Youth Development Research Briefs

2016

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Youth at Risk: Building Resilience through Positive Youth Development

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This year, the annual positive youth development research briefs has a differently focus than in the past. Rather than presenting a selection of current research across multiple domains of youth development, these briefs have a singular focus: Youth at risk and the implications for working with youth at risk for 4-H educators. The urgency of exploring the youth at risk topic, and the need for strategies and protocols for working with at risk youth, arose from various crisis situations encountered in the 4-H program in the past year. But beyond understanding effective ways to handle individual crises as they arise is the need to understand the contexts that underscore youth risk, and furthermore, to understand how a positive youth development approach can be effective in mitigating the effects of youth who live in risk-inducing contexts.

In fact, in the opening chapter of Youth at Risk: A Prevention Resource for Counselors, Teachers and Parents (Capuzzi & Gross, 2014) from which this year’s articles were selected, the authors take care to highlight the difference between risk effects and risk causes. The risk effects are the things, often behaviors, that youth present outwardly. These range from problems with school, to mental health concerns such as low self-esteem or suicide ideation, to failure to obey rules, and anti-social behavior and acting out. The causes of these behaviors, however, are where the source of the risk lies, such as dysfunctional family dynamics, poverty, as well as community, school, and peer environments.

At the macro level, positive youth development has to take an ecological approach, one that is based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory (Figure 1). This theory posits that a young person’s development is affected by everything in their surrounding environments. Bronfenbrenner proposed five different levels that form the ecological web for child development: 1) Microsystem, which is the system closest to the child, like family and caregivers; 2) Mesosystem, which are the systems that operate closely, but indirectly with the child—such as parent’s interactions with teachers; 3) Exosystem, which are the systems that influence a child without the child’s direct input, such as a demanding career that requires a parent to be absent from home a great deal; 4) Macrosystem, which are the societal-level systems such as culture, religion, economic, socio-political, and other systems that influence a child directly or indirectly; and 5) Chronosystem, which refers to events in a child’s life overtime, at both the personal level (for example parental divorce) and external level (such as the time cohort in which one is born).
Youth Resiliency and Optimal Development

When viewed from an ecological, systems perspective, providing programming for youth at risk can at first appear to be a daunting task – especially when one considers the many systems in which a young person develops, and how little influence a program might be able to have on the systems level. The picture appears even bleaker when one considers how little agency, that is, personal control and influence, a young person has on the systems that affect their development. Yet it is building youth agency that appears to be a critical factor in helping youth develop positively, despite the at-risk situation in which they are living.

The understanding of the importance of youth agency grew out of seminal work by Werner and Smith (1992) who followed a cohort of people in Hawaii from the time of their birth in 1955 through age 40. Werner and Smith were leaders in terming the phrase “resiliency;” a term they applied to youth who did well, despite being in systems that put them at risk. As a result, the resiliency approach to youth development grew out of the recognition that not all youth who are exposed to significant risk factors develop problems. Resiliency researchers worked to understand the factors that helped young people adapt well, despite the presence of contextual risk (Garmezy, 1993). Further work by Bernard (2004) proposed
that given the chance, humans are “self-righting” and will seek a course of optimal development, and that there are individual traits and environmental factors that support this self-righting tendency (Table 1).

**Table 1: Individual Traits and Environmental Factors Supporting Youth Agency & Resilience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Traits</th>
<th>Environmental Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Social competence – including responsiveness, flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, and a sense of humor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Problem solving skills – including the ability to think abstractly and reflectively, planning skills, and flexibility</td>
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<td>• Autonomy – including an internal locus of control, sense of power, self-discipline, and adaptive distancing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sense of purpose and future – healthy expectations, goal directedness, success orientation, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, hardiness, belief in a bright or compelling future, and a sense of coherence and meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Caring relationships – having at least one caring person is the most important factor in fostering resilience in youth. Relationship qualities include: stable care, affection, attention, intergenerational social networks and trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High expectations – having high expectations for youth reflects that adults see youth strengths and potential, not just the problems and deficits.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Opportunities to participate and contribute – connecting youths to other people and opportunities. This reflects that youth are valued as participants and that they are capable of taking on responsibilities and contributing to others.</td>
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*Information in this table is adapted from Lewis (2014).*

**The Emergence of the Positive Youth Development Approach**

Positive youth development emerged as a way to describe and promote healthy youth development distinct from previous approaches that dominated the research field (Small & Memmo, 2004). These earlier approaches included a focus on prevention, risk and protective factors, and resiliency. The prevention approach emphasizes that that it is less costly and more efficient to prevent youth problems from occurring in the first place, than to address them once they have happened (Durlak, 1997). The focus on risk and protective factors highlighted that the context in which a young person is developing plays a key role in his or her development, particularly when there is a high degree of risk involved (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Garbarino, 1995; Rutter, 1983). And, as aforementioned, the resiliency approach grew out of the recognition that not all youth who are exposed to significant risk factors develop problems.
The positive youth development (PYD) approach emphasizes the promotion of positive youth development and the situations and processes that facilitate healthy development (Small & Memmo, 2004). In their summary of the PYD approach Small & Memmo (2004) clarify that PYD is used to describe three distinct ideas: 1) A description of the natural process of development in children and adolescents; 2) The focus of programs and organizations that provide activities to promote positive development; and 3) A philosophy based on the belief that a positive asset-building approach that focuses on building youth strengths (Hamilton, S. F, 1999).

Small and Memmo (2004) further outline four assumptions of the PYD approach gleaned from the nascent, but building scholarly PYD field. First, is the idea that helping youth reach their full potential is the best way to prevent problems (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Second, that youth need support and opportunities to succeed (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2003). Third, building community capacity to support youth development is critical (Benson, 1997; Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 1998, Eccles & Gootman, 2002). And fourth, youth should be viewed as assets to be developed, not problems to be fixed (Pittman & Irby, 1996; Pittman & Zeldin, 1995).

Building Resilience through Positive Youth Development
As Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) point out, addressing the adverse, systemic, situations youth at risk face is an important part of the overall ecological solution to preventing youth risk. However, there is increasing evidence that an approach grounded in positive youth development can play a significant role in mitigating youth risk at the individual level (Butts, Brazemore, & Maroe, 2010; Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015). Such an approach crosses risk-specific domains (such as substance abuse or mental health, which are typically treated with approaches specific to the risk) and focuses on building the internal capacity of young people in supportive program environments.

Sanders et al. (2015) propose that increasing PYD in youth leads to greater levels of resiliency, which, in turn, leads to greater levels of well-being. Youth resiliency, then, becomes a mediating factor in the PYD equation. As such, programs that focus on building PYD as it relates to building youth resiliency are the ones that will have the greatest impact on well-being and optimal development for youth at risk. Such a programmatic approach places emphasis on building the internal traits important for resiliency (Bernard, 2004), in the context of high quality youth programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) that focus on developmental relationships (Search Institute, 2014).

This theoretical approach to enhancing PYD through building resiliency is reflected in the Oregon 4-H Program model, under which 4-H youth development programs are planned
(Figure 2). The model highlights two things of particular importance when working with youth at risk: 1) Program quality standards; and 2) Developmental relationships.

