. Generating Youth Safety from Below: Situating Young People at the Centre of Knowledge-Based Policing. In: *The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Policing*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd; 2008:263–278. doi:10.1002/9780470773215.ch12
193. Friedman W, Lurigio AJ, Greenleaf R, Albertson S. Encounters Between Police Officers and Youths: The Social Costs of Disrespect. *Journal of Crime and Justice*. 2004;27(2):1–25. doi:10.1080/0735648X.2004.9721193

REFERENCES

194. Swartz S, Cooper A, McLaughlin A. The role of trusted adults in young people's social and economic lives. *Youth & Society*. 2016;48(5):735–757. doi:10.1177/0044118X16637610
195. Developmental Services Group, Inc. Interactions between Youth and Law Enforcement Literature Review. OJJDP Model Programs Guide. Published online January 2018. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Interactions-Youth-Law-Enforcement.pdf>
196. Marsh SC, Dierkhising, Carly B. Toward a Conceptual Framework for Trauma-Informed Practice in Juvenile and Family Courts. *Juvenile and Family Justice Today*. Published online Summer 2013:19–20.
197. Cunningham KA, Gubner NR, Vick K, Herting JR, Walker SC. Redesigning Juvenile Probation to Align With Behavioral Health and Positive Development Principles: A Quasi-Experimental Study. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 2023;50(1):6–21. doi:10.1177/00938548221082997
198. Aalsma MC, Schwartz K, Tu W. Improving police officer and justice personnel attitudes and de-escalation skills: A pilot study of Policing the Teen Brain. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*. 2018;57(7):415–430. doi:10.1080/10509674.2018.1523819
199. Broll R, Howells S. Community Policing in Schools: Relationship-Building and the Responsibilities of School Resource Officers. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*. 2021;15(2):701–715. doi:10.1093/polic/paz053
200. Brogan L, McPhee J, Gale-Bentz E, Rudd B, Goldstein N. Shifting probation culture and advancing juvenile probation reform through a community-based, participatory action research-informed training. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*. 2021;39(1):6–25. doi:10.1002/bsl.2497
201. Richards K, Cross C, Dwyer A. Police perceptions of young people: a qualitative analysis. *Police Practice and Research*. 2019;20(4):360–375. doi:10.1080/15614263.2018.1428899
202. International Association of Chiefs of Police. *Police-Youth Engagement*; 2018. <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/practices-in-modern-policing-police-youth-engagement>
203. CDCMMWR. QuickStats: Percentage of Children Aged 18 Years Who Received a Well-Child Checkup in the Past 12 Months, by Age Group and Year — National Health Interview Survey, United States, 2008 and 2018. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2020;69. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6908a5
204. NCB_Report 2021_Children and Young People's Opinions and Experiences of Healthcare.pdf. Accessed October 2, 2025. https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/files/NCB_Report%202021_Children%20and%20Young%20People%27s%20Opinions%20and%20Experiences%20of%20Healthcare.pdf
205. An integrative review of adolescent trust in the healthcare provider relationship – Hardin – 2021 – *Journal of Advanced Nursing* – Wiley Online Library. Accessed October 2, 2025. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jan.14674?casa_token=ItyvmAe8is4AAAAA%3AXdp0BNmfCGNwfEBTNIK5GZ21dZLGIqxx4C9TIRbGymYa6kKu8jVMqHEGKmkY7FUSZO2OgdGnXveswITy
206. Waselewski M, Amaro X, Huerto R, et al. Youth preferences for healthcare providers and healthcare interactions: a qualitative study. *BMC Primary Care*. 2024;25(1):63. doi:10.1186/s12875-024-02300-z
207. Gould D, Carson S. Life skills development through sport: current status and future directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. 2008;1(1):58–78. doi:10.1080/17509840701834573
208. Holt NL, Neely KC, Slater LG, et al. A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. 2017;10(1):1–49. doi:10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704
209. Fraser-Thomas JL, Côté J, Deakin J. Youth sport programs: an avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*. 2005;10(1):19–40. doi:10.1080/1740898042000334890
210. Perry C. READ: Nothing Heals Like Sport – A Playbook for Coaches. CHJS. May 17, 2023. Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://chjs.org/resources/read-nothing-heals-like-sport-a-new-playbook-for-coaches/>
211. Godor BP. Cultivating Resilience in Youth: Assessing the Psychological Benefits of Sport-Based Development Programs. 2025;13(1).
212. Varney R, Coakley L. Coaching Life Skills through Sport. *THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORT AND SOCIETY*.
213. Petitpas AJ, Cornelius AE, Van Raalte JL, Jones T. A Framework for Planning Youth Sport Programs That Foster Psychosocial Development. *The Sport Psychologist*. 2005;19(1):63–80. doi:10.1123/tsp.19.1.63
214. Calls for Coaches: Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports. Aspen Institute; 2019. Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED596319>
215. Sports-Based Youth Development Playbook.
216. Geldhof GJ, Bowers EP, Mueller MK, et al. The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development. In: Bowers EP, Geldhof GJ, Johnson SK, et al., eds. *Promoting Positive Youth Development: Lessons from the 4-H Study*. Springer International Publishing; 2015:161–186. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-17166-1_9

ABOUT ADAPT

ADAPT supports the National High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program by providing training and technical assistance for substance use prevention to HIDTA communities. The mission of ADAPT is to support integration of the best available evidence for substance use prevention into communities by advancing mindsets, knowledge, and skills.



CONTACT US

Website: www.hidta.org/adapt

Email: adapt@wb.hidta.org

