

**From Childhood to Adolescence:  
Healthy Youth Development & Well-Being**

**Picture a Brighter Future for Oklahoma Children  
Child Abuse Prevention Day Mini Conference**

**April 14, 2015  
Oklahoma City, OK**

**Charlyn Harper Browne, PhD**

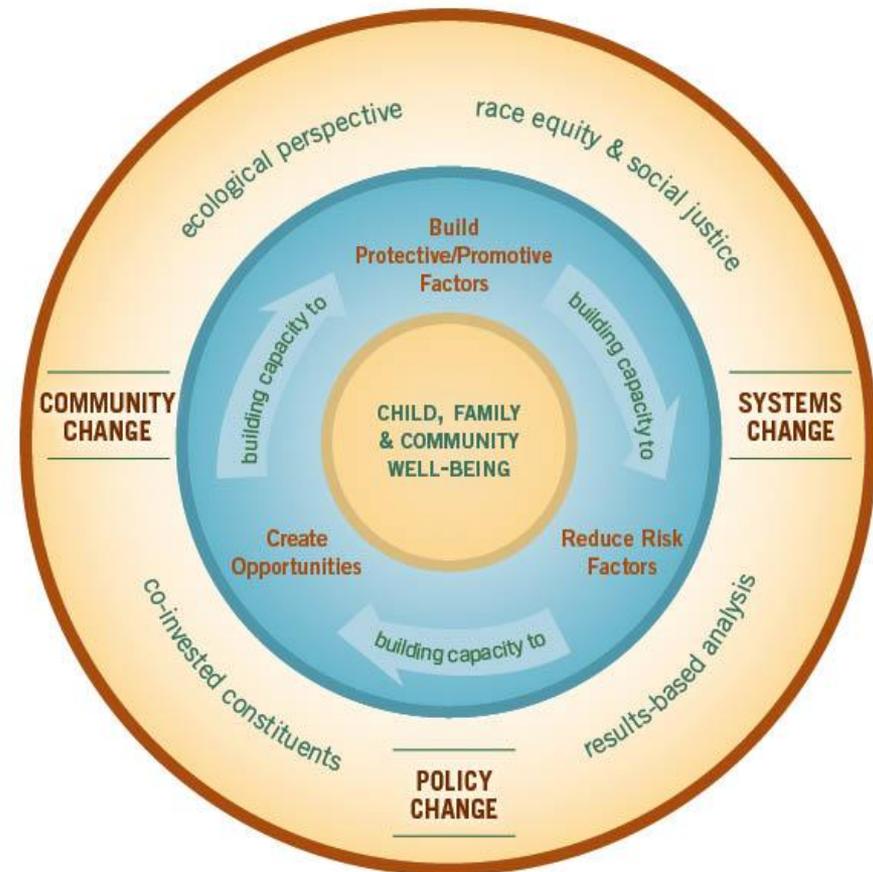
# The Center for the Study of Social Policy



- Nonprofit public policy, research, and technical assistance organization based in Washington, D.C.
- Work with state and federal policymakers and with communities across the country.
- Mission: promote strategies that produce equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, especially those most often left behind.
- Develop new ideas, conduct research, promote policy solutions, and provide technical assistance to policymakers, administrators, researchers, and community-based organizations.

# CSSP's Theory of Change Includes

- building protective factors
- reducing risk factors
- strengthening local communities
- connecting all of this to systems change and policy
- *a fierce commitment to equity across lines of race, ethnicity, and culture*



# CSSP's Developmental Protective Factors Framework

## Strengthening Families

1. Parental Resilience
2. Social Connections
3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
4. Concrete Support in Times of Need
5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children

## Youth Thrive

1. Youth Resilience
2. Social Connections
3. Knowledge of Adolescent Development
4. Concrete Support in Times of Need
5. Cognitive & Social-Emotional Competence of Youth

# Protective/Promotive Factors Across Development

When children are young, the family environment is very important. That's why Strengthening Families emphasizes parents' protective factors as a pathway to children's well-being.



## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

PROTECTIVE FACTORS strengthening families

## YOUTH THRIVE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth



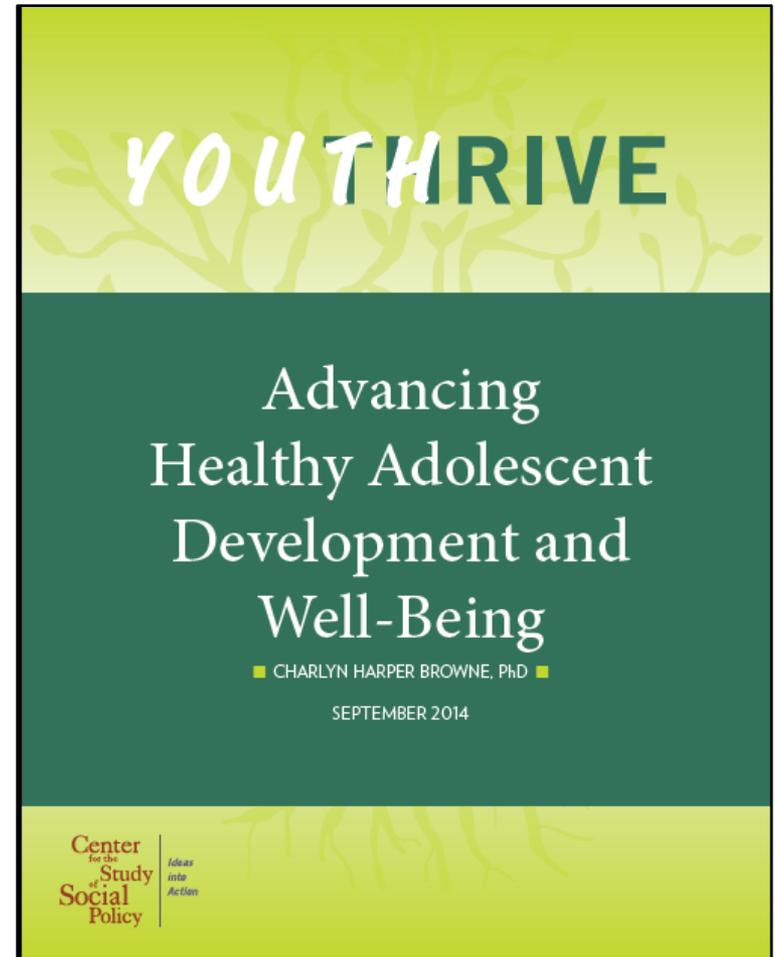
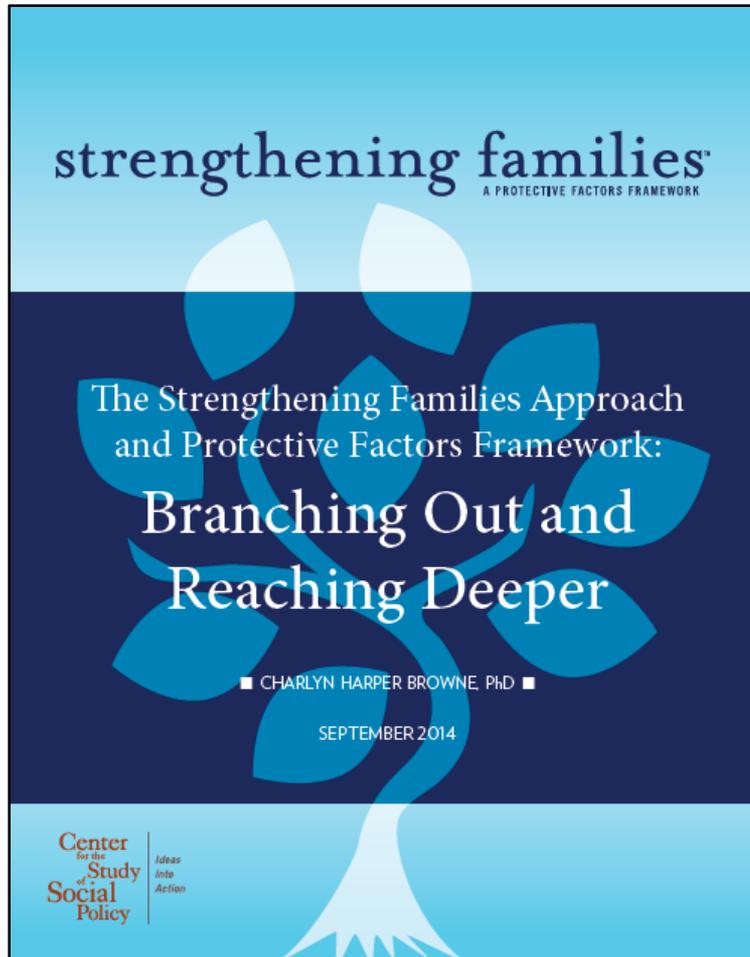
YOUTH THRIVE

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

As children grow, their own sense of self and experiences in family, peer, school and community contexts are very important. Youth Thrive emphasizes protective and promotive factors as a pathway to well-being during adolescence and in the transition to adulthood.



# Two New Reports



[www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org)

# The **YOUTH**RIVE™ Framework



Describes how all youth and young adults (ages 9-26) can be supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences, with particular focus on youth receiving child welfare services.