Figure 2: The Oregon 4-H Program Model

The program quality standards (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) outline the key structural aspects of high quality programs, such as physical and psychological safety, as well as programmatic outcomes, such as skill development (Table 2). When serving youth at risk, high quality programs should focus skill building activities on those skills deemed most important for building resiliency (Arnold, 2015; Table 1).

Table 2: Indicators of High Quality Youth Programs

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<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Physical and psychological safety</strong> – youth need to feel safe in 4-H programs, and able to interact positively with others.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Appropriate structure</strong> – whether it is a club meeting or leadership camp, 4-H programs must have clear and consistent rules and expectations, with clear boundaries and age-appropriate monitoring.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Supportive relationships</strong>– all youth need to feel warmth from and closeness to others in 4-H. Youth need to feel others care about and support them. They also need to receive clear guidance and communication from 4-H volunteers and staff.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Opportunities to belong</strong>– all youth need to feel included in a meaningful way in 4-H, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientations, or ability. Youth should have opportunities to share their culture and heritage with others, and to forge a positive identity.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Positive social norms</strong> – Youth should experience clear rules and expectations for participating in 4-H, including the values, morals, and ethical expectations of being a 4-H member.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Support for efficacy and mattering</strong> – Youth in 4-H should be taken seriously and respected for their ideas and contributions. Youth should be given opportunities to develop responsibility and be challenged to set and achieve goals.</td>
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Opportunities for skill building – Youth need to develop physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social skills as they grow and develop. 4-H programs provide opportunities for youth to develop these skills, skills that support a young person into adulthood and the workplace.

Integration of family, school and community – Youth in 4-H do best when there is a connection to their 4-H experience with their family, school, and community. This is why 4-H programs begin at the local level, in the community where youth can practice their emerging leadership skills as they grow and develop.

Likewise, when serving youth at risk, high quality programs should focus on enhancing the environmental factors that support optimal development, through an emphasis on developmental relationships (Arnold, 2015; Table 2).

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<th>Table 2: Features of Developmental Relationships</th>
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**Summary**
The reviews presented in this issue of *Positive Youth Development Research Briefs* focus on seven areas that have the potential to put youth at risk. These are:
1. Low self-esteem  
2. Stress and trauma  
3. Adolescent suicide  
4. Sexual minorities  
5. Homelessness  
6. Multi-racial identification  
7. Bullying

Our hope is that by exploring these topics through the lens of positive youth development and the role PYD can play in building the mediating factors of resiliency will provide insights into how practitioners can shape PYD programs to address the needs of youth at risk more effectively.

References


Who Cares What I think? Problems of Low Self Esteem

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Theory
Research has shown that there is a connection between how a person feels about himself or herself and how that person acts. The research extends to demonstrate that one of the major causes of deviant or potentially destructive behavior is low self-esteem. Beliefs about self develop as a result of perceptions and evaluations of success and failure experiences.

In this article, self-esteem is defined as “subjective evaluation of worth.” Individuals with low self-esteem often find it necessary to develop defenses. They may be hostile, critical, or suspicious of others and may adopt an “I don’t care” attitude or resist trying. They do not feel connected and lack a sense of belonging.

There are several factors contributing to a young person’s self-esteem. One of the most significant influences is quality of significant relationships. For example, depression appears to be more strongly affected by the relationship with parents than peers. Parent-child conflicts and depression are common predictors of self-esteem, according to one study. Some of the parenting habits that may lead to low self-esteem include: expecting perfection, failure to set limits, failure to give positive feedback, failure to listen, rejection, being a maladjusted role model, failure to help children adapt, forcing children into a pattern, and allowing procrastination.

As the family unit has evolved over time, the culture and structure of families have changed dramatically. In the absence of a traditional family model with greater support, young people have turned to their peers for guidance and approval. In doing so, they use peer norms, created out of lack of experience, for evaluating behavior rather than the collective experience and wisdom of a network of adult role models.

The need to feel significant is another consideration in the development of self-esteem. Young people who feel unimportant or irrelevant in their families, peer groups, or

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communities, may demonstrate dangerous behaviors. For example, sex may become a strategy to make themselves feel significant in the eyes of someone else. This need is also a powerful motivator to become a gang member.

Social and societal influences may also impact a person’s self-esteem. Societal norms like traditional gender roles can be quite destructive to a young person who does not necessarily conform to the expectation. Masculinity, including behaviors such as competitiveness, decisiveness, and independence, as opposed to feminine characteristics, has been shown to be significantly correlated with self-esteem for both men and women. The absence of masculine skills in boys has the potential of contributing to low self-esteem. Additionally, many young people today receive their information about social norms and expectations through television rather than a family unit or community participation. This leads to children’s realities being distorted and setting them up for feelings of inadequacy and promoting unhealthy coping behaviors.

A sense of belonging and connectedness is central to the development of self-esteem. Belonging to a family, a culture, a community, or a school provides a connection to aid in sustaining a sense of worth.

Physical appearance may also have strong impacts on self-esteem development. Inherited physical characteristics, such as physique, appearance, and disabilities, may impact the way others view a person, which influences the way the person views themselves. Furthermore, those who mature later and continue to be treated as children tend to develop low self-esteem because they maintain old self-perceptions even after maturing.

**Practice**
There is no question that prevention and early intervention are the best methods to combat low self-esteem in youth. There are several key recommendations for supporting youth and countless examples of successful programs.

Youth have a strong need to be needed and their perception of personal significance is extremely important. Research shows adults no longer need to rescue or explain, expect attainment of perfection, or dominate and control. Instead, they must learn to listen and hear individual perceptions, check out assumptions, accept a young person’s thoughts and feelings, and encourage and celebrate successes.

One specific need in supporting high self-esteem in youth is providing assistance to parents. The changing family structure has left many parents without a support network of extended family, or even a co-parent. Parents resort to parenting the way they were parented, but
may be instilling low self-esteem in their children in the same way they learned as youth. If opportunities are made available for parents to grow skills in a group environment, an added benefit is an increase in their network of support.

Involving youth in planning programs for at-risk populations yields new ideas that reflect the interests of the group. At-risk youth will more readily accept and participate in programs that they were involved in planning and that allow them to share the responsibility for implementation. This involvement also promotes a feeling of significance and sense of belonging among the youth who help with planning.

Role models should encourage individuals to learn skills and attitudes that will lead to successful experiences. These opportunities may include volunteering, attending workshops, and entering programs specifically designed for their interests and needs. The external guidance of role models will likely be necessary for youth with low self-esteem to take advantage of these opportunities.

Adults serving as mentors, parents, or youth development professionals need to recognize each child as a unique person. It is important to recognize and accept the contributions each individual makes even if it doesn’t meet our preconceived expectations or personal needs. There may need to be a conscious effort made to include each child and to discover ways in which each child can successfully contribute to the well-being of the group.

The educational focus in schools and organizations should be on prevention and early intervention. Training for youth development professionals and volunteers on identifying and supporting at-risk youth should be considered. Offering peer support programs that foster healthy relationships and social skills among at-risk youth is another strategy to use in educational settings. Protected funding for at-risk populations should be provided for in the budget to standardize school-linked programs. Prevention programs may include career information to promote goal setting, the use of peer advisors, using local businesses to provide internships or work experience, and encouraging counseling services as part of educational programming.

