



**WELL-BEING**

**PROMOTING RESILIENCE**



## PROMOTING RESILIENCE

### WHY IT MATTERS

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Each year more than 676,000 children and youth experience abuse or neglect.<sup>1</sup> Traumatic events associated with abuse or neglect can have lasting physical, emotional, and behavioral effects that can lead to poor outcomes for these children and youth, including early pregnancy, homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, and poor educational outcomes. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can cause toxic stress or frequent and prolonged adversity, which can impede brain development and manifest during adolescence through disconnected relationships, difficulty interpreting others' emotions, and problems controlling thoughts and actions.<sup>2</sup>

For many years, researchers have explored why some people recover and thrive when faced with tragedy,

trauma, or extreme stress while others experience ongoing distress, illness, or other negative outcomes. The difference is resilience — the ability to adapt following a traumatic event. Resilience is a person's ability to bounce back or to manage the stress from

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a difficult experience. Resilience was once thought to be an innate quality, but it is now widely accepted that resilience can be learned and cultivated. A young person who is focused on building resilience will be more likely to deal with

negative situations in a healthy way without prolonged and unfavorable outcomes.

One of the best ways to promote resilience in young people is to focus on strengthening protective factors that promote well-being and buffer against risk.

Protective factors include a young person's individual

academic, relational, or self-regulation skills, strong relationships with family members and caring adults, and supportive community and environmental conditions. Youth who are resilient may have strong connections within their families, schools, and communities and possess a sense of integrity.<sup>3</sup>

Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and

trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance, help bolster resilience. For caregivers, practitioners, or other adults working with at-risk youth to build resilience, focusing on building strengths and assets instead of on negative behaviors—known as positive youth development—has proven to help young people thrive. Developing resilience is important for children and youth of all ages, but brain science shows that adolescence provides a critical opportunity for building this set of tools.<sup>4</sup>

## ADVOCATES IN ACTION

*Numerous studies show that caring relationships are the most critical factor promoting healthy and successful development for young people ... When adults take an active interest in young people, show them respect, have compassion for their circumstances, and actively listen to and talk with them, these relationships help young people build communication and conflict management skills, concern for others, and a sense of belonging ... Some young people in foster care have described their relationships with supportive adults as turning points in their lives.<sup>5</sup>*

## ACTIONS

- **Learn more about protective factors,** identify ones related to your case that you can influence, and create a plan to help strengthen and advocate for those individual-level, relationship-level, and community-level factors where you can make a difference. See the fact sheets from the Children's Bureau and the Development Services Group.<sup>6</sup>
- **Consider culture when helping build resilience.** Developing resilience is not one-size-fits-all. A young person's culture may affect how they handle adversity, how they express feelings or emotions, and how receptive they are to seeking or accepting help.<sup>7</sup>
- **Help youth develop lifelong connections with caring individuals** who can provide support, counsel, and compassion. These connections may be with family members, teachers, coaches, mentors, or others. If the youth has mentioned a person who has demonstrated care, encourage them to develop that connection further. This is especially critical for youth on track to age out of foster care. For these individuals in particular,

advocates can help cultivate the youth's social capital<sup>8</sup> by encouraging them to build a safety net of individuals who can assist during difficult times and celebrate during happy ones.

- **Build self-confidence by working with the youth to identify strengths, assets, and resources.** Take a strengths-focused approach and start a conversation about what the youth loves about him or herself to help build a sense of agency and autonomy. Show them that they have the tools to succeed and contribute. Two excellent frameworks for this strengths-focused approach are the Search Institute's *Development Assets* assessment and the Center for the Study of Social Policy's *Youth Thrive Framework*.
- **Work with youth to set goals and help them stay accountable** so they can achieve those goals. This is also a great strategy for building self-confidence. Many youth who have spent time in foster care have experienced multiple social workers, attorneys, therapists, teachers, etc. By following up and holding them accountable, you are providing continuity and showing them that positive actions and hard work pay off, helping them see their own lives beyond foster care and building a vision for the future.
- **Set and communicate high expectations for the youth.** Many of the children and youth served by CASA and GAL programs have been victims of low expectations for much of their lives. Having someone to believe in their potential and to communicate that optimism can be life-changing. Because young people need a balance of challenges and responsibility, a combination of your high expectations and your support can help them experiment and take risks to help them grow and take control of their lives.<sup>9</sup>
- **Develop the youth's problem-solving skills** by positioning yourself as a problem-solving resource. One of the biggest traps we can fall into as advocates is to solve the problem but then never transfer the problem-solving responsibility to the youth him or herself. By helping work through problems together and sharing tools and resources with the youth in case the situation (or a different one) arises again, you will help them develop a key component of resilience and prepare them for adulthood.
- **Advocate for the youth to have opportunities to participate and contribute<sup>10</sup>** in the courtroom and the community. As the youth's best-interest advocate, you can make recommendations to the judge that support the youth's personal growth and development. Ask the youth if there are opportunities to cultivate a particular skill (e.g. public speaking competitions, acting camps, coding classes) and recommend to the court that the child participates. If the child or youth is old enough, help him or her prepare to attend court and speak for him or herself, if appropriate. Giving the youth opportunities to address adults or peers can help build communication skills that can be used with family members, future partners, and employers.
- **Provide ongoing support** by staying on the case until closure, when possible. Even when youth make progress toward building up protective factors and cultivating assets to help them thrive, they can have setbacks or rough patches. A child may be resilient in one situation, but vulnerable in another.<sup>11</sup> Having someone they trust to help them rebound is critical.