# Purpose of the YT Session



To provide an overview of the ideas and research from the neurobiological, behavioral, and social sciences that inform the evidence-base of the YT framework:

- Foundational ideas
- Research that informs the theoretical articulation of the YT protective factors

To discuss the practical application of the YT framework

# Foundational Ideas of the YT Approach



1. Strengths-based perspective
2. The biology of stress
3. Resilience theory
4. The Positive Youth Development perspective
5. Focus on well-being
6. The nature of risk, protective, and promotive factors

# FI 1: The Strengths-Based Perspective



1. A strengths-based perspective is grounded in the belief that all youth have strengths.
2. Encourages shared-decision making.
3. Does not eliminate the need to address barriers such as poverty, abuse, neglect, and other hardships that are very real and devastating for too many children and youth.
4. Identifying and building upon a youth's strengths is essential in implementing the Youth Thrive approach.

# Youth Strengths



## **Emotional and behavioral skills that . . .**

- create a sense of personal accomplishment
- contribute to satisfying relationships
- enhance one's ability to deal with adversity and stress
- promote one's personal, social, and academic or career development

# FI 2: The Biology of Stress



The YT approach emphasizes, in order to forge relationships and create environments that support the development of youth's and young adults' resilience, we must be aware of:

- How adverse childhood experiences can have immediate, long-term, and enduring effects
- Differences in stressors and stress
- The nature of positive, tolerable, and toxic stress

# The ACE Study



## Categories of adverse childhood experiences

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional neglect
5. Physical neglect
6. Mother treated violently
7. Household substance abuse
8. Household mental illness
9. Parental separation or divorce
10. Incarcerated household member

# Early Trauma and Later Behavior

## Adverse Experiences

- Direct experience of exposure to violence
- Child abuse, neglect, abandonment
- Accumulated burden of economic hardship
- Parental substance abuse
- Parental depression

## Later Impacts

- Hypersensitivity to stressors
- Problems with trust, autonomy, and initiative
- Difficulty interpreting emotional responses
- Patterns of intense, unstable relationships

# Stressor vs. Stress



## Stressors

The *experiences* that are perceived as challenging or threatening as “stressors”

## Stress

The biological and emotional *responses* to such events

## Stress Response System

A series of bodily changes—such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, and production of stress hormones—that are automatically triggered by the brain when faced with a challenging or threatening experience

# Classification of Stress Responses



## Positive Stress

Moderate and short lived pressure (e.g., being immunized) that causes brief increases in heart rate or mild changes in stress hormone levels. Positive stress is regarded as an important and necessary aspect of healthy development that occurs in the context of stable and supportive relationships.

## Tolerable

Severe pressure that is buffered by supportive relationships that promote healthy coping and mitigate the damaging effects (e.g., death of a loved one). If left unchecked, tolerable stress can become toxic stress.

## Toxic

Strong, frequent, prolonged adversity/trauma without the buffering of adequate adult support (e.g., physical, sexual, or emotional abuse). Toxic stress disrupts brain development.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005). *Excessive stress disrupts the architecture of the developing brain*. Working Paper No. 3.

# FI 3: Resilience Theory



- Resilience is a process & an outcome, not a personality trait
- Learned through exposure to challenging life events *facilitated by supportive relationships and environments* (e.g., people, culture, institutions, conditions, policies)
- Resilience is contextual with respect to setting, point in time, culture, and social factors
- Resilience reflects a person's pattern of positive adaptive behavior in response to current or past risk factors or adversity
- Resilience results in personal growth and positive change

# FI 4: Positive Youth Development Theory



1. Identify and build on youths' strengths
2. Youth development is more than overcoming deficits and risk
3. Provide access to caring people and safe places and institutions
4. Provide services, opportunities, and supports
5. Encourage youth to make informed decisions
6. Build meaningful, respectful, sustained relationships
7. Collaborate across community sectors

# FI 5: A Focus on Well-Being



- Well-being

The healthy functioning of children and youth that allows them to be successful throughout childhood and into adulthood

- 4 domains of child well-being identified by the Administration for Children and Families:
  - cognitive functioning
  - physical health and development
  - emotional/behavioral functioning
  - social functioning