Examples of programs successful in preventing low self-esteem include: outdoor adventure groups, ropes courses, community service groups, youth-produced community newspapers, youth-run small businesses, sports programs, National Guard, employment exploration and job readiness, wilderness programs, multimedia groups, and many others.
Implications
This research presents several key lessons for youth development professionals. It is clear that the 4-H program is in a prime position to provide preventative and impactful programming that supports positive self-esteem among youth. The 4-H program model, vision, and mission are well aligned to address the needs and follow the recommendations presented. As the author explains, pursuing a holistic approach in promoting positive self-esteem is the best approach. Integrating youth, their families, community, and schools, will achieve the best results. The 4-H Youth Development program, situated within the Extension Service is an outstanding place to bring this network together with a collaborative vision.

One of the most essential places to focus energy is supporting parents. The research consistently shows that parents need additional support and guidance. Perhaps county 4-H programs could further promote the connection between members’ parents in order to grow a supportive parenting network. Even better, 4-H, or another Extension program, should explore opportunities to offer innovative parenting classes to provide resources and guidance to parents.

Another key indicator for youth developing positive self-esteem is a sense of belonging. As one of the 4-H program’s Core Values, this is something we are already doing well. However, this research further substantiates its significance and staff, faculty, and volunteers should continue to focus attention on it. A sense of belonging can be achieved by supporting healthy relationships among club members, preventing bullying, and fostering an environment of acceptance. 4-H events and activities should be viewed as a safe environment for all youth to be themselves. It is important that youth development professionals accept non-conforming members who may identify with minority groups and promote that acceptance among the peer group. This includes youth with diverse cultures, gender identities, sexuality, race, physical appearance, disabilities, etc.

4-H Youth Development programming has been successful in involving youth in program planning and leadership opportunities as well as offering recognition. Through positive youth/adult partnerships and recognizing their success, youth can enhance their feelings of personal significance and competence, leading to better self-esteem. Delegating tasks, trusting youth to make decisions, allowing independence, and offering leadership roles are all ways 4-H staff and volunteers can meet these needs.

Some of the programs 4-H offers were cited by researchers as strategies for enhancing self-esteem. These include, challenge and adventure, wilderness programs, career exploration, ropes course, and others. These are areas that could be expanded to increase benefits. One
recommended program that 4-H has not traditionally provided is peer support groups. There may be opportunity for older youth leadership members to offer their time in schools with a structured peer support program.

The author cites research that indicates training for youth development professionals is necessary. Specifically, training should be provided in identifying at-risk youth, making appropriate resources available, and better serving their needs. Youth development organizations should also provide dedicated, secure funding for programming that enhances self-esteem and addresses the needs of at-risk youth.

Finally, youth development professionals should learn to intervene early, provide appropriate programming, and play a long-term, consistent role in the lives of at-risk youth. Serving as strong role models and offering consistent safe and healthy environments for positive growth will help to improve the self-esteem in youth.

REFERENCES
Stress and Trauma: Coping in Today's Society

Dale Larson
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The authors begin this chapter with a brief recall of the Sandy Hook shooting and the fact that it traumatized children around the country not only those in Newtown, CT, then pose the question "How do we help children cope with both everyday stressors and stress brought about by extreme trauma?" The introduction concludes with a brief history of the psychology of stress in youth, which has only become an independent field of study as recently as the 1980’s. The models that have been used to study and treat stress disorders are then discussed, followed by a long list of various stressors impacting youth and corresponding coping mechanisms.

Important Theory
The first step toward addressing stress in children is to acknowledge that it exists, because our societal mythology regarding childhood continues to be one of a carefree existence free of stress, as if children are somehow immune to the 24/7 news cycle that has the adults in their lives on constant alert. The point is made early on that age and developmental level should be considered in both assessment and response (Krueck & Salsman, 2006). Three approaches to stress are presented with posttraumatic stress considered independently. The Stimulus Oriented view provides a good foundation and is grounded in studies of life-event stressors such as divorce and death but falls short when youth experiencing the same event react differently, which has led to inquiries into the influence of both peer and maternal relationships in framing the individual's response (Abaied & Rudolph, 2011). The Response Oriented view focuses on the physiological effects of stress, which when not mitigated by such healthy living behaviors as increased exercise and eating well, can manifest as eating disorders, violence, and alcohol abuse (Katz et al, 2012). The final approach is Transactional, which focuses on the emotions evoked by a particular event with particular attention to whether the response is intentional or passive and the level of peer support for that response (Agonston & Rudolph, 2011). Each approach has its merits and all speak to the need to recognize both the unique response of the individual and the environment in which they live.

Implications for Positive Youth Development Practice.
The casual factors of stress are too numerous to address directly, suffice it to say that they are a constant in the lives of the youth we serve. While therapeutic responses need to be tailored to the individual, there are programmatic elements at our disposal that can empower successful management of their impact. Key among these are the 4-H Essential Element of Belonging and the 4-H Mission Mandate for Healthy Living. Belonging in practice is an effective application of an external asset as promoted by the Search Institute (2003) involving the development of caring relationships with both peers and unrelated adults with whom youth can share the triumphs and challenges of their lives without judgement. Curriculum resources that can be applied in a club or group setting in support of this objective include: Be SAFE: Safe, Affirming and Fair Environments, The Ready To Go Mentor Training Toolkit, and Youth Advocates for Health (YA4-H!): Building Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships. In the Healthy Living realm developing an environment where eating well and being active are the norm is a goal that has a direct impact on the ability of youth to deal with the effects of stress and reduces the likelihood of harmful behaviors. In addition to adopting these core values, several curricula are available in support of this mandate among them: Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness, Health Rocks!, and STEPS to a Healthy Teen.

Implications for Positive Youth Development Professionals.
As professionals we have a responsibility to both keep abreast of developments in the science of prevention and be ready for the opportunities to apply the resources at our disposal to improve our communities. In applying our instructional and organizational principles of equity, access, and inclusion we need to acknowledge the unique stresses encountered by those whose self-identify is different from the ‘norm’ particularly those who are impoverished, differently abled, LGBTQ+, and from non-European ethnic groups or cultures and provide additional support as needed. We can and should acknowledge the reality of persistent stress in the lives of our youth, then equip, empower, and encourage our staff and volunteers to structure program delivery around providing all participants with an environment that buffers its impact not only through preventative habits like regular physical activity and serving healthy snacks and beverages, but also by providing intentional support to individuals encountering traumatic events. This means incorporating the concepts of community building and healthy living into both initial orientation and training as well as continuing education of those engaged in program delivery. Simple activities such as a check-in (pair and share) at the beginning of meetings can provide the connection and release that makes a difference to someone. With encouragement those activities can be replicated through the program multiplying their protective effect. Like the pervasive myth of the stress-free childhood we often fall prey to the myth that as practitioners we are immune to the effects of stress. Professionals should pay attention to
the stressors in their own lives and develop healthy means of dealing with them. Doing so may provide professionals with both insight into helping others cope and credibility when they do.

