

# Research that Supports Youth Development

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There are three primary bodies of research and practice that have influenced the field of Positive Youth Development: Prevention, Resilience, and Thriving. **Prevention**, focused primarily on reducing and preventing problem behaviors, evolved as a dominant service approach in the 1960s and is still very influential in many youth organizations and programs today. In the 1980s, research into **resilience** enhanced the risk and protection framework by highlighting the power of protective factors in young people's lives. In the 1990s, the Search Institute developed a holistic approach focused on positive outcomes by identifying all the factors (or "assets") that young people need to **thrive**.

## Prevention

Prevention science has begun to evolve from a focus on preventing problems to a more integrated approach, simultaneously preventing negative behaviors and promoting positive development. Communities That Care (CTC), for example, is a model that reflects a synthesis of prevention research. The CTC framework identifies risk and protective factors that are linked to five problematic outcomes (teen pregnancy, school drop-out, delinquency, substance abuse, and violence). Twenty risk factors are connected to the domains of community, school, family, peer, and individual. Protective factors include healthy beliefs, clear standards, bonding, and individual characteristics such as intelligence. Originally developed by Drs. Hawkins and Catalano of the University of Washington, CTC is a public health planning model that guides community partnerships through the development of a community action plan to implement best practice strategies. For more information:

- Communities that Care: [www.communitiesthatcare.net](http://www.communitiesthatcare.net)

## Resilience

Understanding risk and protective factors is central to the concept of resiliency. Risk factors are those aspects of life circumstance and individual traits that increase the probability of a negative outcome. Protective factors, on the other hand, help an individual overcome adversity or risk factors. Longitudinal studies and intensive case studies have identified several key protective factors, including those that are internal (social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose, and belief in a bright future) and those that are external (caring adult relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for participation). Research findings indicate that protective factors have a more profound impact than any specific risk factor, and that resiliency is a dynamic, innate human capacity that can be learned and developed. For more information:

- Benard, Bonnie. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco: WestEd.
- Resiliency in Action: [www.resiliency.com](http://www.resiliency.com)
- Project Resilience: [www.projectresilience.com](http://www.projectresilience.com)

## **Thriving/Assets**

Search Institute contributed the theoretical framework of 40 developmental assets: the factors young people need to thrive and develop to their full potential. Grounded in the current research on adolescent development, assets are the experiences, skills, opportunities, and values young people need to be healthy and productive. Assets are external (e.g., opportunities and supports provided by community, school, family, and peer group) as well as internal (e.g., values, commitment, competencies, and identity). Search Institute research has demonstrated that the more assets an individual possesses, the greater their chances for healthy growth and development. Youth survey findings show that 50% of high school students report 20 or more assets in the vast majority of communities they have surveyed. In response to these findings, Search Institute challenges communities to create and rally behind a positive, holistic vision of youth and engage all community sectors in building assets. For more information:

- Search Institute: [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)