# Well-Being Also Includes. . .



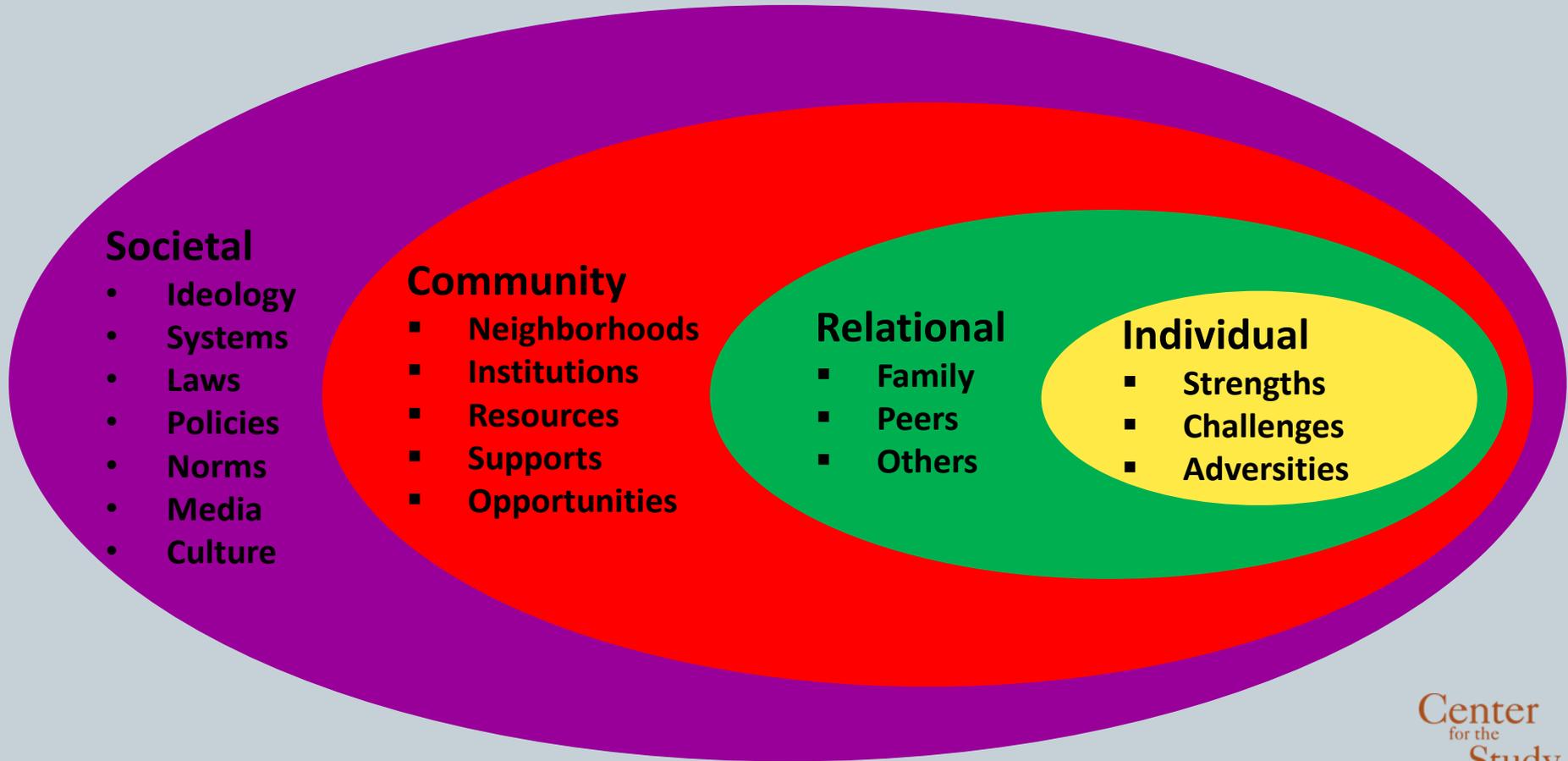
## Center for the Study of Social Policy:

- Must take into account the interplay between a youth's well-being and the parenting or caregiving environment around them
- Attachment to a caring and reliable adult must also be included as part of the concept and recommended actions to promote well-being

# FI 6: The Nature of Risk & Protective Factors



## Domains of the Social Ecology



Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Social-Ecological Model:  
A Framework for Prevention

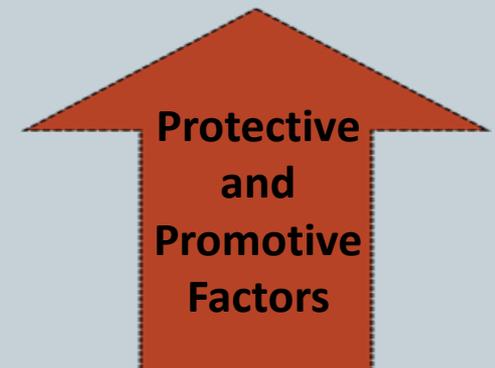
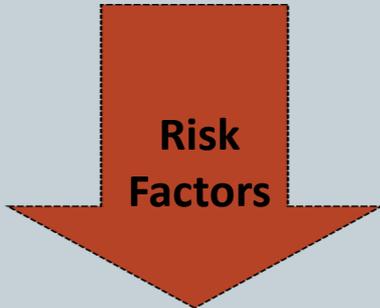
# Risk, Protective, & Promotive Factors



**Risk Factors:** conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that **increase the probability of poor outcomes**

**Protective Factors:** conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that **mitigate or eliminate risk**

**Promotive Factors:** conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that **actively enhance well-being**



# Cumulative Protective & Promotive Factors



The presence of multiple protective and promotive factors is associated with a decreased likelihood of involvement in problem behaviors.