Selected References
I Don’t Want to Live: Adolescents at Risk for Suicide

Karissa Dishon
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Comprehensive Theory and Practice:
Before delving into the intricacies of education, crisis management, and support surrounding adolescent suicide, we as youth development professionals must do two things. First, acknowledge the rate at which it is happening, and growing, and second, be willing to bring suicide out of the shadows and talk about it.

Adolescent suicide is increasing more rapidly than any other suicide segment, and has been doing so since the middle of last century. Because of its accelerating growth, and the many myths surrounding adolescent suicide, research on the topic can be contradicive and overwhelming. With this understood, there are still some best practices and accepted facts within the field about which youth development educators must learn and develop skills.

For the purpose of this research, adolescent is defined as individuals between 15 and 24 years of age. Within this population there are 85 suicides each day, and an additional 2,000 attempts each day. This means over the course of a school year, “each U.S. classroom can expect to have at least one male or female attempt suicide”. While socioeconomic factors don’t seem to have an impact on occurrence rates, gender and race do. Research is fragmented across groups, but a few important takeaways are prevalent. Males are more likely to complete a suicide, while females are more like to attempt, but not complete. Caucasian male adults are the most likely to commit suicide, but in adolescents, Native Americans are most prevalent followed by Caucasians, Asians, and African Americans. Race is such an important predictor, that research found “Non-White adults are 50% LESS likely to commit suicide as White adults.”

Much like attempt and completion percentages, the method of suicide is also different across gender segments. Firearms remain most prevalent by males, though are gaining popularity with females. Hanging remains common with both genders, while gassing, ingestion, and overdose are most common with female adolescents. Across genders the three most common methods are firearms, hanging, and gassing.

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There are two ways to look at suicide prevention, first to look at predictive behaviors and identify at risk youth, and second, develop protective behaviors within our youth population. Predictive behaviors include affective disorders, conduct disorders, anti-social personality disorders, substance abuse and more. Protective behaviors are less researched until late, but include having a strong network of social support, internal locus of control, increased self-efficacy, reasons for living, and high self-esteem.

From the first discussion of adolescent suicide, there have been multiple myths that are widely distributed and accepted. Until recently it was believed that youth who verbalized their suicidal behaviors were less lethal than those who didn’t. According to Gross, this is completely false, and in fact 90% of youth who attempt suicide give some type of warning. This can range from slight changes in behavior and attitude to repeated attempts to reach out to individuals around them. Youth often reach out through social media to friends rather than in face to face settings, or to adults. Another common myth is that talking to youth about suicide and providing education and support plants the seed and normalizing the idea. According to Gross, this too is a myth, and in fact well-constructed educational programing on the topic will actually increase the likelihood that youth will reach out to a resource person. Another important facet is that with each attempt of suicide, the successive attempts become more lethal, and while youth who have recently attempted suicide are at a high risk of repeating, one attempt does not mean a youth will remain suicidal and at a high risk long term.

With a better grasp on the size and scope of the problem, we can now begin to plan prevention education programming. For youth exhibiting predictive behaviors or those who have reached out directly, the most important step is to work with a counselor or psychiatrist to develop a plan encompassing risk and protective factors. The relationship built between therapist and youth becomes even more important during crisis times as it serves as a social connectedness that may be lacking in other aspects of the youth’s life.

Secondary to an individualized treatment plan for youth already identified as suicidal, the most urgent need is for comprehensive educational programming for youth, adults who work with youth, and parents of adolescents. As aforementioned, teens’ most common method of reaching out is to other teens on social media. An educational program directed at teens teaching them how to recognize and handle their peers’ attempt at connection can save lives and reduce judgmental behaviors.

Up until this point schools, and education programs have not been held accountable or liable for youth deaths as they have been labeled as “spontaneous acts of violence”. Some of the legal views surrounding these cases are changing however, and now is the time for
all professionals working with youth to take a more active approach to prevention and education. In the interest of providing educational programs, Gross outlines a few major factors to consider.

At a minimum, all organizations working with youth need to create a comprehensive plan including collaboration between all levels of staff and administration, preparation of a crisis team, and creating a network of individual and group counseling options. The counseling options must be made available and staff aware of them before any awareness or suicide education happens. As part of this readiness plan, a crisis management strategy should also be developed. This includes targeting specific individuals who are trained as youth resource personnel and are equipped to deal with youth in suicide crisis. Specific individuals should also be trained on how to handle media, public concern, and stakeholder questions. At a minimum, all staff working with youth should be trained to assess youth’s lethality and the immediate risk.

Organizations and individuals wanting to go beyond readiness and deliver educational and awareness programming should keep the following best practices in mind. All educational programming packages should be cleared with a professional in the field of counseling, psychiatry, or suicidality. These programs should also be cleared through the organization’s legal team to ensure that it is within the organization’s scope and doesn’t increase liability. Keep in mind that not providing education on the subject could also increase liability with today’s changing legal opinions. It is important to address this topic with legal and administrative teams regardless of the programmatic plans. General guidelines for educational and awareness programming include keeping elementary programs focused on developmental counseling and helping youth overcome traits that put them at risk for suicide, and focusing secondary school programs on causes, myths, and symptoms as well as where to go for help. On a final note, Goss specifically mentions that suicide plans should never be shown or discussed as part of the education program.

**Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice:**
The most immediate and inherent implication for 4-H is our duty to, at a minimum, have a readiness plan in place, and we should work toward developing a comprehensive educational and awareness program for the youth in our organization. This plan must include collaboration with campus and organizational administration, identify key individuals as youth resources, crisis management individuals, and train all staff on suicide profiles and lethality assessment.

In addition to an organizational level strategic plan, we as educators must also develop education plans to prepare for an attempt or completion of suicide among our program’s
youth. This includes keeping up to date on best practices, research, and instruction. As an organization, 4-H must also develop training for volunteers and be able to support volunteers through a crisis management situation.

In addition to the implications above, 4-H must take special precautions during residential camping and retreat settings. While it is unlikely, according to Gross, that an attempt would be made during school or program hours, an overnight setting may be an opportunistic time for a youth who wants someone to stop them. Youth are less likely to commit suicide in late evening hours or early morning hours. By attempting during mid-morning and day hours' youth are more likely to be stopped and get the support they need.

**Selected References**


It Takes a Village: Advocating for Sexual Minority Youth

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Sexual minority youth face a daunting developmental task while also coping with internalized and externalized homophobia and culturally-sanctioned oppression. Sexual minority youth who have different sexual orientation or gender identity from other youth in many ways are no different from their heterosexual counterparts when it comes to navigating adolescence. However, there are some key differences during this period that are important to understand and value. Youth in rural areas are more likely to face prejudice and discrimination than their counterparts in urban areas. By promoting prevention and intervention at different levels society can continue working towards a day when it is not risky to be a sexual minority youth. This article proposes a set of practices in order to protect sexual minority youth from the risks associated with minority stress. The authors also discuss interventions techniques to use when youth have symptoms of stress, which can range from depression to self-harm.

Contribution to Theory
By using a case study and review of existing research the authors offered a robust case for practitioners to establish strategies for working with sexual minority youth in prevention and intervention settings. By drawing from previous work of Negy and Eisenman (2005) and a study conducted by Dias, Arala, Bein, Henne, and Marin (2001), the authors of this article provided a solid framework for adapting intervention and prevention strategies when working with sexual minority youth who also have other minority statuses (e.g., race, culture, gender, religion).

