

# A CHECKLIST FOR YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS:



## WAYS TO INCORPORATE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES INTO PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT YOUTH IN REACHING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL:

- Focus and build upon youth's strengths, skills and protective factors, including communication, life skills, coping skills, advocacy, spirituality and character development, as opposed to focusing mainly on the consequences of the risky behavior.
- Provide physically and emotionally safe places for youth to talk with one another about what is on their minds. Offer young people opportunities to discuss the questions they have and the issues that concern them, including those that make them similar and different. Ensure that a caring adult is involved to facilitate creating a safe environment where issues can be directly addressed with research-based information.
- Increase the use of evidence-based programs (best and promising practices) that incorporate the principles of positive youth development, such as restorative justice programs; peer mentoring/education programs that support students in navigating transitional times; and comprehensive sexual health programs. These should teach young people complete and accurate information and skills, so they have the tools to respect their bodies, make healthy choices and learn interpersonal communication skills. If using innovative strategies, develop a solid evaluation to demonstrate short and long-term behavior change.
- Honor and support the myriad of learning styles and interests of youth. Young people are problem solvers and are intrinsically motivated by their own interests and concerns. Inquire about what those interests and concerns are and build from them in your organization's planning. Allow for them to be cultivated through a variety of media: visually, orally, experientially, kinesthetically, etc.
- Offer a variety of interesting challenges, such as experiential activities and service learning that foster creativity and feelings of success and accomplishment beyond traditional forms of academic achievement.
- Eliminate the stigma of behavioral health support services and alternative education by providing a baseline of behavioral health awareness education and support and alternative education to all youth.
- View parents and caregivers as part of the solution as opposed to part of the problem.
- Utilize one of Colorado's 84 youth advisory boards when making decisions that affect youth. (See Appendix E: Youth Advisory Boards/Councils in Colorado.)
- Involve a diverse group of young people and their families in the development and implementation of programs, with focus groups, internships, apprenticeships and as consultants throughout the entire process of program assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. Support this principle and practice with the necessary financial and logistical resources, such as a budget for youth and family participation (e.g., stipends or hourly fees for youth and family consultation, transportation reimbursement, food expenses and staff time for outreach, coordination, communication and training development).
- Intentionally engage youth with diverse backgrounds, such as youth with varying developmental disabilities, youth in military families; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender youth in positive youth development efforts. Use recruiting strategies that ensure diverse representation. In addition, increase attention to youth's family and cultural assets to encourage celebration of their cultures.

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## WAYS TO INCORPORATE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES INTO PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT YOUTH IN REACHING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL:

- Assure successful youth and family engagement, partnership and collaboration by
  - training youth and families on the skills and background knowledge required to participate in a meaningful way;
  - training decision-makers on how to engage youth and families in providing input, how to partner with them and what to do if their “hands are tied” and they are unable to act on the youth’s or families’ suggestions and ideas;
  - being clear about the roles, responsibilities and benefits of youth, family members and adult partners;
  - creating line items in organization, agency and program budgets that support diverse youth and family engagement in decision making. (See Appendix G: Sample Positive Youth Development Line Items.)
- Support educators in creating student-driven classes so they are more engaged and invested in their education.
- Create opportunities for building diverse cultural relationships and having open and reflective cultural conversations as a group to learn about each individual, as well as how to improve individual, organizational and community cultural responsiveness.
- Recognize and support the diverse family and community cultures of today and tomorrow by:
  - Including kinship, foster and adoptive caregivers when defining “parent.”
  - Redefining the concept of “parent involvement.” Many parents and/or caregivers cannot volunteer in the classroom or attend an event after school in the middle of the afternoon. Make “parent involvement” more inclusive and supportive of working parents by fostering strong and positive connections between the home and school environments. For example,

- host family celebrations to start off the new school year or a community program, or assign flexible homework activities that engage the whole family.
- Recognizing and responding to the fact that most families do not include an adult whose sole responsibility is to care for the children. For example, since many families see schools as their community’s “hub,” schools could expand the traditional school day and/or year by partnering with community organizations that could provide before and after school programming on their campuses. This time could allow for opportunities such as physical and arts education that are increasingly being cut during the regular school day. A dedicated staff person could be assigned to develop and coordinate partnerships with the community to offer a diverse menu of opportunities.
- Providing a diverse array of school and after-school programming to effectively reach out to and engage all youth in their learning, development and enrichment.
- Supporting and guiding families, especially those who are new to the education system in the United States or have had their own negative experience, in supporting their children’s schooling.