# YT Theory of Change



- Youth in general, as well as those at heightened risk for negative outcomes, have a greater likelihood of achieving healthy outcomes as a result of experiences that support the building of the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors and the reduction of risk factors.

# The YT Protective and Promotive Factors



The Youth Thrive framework describes five interrelated attributes and conditions that are simultaneously:

- *Protective factors*, i.e., they prevent or mitigate the effect of exposure to risk factors and stressful life events
- *Promotive factors*, i.e., they actively enhance healthy development and well-being

# YT Protective and Promotive Factors



***Youth Resilience:*** Managing stress and functioning well when faced with stressors, challenges, or adversity; the outcome is personal growth and positive change.

***Social Connections:*** Having healthy, sustained relationships with people, institutions, the community, and a force greater than oneself

***Knowledge of Adolescent Development:*** Understanding the unique aspects of adolescent development; implementing developmentally and contextually appropriate best practices

# YT Protective and Promotive Factors



***Concrete Support in Times of Need:*** Understanding the importance of asking for help and advocating for oneself; receiving a quality of service designed to preserve youths' dignity, provide opportunities for skill development, and promote healthy development

***Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence:*** Acquiring skills and attitudes that are essential for forming an independent identity and having a productive, responsible, and satisfying adulthood

# YOUTH THRIVE™ Protective & Promotive Factors



## Youth Resilience

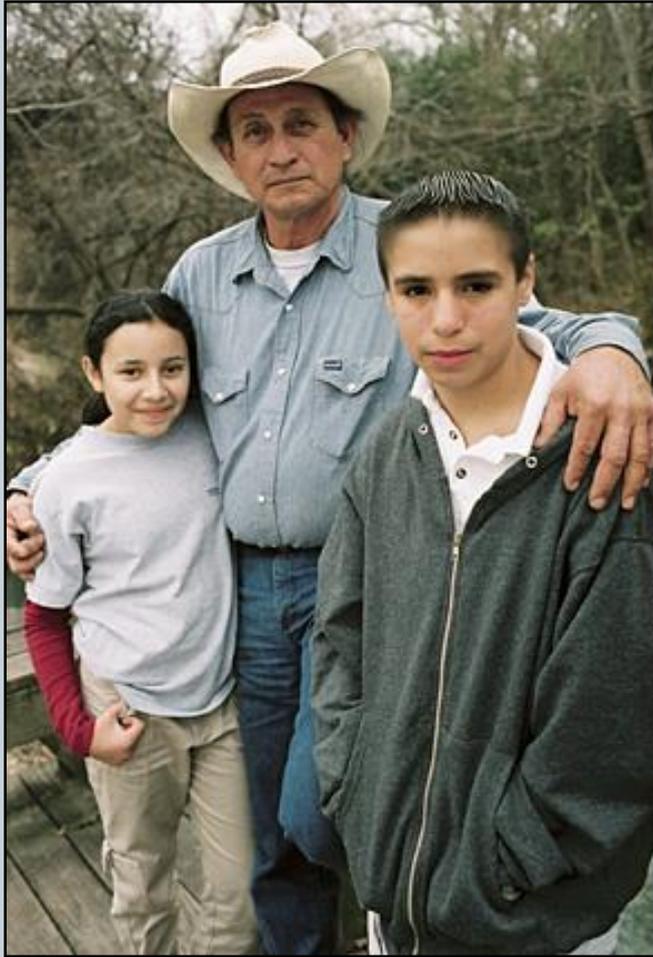


# Resilience



- Much more than “bouncing back”
- The processes that enable youth to thrive in the face of adversity
- Should result in positive growth and change