Although there’s a growing number of articles on minority youth and LGBTQ studies, the authors put an emphasis on the current work of researchers advocating for innovative practices when working with sexual minority youth. For example, they cited the work of Fedewa and Ahn (2011) who conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of the literature to determine the effects of homophobia and homonegativity on both heterosexual and sexual minority youth and found that sexual minority youth are 124% more likely to experience bullying as a result of their real or perceived differences than their heterosexual

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peers. The terms, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia refer to discrimination, hatred, verbal and physical harassment, and acts of violence perpetuated against sexual minorities (Logan, 1996). This article therefore, complemented the ongoing body of work in the the field of LGBTQ studies focusing in both urban and rural settings. By outlining a case study and citing previous studies the authors added a new set of tools for practitioners and youth development professionals to employ when promoting prevention and intervention techniques at all stages of youth and adolescence development.

**Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice**

4H Youth Development professionals have the important task of creating and designing programs that provide the right atmosphere for youth and adults to thrive. It’s important to understand that the changing landscape and the scope of work for youth development professionals requires new set of practices based on recommendation by institutions and researchers with expertise on the subject. For example, Advocates for Youth (2013) suggested an overall youth development program to serve youth at risk, such as LBGTQ youth and other youth who have little support in their communities. Programs that are focused on overall development are needed in addition to those programs that are focused on a specific issue; focusing on overall development will increase youth’s motivation to avoid risky behaviors. The authors outline the following set of practices that will prove to be useful for 4-H professionals when working with sexual minority youth and partner organizations in domains such as camps, after-school program, club meetings, etc.

1. Focus on the assets and strengths of youth and help youth develop competence in all areas of wellness.
2. Focus on the needs that youth people themselves identify, and consider the multiple factors of youth people’s lives in developing an intervention.
3. Include youth in designing and implementing program.
4. Include adults who are committed and treat youth with respect, not judgment.
5. Encourage the involvement of the whole community, and tailor the programs to the youth’s culture, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.
6. Seek community partnership with other groups.

Youth with other minority statutes (e.g., race, culture, gender, religion) are double or triple minorities (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991) It is important for youth development practitioners working in either prevention and intervention programs to consider the intersections of sexual orientation identity, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and religious identity. A sexual minority youth is more than his or her sexual orientation or gender identity; the youth is also developing these other aspects of his or her overall identity. Youth development professionals must continue to create an environment where sexual minority
youth can feel accepted and nurtured. By promoting prevention and intervention at all levels each practitioner can contribute towards creating a space where is not risky to be a sexual minority youth.

**Contribution to Practice**
The authors discuss efforts to protect sexual minority youth from the risk associated with “minority stress” (Meyer, 2003). Additionally, they discuss intervention efforts to use when they have symptoms of this stress that range from depression to self-harm. Furthermore, they advocate for the use of prevention and intervention strategies in order to protect and look after sexual minority youth as they develop into sexual minority adults.

4-H Youth Development professionals, mentors, and volunteers should continue working in partnership with organizations that have the expertise and the experience in this field of practice. It takes a village of youth development professionals to create the right environment for youth to feel safe, cared for and accepted. 4-H clubs and programs can be part of the prevention process provided that our staff, mentors, volunteers and agents have the adequate training and understanding of sexual minority youth. Preventions then, the authors suggest, includes letting all children know that they are loved regardless of their sexual minority status.

Furthermore, prevention includes parents, school personnel, and community members demonstrating to youth that they are accepting of people regardless of who they are; this acceptance can be demonstrated by their reactions to sexual minorities in the community. Hence prevention begins before youth come out as sexual minorities, it occurs when they come out to others, and it continues into adulthood.

Intervention, on the other hand, occurs when youth are not able to cope with their reactions to minority stress, for example, when they become depressed, become anxious, seek escape through alcohol or drugs, engage in unsafe sex, or have suicidal ideations. This is the time that families, schools, and communities need to move beyond prevention to intervene on behalf of youth. Although the authors present prevention and intervention in separate sections, they are intertwined when working with sexual minority youth. Intervening with a sexual minority youth who is depressed is not only a means to lessen the depression but a means to prevent suicide.

The line between prevention and intervention can be blurry when working with sexual minority youth. The case study outlined by the authors demonstrated the need to train staff, administrators, parents and the community in order to offer the proper support for sexual minority youth.
Selected References
Nowhere to Turn: The Young Face of Homelessness

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Theory
In 2011, 1.6 million children (1 in 45) were homeless at some point during the year. Homelessness may include any housing situation that is unstable and non-permanent. Some people may experience a loss of independent housing so they double up with friends or family. Others may live in shelters or hotels. Some live on the streets, stay in emergency shelters, live in cars, or camp. The homeless youth population consists of two distinct groups: Families with young children (predominately elementary age and younger) and adolescents living alone. Each group has distinct characteristics and the implications for practice are different.

The typical family with young children is headed by a single mother (85%). The cause of homelessness for most families is poverty. Factors such as the high cost of housing, lack of affordable child care, and lack of funds for mental and physical health care make low-income families vulnerable to becoming homeless. Some families may have lost jobs and therefore lost income, but homeless shelters house many full-time workers whose income is not sufficient to pay for housing. Once a family is homeless, it becomes even more difficult to address their poverty issues as they are more prone to illness, experience chronic stress, and may be removed from their support networks. Federal safety net programs have decreased dramatically. In 1996, TANF provided cash support to 68 out of every 100 families living in poverty, but in 2010 only 27 out of 100 impoverished families received support.

The average age of a child in a homeless family is six years old and typically has a mother in her 20s. Two thirds of these children have significant social, emotional, and behavioral problems. They are at risk for moving frequently; 68% change schools one or more times in a year; and one third are held back in school. They are at risk for witnessing domestic violence, which is also a leading cause of homelessness in families. They are two and three times more likely to have been victims of physical and sexual abuse (respectively) than their peers. They constantly worry about their housing situation, whether they will have a place to sleep that night, and whether something bad will happen to them or their family.

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Nationwide, 42% of homeless families have an African American background and an additional 20% identify with another racial or ethnic minority. Homeless urban and rural families tend to have different characteristics – there is not a clear pattern. Practitioners should seek local data to better understand the numbers of homeless children in their area and determine common characteristics.

The number of homeless adolescents is difficult to calculate. These youth may have run away from abusive homes, been kicked out by their families, left foster care, started abusing drugs or alcohol at a young age, or have experienced other trauma before becoming homeless. Once homeless, they are likely to experience additional trauma, including high risk sexual behavior, “survival sex,” and high rates of drug and alcohol use. Homeless youth exhibit extremely high rates of oppositional defiance disorder – as many as 40–51% meet the criteria for diagnosis. Youth with serious psychiatric problems are also at high risk of becoming homeless.

Nationally, homeless adolescents are more often male. Unlike homeless families, youth living on their own closely resemble the racial and ethnic characteristics of the general population (57% Caucasian, 14% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 11% other groups). A striking 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ – these youth are six times more likely than their peers to become homeless.