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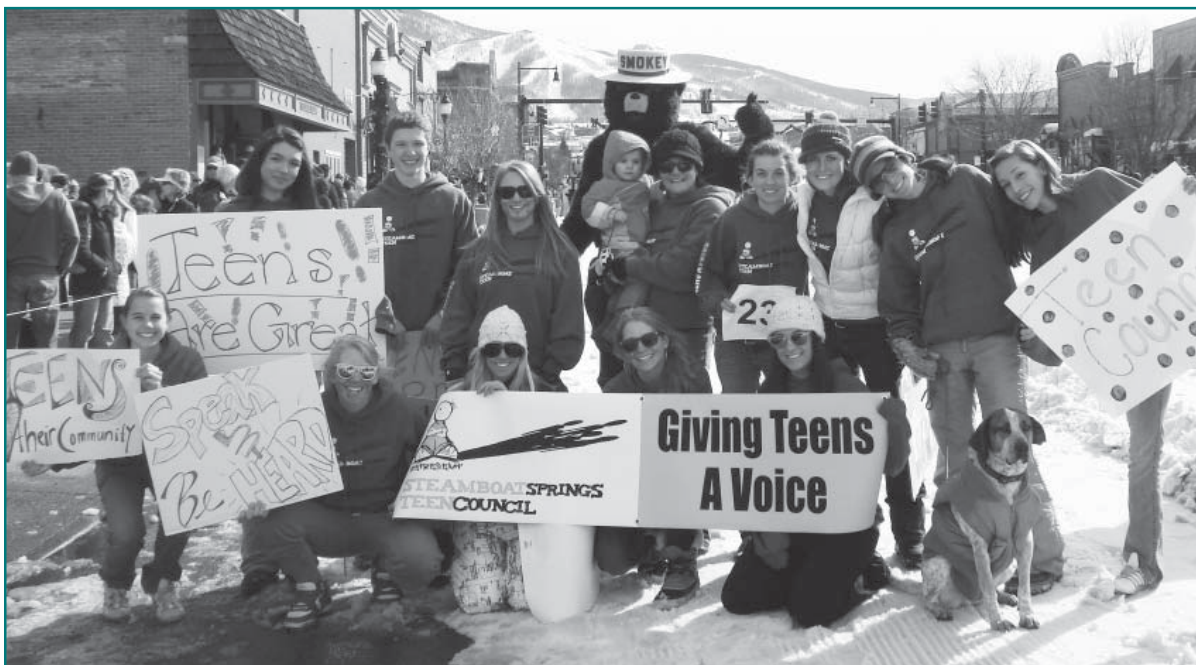


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- Increase cultural awareness and sensitivity through trainings and learning circles.
- Provide culturally appropriate mental and behavioral health services that are affordable and accessible for all youth.
- Develop partnerships with state and local transportation providers to address the lack of transportation that disenfranchises youth across the state from engaging in positive, community opportunities.
- Coordinate programs and services to make resources more accessible to youth and families. An example of this type of community coordination is school-based health centers. These centers rely on community coordination and collaboration to increase access to primary and behavioral health care for youth in their schools.
- Develop a coordination system for local and state positive youth development advocates of all fields and levels of professionalism to share, discuss and leverage resources, including funding opportunities.
- Create a youth-friendly website for outreach and collaboration across communities using social networks as positive forums for youth to connect with one another as well as with adults and community efforts. For example, anyone can connect with local positive youth development champions in their area via the social networking tool, the Colorado Youth Development “ning” at <http://coloradoyouthdevelopment.ning.com>.
- Develop a positive youth development evaluation tool to document and measure the effectiveness of positive youth development initiatives and strategies in Colorado.
- Develop a realistic sustainability plan based upon an organization’s funding and capacity.



To learn more about Positive Youth Development, visit [www.healthyouthcolorado.org](http://www.healthyouthcolorado.org)