# Youth Who Demonstrate Resilience

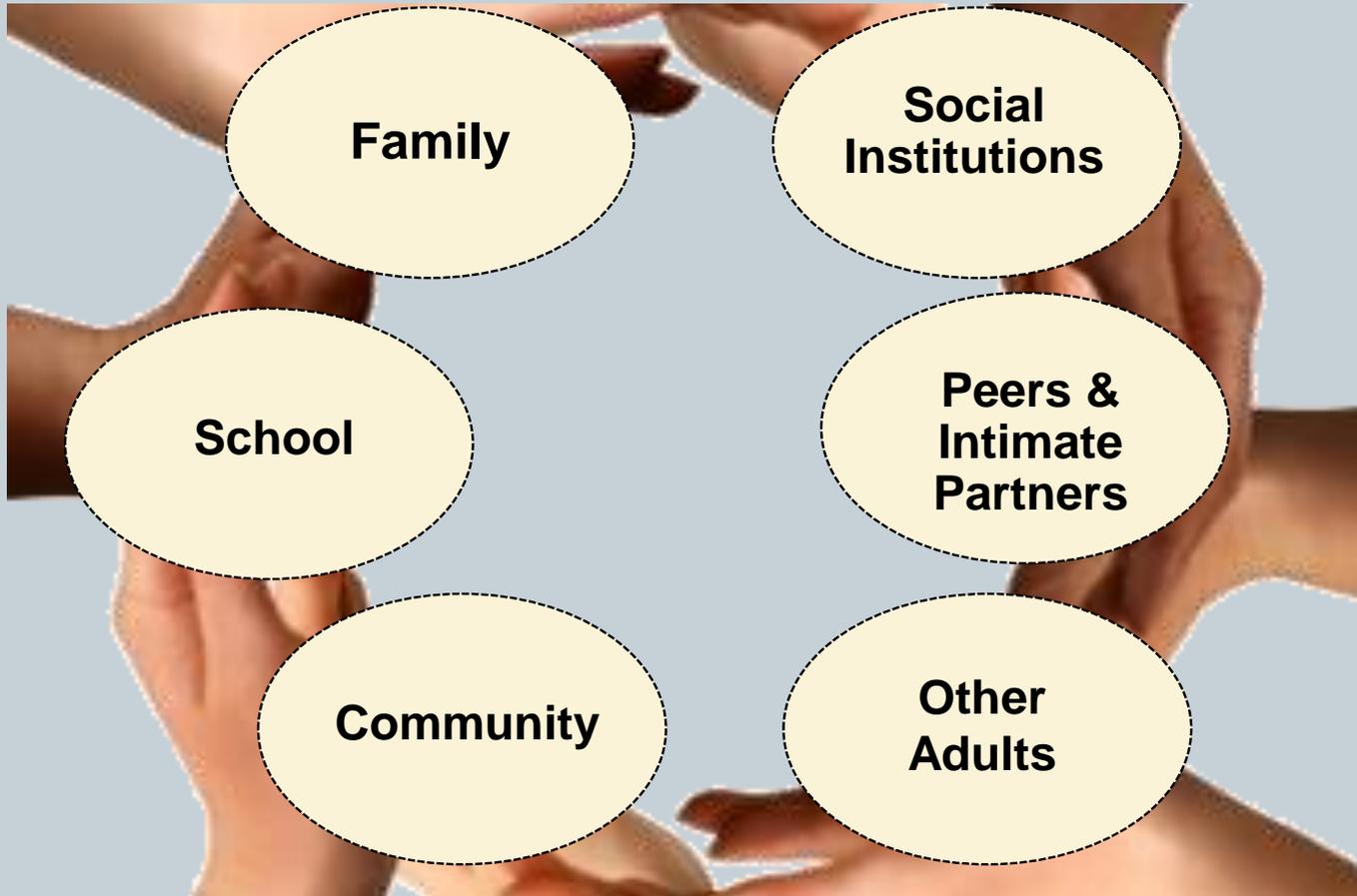


- Call forth their inner strength to positively meet challenges, manage adversities, heal the effects of trauma, and thrive given their unique characteristics and circumstances.
- Have a trusting relationship with a caring and competent adult who provides positive guidance and promotes high expectations.

# **YOUTH THRIVE™** Protective & Promotive Factors



## **Social Connections**



# Youths' Social Connections



- Healthy, sustained, supportive, caring relationships with family and other adults
- Healthy, supportive, caring relationships with peers and close friends
- Physically and emotionally safe, stable, supportive equitable environments
- Opportunities for constructive engagement in family, school, community and social institutions

# Youths' Sense of Connectedness



Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health “revealed the importance of feeling a strong sense of connectedness: to parents, to family, to other pro-social, supportive adults, as well as the protective effects of feeling connected to school, and experiencing a sense of spirituality—a sense of connectedness to a creative life force in the universe.”

Resnick, M. D. (2005). Healthy youth development: Getting our priorities right. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 183(8), 398-400.