**Practice**

Many homeless youth and the parents of homeless families experienced homelessness as children. Homelessness becomes a cycle and therefore points to prevention as being the most effective way of reducing youth homelessness.

For families, prevention is mostly aimed at addressing the underlying poverty. Programs that provide support services such as housing assistance, eviction prevention, or helping families find co-housing situations are more cost effective than trying to re-establish housing for a family that is already homeless.

For elementary aged youth experiencing homelessness, schools and community organizations could provide out-of-school-time programs to assist youth academically and emotionally. Programs such as afterschool enrichment and day camps help working parents by easing the challenge of finding child care. Afterschool or weekend homework programs also address the problem of resources – homeless youth may not have the supplies, safe storage for supplies, or an appropriate place to complete their work. Programs should be ready to accommodate youth who have no records, no resources to contribute, and who may be academically behind their peers.
Homeless youth of all ages under stress benefit greatly from programs that address their emotional needs and build their sense of competence. Resilient youth – those who believe in their own competence and are more accepting of themselves – are less likely to feel lonely or depressed and engage in fewer risky behaviors. Play therapy is a helpful technique for younger children to cope with their stress. Expression through art and music benefits youth of all ages.

For older youth, safety nets to prevent homelessness are especially important for youth in psychiatric or drug/alcohol treatment programs and youth in foster care. It is crucial that these youth receive resources to help them transition to adult life. Vocational training, academic enrichment, and individual counseling are high areas of need. For homeless youth that have loving families, reconnecting them quickly is important to prevent further trauma and increase the likelihood of a long-term positive outcome.

Implications for 4-H Youth Development
At first blush, it may seem that homeless youth have greater needs than youth development – Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs suggests that their lack of shelter, food, and safety would be a higher priority than belonging, self-esteem development, and meaningfulness. But most youth are connected with some kind of service that helps with their more basic needs, and the higher levels of the hierarchy cannot be ignored in developing youth without dire long-term consequences. Many 4-H programs may be seen as an intervention to prevent youth homelessness, since they contribute to resiliency and vocational skills that help keep people from becoming homeless. 4-H volunteers and staff are in a position to identify youth and families at risk of homelessness. Extension programs could connect families to educational programs or refer them to direct service partners.

This article presented many statistics that show national trends. These may not present an accurate picture at a local level. School districts are good sources of data on school-aged homeless youth – they are required by federal law to have a homeless liaison and to track and provide services to these youth. There may be NGOs in the community that serve the homeless population and could be important resources or partners as well.

To learn more about the homeless youth population in the Portland Metropolitan area, I conducted a personal interview with staff from Janus Youth Programs (January 8, 2016), the only organization in Oregon that targets homeless adolescents. Janus identifies itself as a youth development organization. They refer to their population as “famililess children”. They provide programs to teens and young adults up to age 24; this extended age range is supported by adolescent brain development research. Portland is a magnet city for
homeless youth, drawing youth from across the state and some from other areas of the country. There is no reliable way to count the number of homeless youth in the area, but Janus connects 1100 youth each year with services and follows 400 in case work. This population is 70% male and 42% identify as LGBTQ. They quoted the phrase “there are no dumb kids on the street” and referenced studies showing that the homeless adolescents perform above average on intelligence tests; yet, it other areas of development, these youth may be behind their peers. The biggest challenges in this region are a lack of resources to address mental health and insufficient affordable housing.

In planning programs that either target or are open to homeless youth, practitioners should consider some logistical issues. Youth of any age will face typical barriers of poverty – they can’t afford program fees, may need to be fed, have transportation barriers, and parents may be working and not available to volunteer. Homeless youth have no mailing address and may not be able to complete projects “at home.” Both academic support and art programs are important and suitable to 4-H afterschool and camp formats. It is important to consider that the 4-H has an upper age limit that falls within the period of late adolescence. Staff may want to consider exceptions for older youth who are above that age but are developmentally behind their peers.

Homeless adolescents living on their own are in desperate need of adult mentors. They need consistent and caring adults in their lives. 4-H programs that emphasize life skills needed for employment, self-sufficiency, and transition into adulthood are particularly relevant for these youth. Finally, special attention should be paid to the needs of LGBTQ youth. These youth face high rates of bullying, experience higher rates of abuse, and some are alienated by their families. 4-H staff and volunteers should be prepared to understand the needs of these youth during this critical time of identity development. They should make sure 4-H programs are a safe and welcoming environment and they should be vigilant for signs of trauma and family discord.

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Who Am I? Unique Issues for Multi-Racial Youth

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Youth Development Theory
The United States is a melting pot of cultures, races, and familial backgrounds. The increasing demographic growth of mixed families and diversity is influential in how we view identity. “A growing segment of the population of the United States claims to be of multiple heritages, which creates unique needs for those who do not have a clearly defined ethnicity but do have a need to articulate a defining race” (Gibbs, 2003). In this article, the authors attempt to uncover many of the internal and external challenges for multiracial youth to educate counselors. “It is clear from research that racial and ethnic minorities are more vulnerable to social, emotional, and academic problems and that limited support systems are available to racial and ethnic minority youth” (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990; Moss & Davis, 2008). As youth development professionals, we should know the content of this article to better address the needs of our community and youth population.

It would not take much convincing that “every individual is born into and influenced by his or her cultural context, which includes existing beliefs, values, rules, roles, and family practices” (Sue & Sue, 2012). However, the process of defining one’s identity with a diverse background can be more difficult than a family tree with homogeneity. One of the reasons for this is the perspective of society in which “a sociocultural perspective highlights that racial and ethnic minority youth undergo a socialization that includes learning to adapt to the external pressures of the dominant culture. Poverty, unemployment, exposure to crime and violence, discrimination, and inadequate health care are just some of the environmental issues facing minority youth” (Orton, 1996). Despite the social progress our country has made in a century, social ostracism and racism are not obsolete. “When outside prejudices and values are internalized by the minority youth, this negative internalization can lead to problems of identity” (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004). Youth have enough to deal with, just with their own biological changes that additional stressors can amass with negative influence on their development.

The media messages do not help ameliorate these stigmas either. “The limited numbers of multiracial and culturally diverse families in the media and children’s books offer few role

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models with whom youth can identify” (Turner, 2011). However, media does have the power to positively or negatively influence racial images. “TV captures the viewer and influences the ways viewers see themselves in the context of the world around them. Positive images promote self-pride, whereas negative stereotypes reinforce a disruption of positive racial identity” (Haddock & Falkner, 2014). As youth development professionals, we also have the power to advocate a strengths-based approach that focuses on the strengths and resiliency of multiracial youth and their families.

Another positive influence can come from families and community members involved in the youth’s environment. “For the children to internalize the positive cultural heritages, the parents [adults] must first address the differences and be open to communication about their children’s [youth members’] socialization process” (Haddock & Falkner, 2014). It is important to recognize there exist unique needs for youth with mixed cultural heritage to positively identify within their social setting.