## BRIGHT SPOT

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### *DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS FRAMEWORK, SEARCH INSTITUTE*

Grounded in extensive research in youth development, resiliency, and prevention, the Search Institute's *Developmental Assets Framework* identifies the supports, opportunities, and relationships young people

Search Institute has applied this framework to millions of young people across the United States and around the world. When youth have more assets, they are more likely to thrive now and in the future, and to be resilient

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need across all aspects of their lives (called "external assets"), as well as the personal skills, self-perceptions, and values they need (called "internal assets") to make good choices, take responsibility for their own lives, and be independent and fulfilled.

in the face of challenges. With more assets, youth are less likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors.

To learn more:

<https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/>

## SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
<p><a href="#"><u>American Academy of Pediatrics, <i>Fostering Resilience</i></u></a><sup>12</sup></p>	<p>The American Academy of Pediatrics draws on the Positive Youth Development’s 7C’s questionnaire to give youth-serving professionals a checklist to help promote seven facets of resilience.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>American Psychological Association (APA), <i>The Road to Resilience</i></u></a><sup>13</sup></p>	<p>The APA has developed a guide to help individuals build resilience. This is a potential resource for CASA and GAL volunteers, as well as the youth in their care, to help them develop a personal roadmap to resilience.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Prevent Child Abuse America’s <i>Adverse Childhood Experiences Issue Brief</i></u></a><sup>14</sup></p>	<p>This one-page issue brief summarizes the ongoing <i>Adverse Childhood Experiences Study</i> by the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente that assesses the effects of child abuse and related adverse childhood experiences as a public health problem.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Promoting Protective Factors Fact Sheet Series</u></a><sup>15</sup></p>	<p>Developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau and the Development Services Group, this fact sheet series includes background and tips for practitioners to help promote protective factors for child victims of abuse and neglect, children and youth in foster care, pregnant and parenting teens, children exposed to domestic violence, and for in-risk families and youth. (See links for each individual fact sheet at the address above.)</p>

Name	Description
<a href="#">Resilience film</a> <sup>16</sup> and <a href="#">Facilitation Guide</a>	<p>This film explores the biological effects of abuse and neglect during childhood. <i>Resilience</i> details how toxic stress can trigger hormones that wreak havoc on the brains and bodies of children, putting them at a greater risk for disease, homelessness, prison time, and early death. The film also shows the other side of this phenomenon and chronicles how trailblazers in pediatrics, education, and social welfare are using cutting-edge science and field-tested therapies to protect children and help them thrive into adulthood.</p>
<a href="#">Youth Thrive™ Framework</a> <sup>17</sup>	<p><i>Youth Thrive™</i> is a research-informed framework based on a synthesis of research on positive youth development, resilience, neuroscience, stress and impact of trauma on brain development. The <i>Youth Thrive™</i> framework can be applied to all adolescents and young adults ages 9–26. Since 2013, <i>Youth Thrive™</i> has been working within child welfare systems to create a climate that is conducive to making change and taking actions that build protective and promotive factors and expand opportunities for youth and their families.</p>

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 Child Maltreatment 2016, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2016.pdf>
- 2 Center for the Study of Social Policy, [https://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youth-thrive/2013/YT\\_Youth-Resilience.pdf](https://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youth-thrive/2013/YT_Youth-Resilience.pdf)
- 3 <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/resilience>
- 4 Jim Casey issue brief, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-PromotingDevelopmentofResilience-2012.pdf>
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/victimscan/>
- 7 <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>
- 8 <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/jcyoi-IssueBrief2SocialCapital-2012.pdf>
- 9 <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-PromotingDevelopmentofResilience-2012.pdf>
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 [http://www.fosteringresilience.com/7cs\\_professionals.php](http://www.fosteringresilience.com/7cs_professionals.php)
- 13 <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>
- 14 [http://www.preventchildabuse.org/images/docs/anda\\_wht\\_ppr.pdf](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/images/docs/anda_wht_ppr.pdf)
- 15 <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/victimscan/>
- 16 <https://kplrfilms.co/resilience/>
- 17 <https://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/youththrive/about>