# Youths' Social Connections



- Healthy, sustained relationships with people, institutions, the community, and a force greater than oneself that promote a sense of trust, belonging, and that one matters

# Social Connections Provide. . .



*Affiliative support* (e.g., companionship or a sense of community)

*Emotional support* (e.g., non-judgmental affirmation of parenting skills; empathy; validation of self-worth)

*Informational support* (e.g., parenting guidance or recommendations for health care services)

*Instrumental support* (e.g., transportation, financial assistance, or links to jobs)

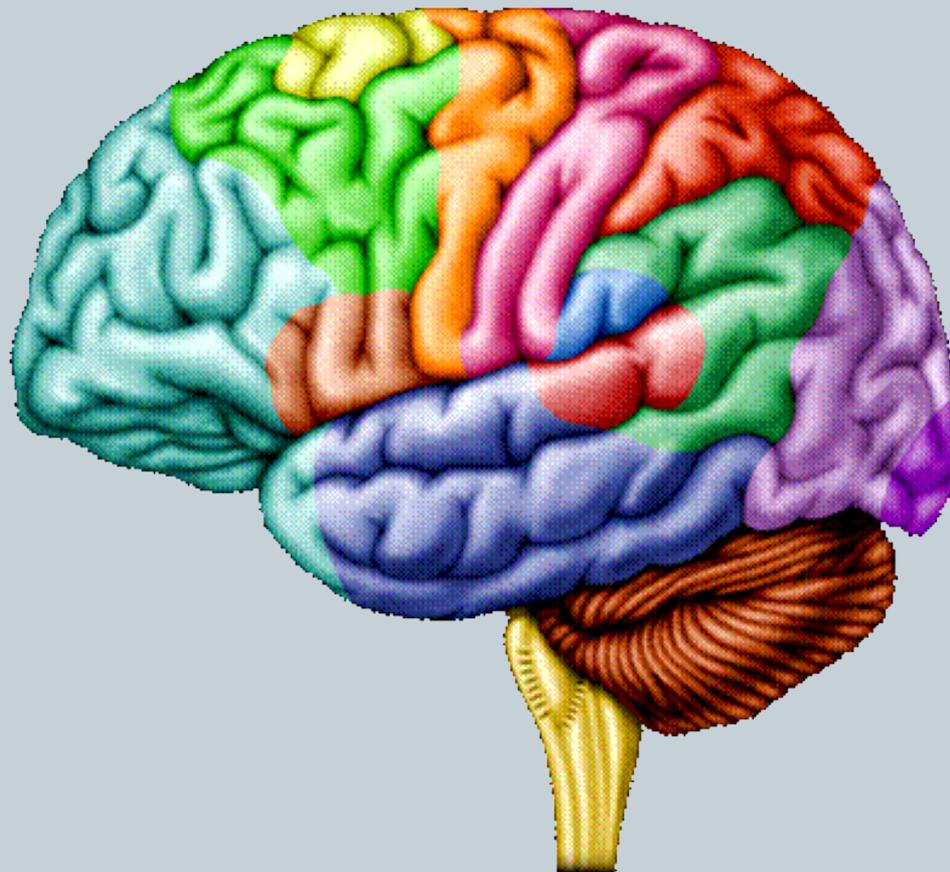
*Spiritual support* (e.g., hope and encouragement; a sense of meaning to life)

**YOUTH THRIVE™**

**Protective & Promotive Factors**



# Knowledge of Adolescent Development



# Knowledge of Adolescent Development



## **Youth and adults have accurate information:**

- adolescent biopsychosocial development with particular attention to brain development
  - ways to promote healthy development
  - trauma and toxic stress
  - preventing or mitigating negative outcomes
  - developmentally appropriate ways of connecting with youth
- 
- **Recognize that all youth have strengths**

# Key Feature of Adolescent Brain Development



## Limbic System

*Rapid* changes related to:

- Emotionality and mood state
- Reward/pleasure seeking
- Processing social information

## Prefrontal Cortex

*Gradual* changes related to:

- Impulse control
- Setting priorities, organizing, and planning
- Decision making
- Sensitivity to feedback
- Self-control, self-regulation
- Initiating appropriate behavior

# Complex Trauma



“The dual problem of exposure to multiple traumatic events and the impact of this exposure on immediate and long-term development. For young adults in foster care, traumatic events might include poverty, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, separation from and loss of family, or multiple moves and relationship disruptions.”

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). *The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care*. St. Louis, Missouri.

# Ambiguous Loss



“A loss in which there is no verification of death, no certainty that the person will come back, or no assurance that the person will return to the way she or he used to be. This form of loss lacks clear boundaries and has no clear ending. There are often no culturally or societally recognized rituals for grieving or even for acknowledging the loss.”

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). *The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care*. St. Louis, Missouri.