**Youth Development Practice**

Although the article is written with counseling professionals in mind, there are many valid points that youth development professionals can put into practice. Whether you have heard or used the words ‘international, transcultural, biracial, multiracial, multicultural, or intercultural’ to describe an individual, the goal should be to increase your multicultural awareness. Some ways for youth development professionals to do this are to:

1. Encourage youth to explore identity and validate their experience.
   - What is vitally important is that ... their experiences are validated (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).
   - Addressing the intersections of gender, class, race, and culture allows...psychosocial identity formation (Akos & Ellis, 2008;Robinson, 1993).
2. Become educated on the families’ cultural values.
   - To be culturally competent, [youth professionals] need to know and respect the traditional values of the particular ethnic group with whom they are working (Schoen, 2005).
3. Acknowledge barriers and challenges.
   - Acculturation is a socialization process that involves adapting to a new culture as a result of changes in cultural attitudes, values, and behaviors (Robinson, 2012).
   - Language barriers and the demands and challenges associated with living in a new country may be overwhelming (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).
• Culturally diverse youth and their families risk being judged as deficient relative to the educational norms and cultural differences in a new educational setting (Maital, 2000).
• Multiracial youth are often rejected by both majority and minority peer groups because their physical appearance is unusual, their family background is unorthodox, and they feel torn between two competing set of norms and values (Herring, 1992).
• Many youth have had few opportunities to develop motivation for careers...(Constantine et al., 1998).

4. Recognize your own biases.
• Professionals will do well to examine their own biases and make a special effort to use positive protective influences (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).
• View behaviors of [youth and families] who are culturally different from you in a nonjudgmental manner (Sue & Sue, 2012).

5. Develop prevention and intervention efforts considering: Developmental level, language, learning style, cultural identity, and method.
• [Teaching] for empowerment implies that young people have the capacity to change, grow, act, and shape their environment despite contextual limitations (Vernon, 2004).
• Education on issues such as responsibility and self-discipline, hope, optimism, and communication skills has the potential to be of great benefit for youth (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).

7. Provide opportunities to build self-esteem.
• Focus on unique strengths; build on positive qualities to increase self-esteem (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).
• Provide opportunities that facilitate self-esteem and subsequent academic success (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).

8. Promote a positive socialization process.
• The facilitation of positive socialization is the ultimate goal and is considered paramount for the minority youth (Haddock & Falkner, 2014).

Implications for Programming
Although the article was written with prevention and intervention strategies in mind for counselors, I believe there is some valuable content for 4-H Youth Development Faculty to use in their professional field as well. Changes should be made on the county and state levels to include:
• Multi-lingual documents and websites;
• Multicultural sensitivity on media including Facebook, newsletters, and photos;
• Recruitment of diverse youth and leaders with multicultural backgrounds;
• Option to write race(s) on enrollment form, instead of just boxes to check;
• Education on different cultures in county (and state);
• Promote positive socialization utilizing positive youth development practices and maintaining a high quality program.

The following proactive activities were recommended in the article for professionals to create positive adaptations and enhance multicultural awareness and a commitment to diversity.

1. Attempt to identify and understand the issues from the worldview of the [youth and family].
2. Be comfortable acknowledging and exploring the [youth’s] cultural differences.
3. Identify and embrace the existence of strengths for a culturally diverse family and attempt to incorporate these strengths into coping skills.
4. Be aware of how the [youth] identifies herself or himself racially.
5. Promote sensitivity through the use of insightful, nonjudgmental interventions and techniques.
6. Read texts (see below), watch movies, and attend theaters that feature characters and themes from other cultures.
7. Prior to working with a new cultural group or individual, consider the assumptions, bias, stereotypes, and negative concepts you may hold against the group. Also, consider the assumptions, bias, stereotypes, and negative concepts that could be held against the group you identify yourself a member of.
8. Create your own cultural genogram and use it as a source of connections with members of cultures different from your own.
9. Learn a second language and find venues to practice your new language.
10. Find a colleague who can serve as a confidant and consultant with expertise in multicultural issues.

Youth development professionals have a huge opportunity and significant role in promoting a positive socialization process for all of our youth and families within the 4-H program. Increasing knowledge about the unique needs of multiracial youth is only the beginning of the process.

References for Additional Reading


A Nation at Risk: Bullying Among Children and Adolescents

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Problem Definition
Bullying by definition can vary; however, bullying behavior is defined as an aggressive behavior (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993) with the presence of the following characteristics: (a) There is an intent to cause another harm; (b) the behavior is repeated over time; and (c) there is an imbalance of power (e.g., the student is physically bigger or more popular) (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). Bullying can include physical aggression (e.g., hitting and kicking), verbal aggression (e.g., name calling and threats), and relational aggression (e.g., gossiping and rumor spreading) (Crick & Grotputer, 1995; Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Another form of bullying has arisen as a result of technology. Cyberbullying is when an individual or group uses information and electronic mediums to perpetrate deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior that is intended to harm others (Belsey, 2006).

The terms bully, victim, and bully-victim are used to discuss bullying behaviors. Early research commonly divides individuals into one of two mutually exclusive groups, the bully and the victim. Recently, there is a third group that has emerged, which is referred to as the bully-victim. The bully-victim is someone who may engage in bullying behaviors one day and experience bullying victimization the next. It is important to remember that bullying is a behavior that is not static but dynamic, which means that the bullying relationship is unique and is ever-changing (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Children assume different roles at different times. Therefore the terms bully, victim, and bully-victim are used. The term bully is used to describe the child who perpetrates bullying behaviors. The term victim refers to the individual who is the target of the bullying behavior, and the term bully-victim refers to the child who both engages in bullying behavior and is also victimized by others.

The prevalence of bullying has generated interest internationally as well as in the United States. The first large systematic research study on bullying was conducted by Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, in 1983. Since then other research estimates that one in three children and adolescents in the U.S. are involved in bullying, as either a bully, victim, or

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bully-victim. Findings revealed that an estimated 22% had been physically bullied, and 25% had been teased or emotionally bullied (Finkelhor, Ormond, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

Impact of Bullying
As a result of bullying behaviors, children and adolescents may experience physical and psychological consequences that include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, increased at-risk behaviors, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Kumpulainen, Rasanen, & Puura, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Young, et al., 2009). Research findings suggest that depression and suicidal ideation are more common among children who report being victims of relational aggression (e.g., rumor spreading and social isolation), effecting their mental health related outcomes.

School-related outcomes suggest that children and adolescents involved in bullying are more likely to have lower school satisfaction and receive lower grades (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003); consequently, students may miss out on opportunities to develop a connection to their peers and the school environment, effectively putting them at risk for missing out on important opportunities afforded by education.

In addition to examining the impact of bullying on the victim, it is important to consider the consequences that the bully may experience as well. An early study (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) found that young perpetrators of bullying behavior were more likely to experience psychosocial challenges, including problem behavior(s), substance use, depressive symptomatology, and a low school commitment. These participants also reported previous bullying victimization, social rejection, violence, low emotional warmth at home, and low socioeconomic status (SES).