# Mitigating Toxic Stress



- Promote positive experiences with and guidance from caring adults and institutions are essential in building complex adaptive brain
- Provide opportunities for productive decision-making and constructive engagement in family, community, school, and other social institutions
- Encourage adolescent voice, choice, and personal responsibility
- Promote the development of self-regulation, self-reflection, self-confidence, self-compassion, and character

# The Adaptable Adolescent Brain



- Shaped by experience
- Key factor in adaptability:

Support and guidance from at least one adult who creates a stable, caring relationship with the adolescent



# YOUTH THRIVE™

## Protective & Promotive Factors



# Concrete Support in Times of Need



**Tutoring**

**Youth Programs**



**Counseling**

**Legal Services**



# Provision of Concrete Support



- Understanding a youth's needs
- Recognizing their own personal resources for meeting needs
- Knowing where and how to access services and goods
- Providing timely and relevant assistance
- Being treated with dignity

# Trauma-Informed Care Perspective



- Recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in a person's life
- Paradigm shift from:  
"What's wrong with you?"  
to  
"What has happened to you?"

# **YOUTH THRIVE™** Protective & Promotive Factors



## **Cognitive & Social-Emotional Competence**



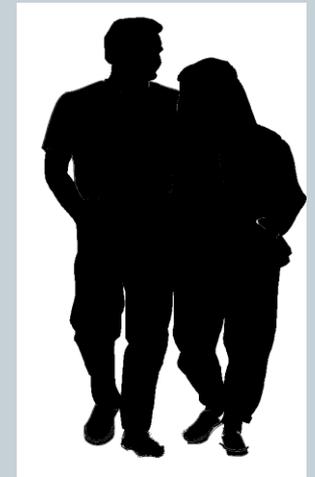
**Self-regulation**



**Positive Emotions**



**Productive  
Habits/Goals**



**Healthy  
Relationships**

# Dimensions of Social & Emotional Competence



1. Having a positive sense of self (**self-concept**) and good feelings about oneself (**self-esteem**)
2. Being open to new challenges and willing to explore new environments (**self-confidence**)
3. Believing that one is capable of performing an action and working to achieve a goal (**self-efficacy**)
4. Controlling impulses and acting appropriately based on the context (**self-regulation**)

# Dimensions of Social & Emotional Competence



5. Understanding and expressing a range of positive and negative emotions (**communication skills**)
6. Understanding and responding to the emotions and rights of others (**empathy**)
7. Willing to try again when first attempts are not successful (**persistence**)
8. Forming close relationships and getting along with others (**social skills**)
9. Learning a sense of right and wrong (**morality**)

# Dimensions of Social & Emotional Competence



## 10. Executive Functioning

- Seeing alternate solutions to problems and being able to shift perspective (**cognitive flexibility**)
- Planning and carrying out purposeful actions (**personal agency**)
- Exercising control over thinking (**cognitive self-regulation**)
- Exercising control over feelings (**emotional self-regulation**)
- Staying on task even in the face of distractions (**behavioral self-regulation**)

# Character Strengths



The psychological ingredients for displaying a life of virtue and success, for example:

- self-control
- curiosity
- persistence
- conscientiousness
- grit
- self-confidence

Tough, P. (2011). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

# Possible Selves



Near and distal possibilities for oneself; should include:

- both positive images of the selves one desires to become and negative images of the selves one wishes to avoid becoming
- specified action plans to achieve the possible selves

# Implications of CSSP's Protective Factors Framework for Child Welfare



1. Address sources of stress (stressors), stress responses, and ways to effectively cope; address grief, loss, and trauma; address secondary trauma [*resilience*]
2. Provide guidance about and support in establishing healthy, safe, stable relationships [*social connections*]
3. Establish and maintain an informed workforce [*knowledge*]

# Implications of CSSP's Protective Factors Framework for Child Welfare



4. Provide trauma-informed care; comprehensive, coordinated services [*concrete support*]
5. Provide opportunities for planning, decision-making [*social & emotional competence*]
6. Consider implications of one's own culture/cultural perspectives [*cultural humility*]
7. Consider chronic environmental stress [*e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism*]

# YOUTH THRIVE™



**Vision for Youth & Young Adults Experiencing Care:**  
“Lifelong personal, family, and community connections that help them to navigate life’s ups and downs in a healthy and effective way, to deal with problems, to meet their needs, to see opportunity in the future and to realize success.

This vision acknowledges the critical importance of healthy and lifelong relationships.

It also recognizes that young people will inevitably encounter challenges and problems along the path to adulthood and that they need support to develop the knowledge, skills, and connections essential for meeting their physical, social, and emotional goals.

Importantly, this vision also includes an explicit statement regarding feeling a sense of hopefulness, seeing opportunity in the future, and realizing success—all key aspects of wellness” (Langford & Badeau, 2013, p. 18).

# Contact Information



[charlyn.harperbrowne@cssp.org](mailto:charlyn.harperbrowne@cssp.org)

[www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org)