Contribution to Theory and Practice
Approaches to Prevention
Implementing prevention efforts to eliminate or at least decrease the incidence of bullying has generated a considerable amount of research over the years (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, 2008; Olweus, 2005; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011.) Some of this attention has been given to individual characteristics and special populations that have been identified as at risk for becoming bullies, victims, and bully-victims. Identification of predictors for bullying-related behavior can provide a foundation for prevention efforts to decrease bullying among children (Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995). A few selected individual factors that are related to bulling behaviors include: gender, race/ethnicity, age and transitions, children with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.
**Individual factor behavior relationships:**

*Gender.* Males perpetrate bullying behaviors more and engage in physical aggression (e.g., hitting, punching, and kicking behaviors more frequently). Females are more likely to engage in indirect bullying, including gossiping, social isolation, and rumor spreading, more frequently than their male counterparts (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

*Race/ethnicity.* An early study revealed that African American students in the US indicated less bullying victimization compared with White or Hispanic youth (Nansel et al., 2001). In a subsequent study, African American males were more likely to be categorized as a bully or bully-victim compared with their White peers (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). In a recent study examining parental characteristics associated with bullies, the researchers found that both Latino and African American children were more likely to be bullies than their White or Asian/Pacific Islander peers (Shetgiri et al., 2012).

*Age and transitions.* According to research (Nansel et al., 2001; Seals & Young, 2003), there is an increase in bullying behaviors among early adolescence (i.e., 11-13 years old) and a decrease in bullying among high school-aged students (i.e., 14-18). These studies highlight the need for prevention efforts to be implemented during transition periods (i.e., elementary to middle school). The transition from elementary to middle school is an important developmental milestone as children begin to focus on peer and social relationships.

*Children with disabilities.* Children with disabilities have been overrepresented as both bullies and victims (Rose & Espelage, 2012). Victimization rates of bullying among students with disabilities have been reported as high as 50% (Dawkins, 1996). Reasons for overrepresentation may be linked to a lack of social skills among students with disabilities. For instance, students may have difficulty with social cues and social processing, which may contribute to this particular group of students being at risk for bullying victimization (Crick & Dodge, 1996).

*Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.* The LGBT student population is at risk for both bullying behavior and victimization. A recent study by Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, and Bartkiewicz (2010) found that out of 7,261 LGBT student participants, 85% between the ages of 13 and 21 were verbally harassed (called names or threatened) at school because of their sexual orientation and 63.7% were harassed because of their gender expression. Another 40% of the sample indicated that they were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) at school in the past.
year because of their sexual orientation and 27.2% because of their gender expression.

A step toward decreasing the prevalence of bullying behaviors is to increase understanding of the bullying dynamic. Bullying does not happen in isolation but is the result of many factors. It is important to examine the bullying relationship from a social ecological perspective, which suggests that interactions between individuals, families, peer groups, school, community, and societal norms may be related to roles (i.e., bully, victim, or bully-victim) that children and adolescents adopt in the bully dynamic (Rose & Espelage, 2012). Developing a more comprehensive understanding of the individual characteristics associated with bullying provides us with the necessary information to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

In addition to individual factors, there are also contextual factors that relate to bullying and victimization. Contextual factors are composed of family/home environment, school climate, community factors, peer status, and peer influence (Cook et al., 2010).

*Family* plays an integral role in helping to prevent bullying among children and adolescents. Families who are more involved and help their children with homework, meet their children’s friends, and have consistent and ongoing communication are less likely to have children associated with bullying behaviors (Shetgiri et al., 2012).

*Schools* with successful prevention programs aim to change the broader school environment rather than just the individual (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 1997; Larson, Smith, & Furlong, 2002), the most effective strategy for preventing and minimizing bullying at schools is a systematic, multilayered approach that focuses on bullies, victims, bystanders, families, and communities.

Targeted awareness and outcomes for successful promotion of self-awareness for 4-H youth development professionals will help guide faculty and staff in the identification and prevention of Anti-bullying. Antibullying policies provide a framework that help to prevent, educate, identify, and intervene in a systematic manner. Antibullying policies should define bullying behaviors, outline how incidents will be reported, identify investigation and disciplinary actions, provide training for staff and faculty, and address how the policy will be evaluated. In addition to outlining specifics about bullying, the policy should address comprehensive harassment/assault policies that specifically highlight race, religion, disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It is important that antibullying policies have a well-defined and effective system in place for reporting and addressing situations (Kosciw et al., 2010).
Intervention Strategies

Interventions to address bullying can take place on a variety of levels. Once it has been assessed that the child or adolescent is a bully, victim, or bully-victim, it is essential to have appropriate intervention strategies for individuals, families, schools, and communities. An effective intervention at the individual level is individual counseling. Individual counseling sessions with victims should focus on identifying, expressing, and learning healthy ways to cope with their feelings and emotions. Other areas of attention could include teaching interpersonal, friendship-making, and assertiveness skills (Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001). The focus of individual counseling sessions with bullies should be on anger management, conflict resolution, and social skills (DeRosier, 2004; Swearer et al., 2009). School staff should meet individually with bullies and victims immediately after an incident has occurred to communicate expectations and provide support and resources (Olweus, 1993).

Research suggests that intervention efforts should incorporate psychoeducational groups (Swearer et al., 2009). These groups can focus on skill building with victims that include social skills, self-esteem, interpersonal problem solving, and friendship skills (Sharp & Cowie, 1994; Smith et al., 2001). Groups for bullies should address anger management strategies, conflict resolution, cognitive retraining, social skills, and empathy training (DeRosier, 2004; Espelage et al., 2000). The group can serve as a safe place for the child and may facilitate the development of friendships among members.

Developmentally appropriate interventions and expectations are important factors to consider when working with children or adolescents. Often children do not have the language ability, cognitive development, emotional maturation, or social maturation to address their feelings and emotions. Therefore, counselors should be aware of different ways to work specifically with children that allow them to explore their feelings and emotions.

The importance of open communication between children and adolescents and their families cannot be stressed enough. Families can serve as a protective factor for victimized children by offering support and decreasing stress. Most important, family support can contribute to eliminating further victimization (Hunter & Borg, 2006). Unfortunately, prior research findings reveal that children may not disclose to their parents that they are experiencing bullying victimization (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Establishing a positive relationship that is characterized by open communication will increase the likelihood that children and adolescents will disclose this information to their family.
Parents or guardians should consider what messages and skills they are teaching their children and adolescents at home. It is important to consider what children and adolescents are being exposed to at home. Television, video games, exposure to aggression, and exposure to graphic material should be limited in the home. Research suggests that exposure to violence in media increases the likelihood of aggression and violent behavior among children and adolescents (Anderson et al., 2003). Therefore a home environment that consists of positive role models, open communication, and developmentally appropriate media are important factors to consider. Counselors and other personnel who work closely with bullies and victims should partner together with families to develop a system of support for children and adolescents. Partnering with families is critical to intervening in bullying and decreasing the future incidence of it; thus, communication between schools and families is an important aspect to addressing bullying. Parents can help their children by teaching children how to manage themselves when confronted by a bully or exploring why their child may be engaging in bullying behavior. Parents should encourage children to ask for help when needed. The use of role-plays can be a useful strategy in teaching children how to handle situations (Roth & Von Der Kar-Levinson, 2002).

Implications for 4-H Youth Development Professional Practice
It is important to have ongoing education for 4-H youth development professionals related to bullying that should focus on the following: identifying at-risk populations, increasing awareness and knowledge of bullying behaviors, identifying predictors and protective factors, and providing opportunities for discussion of attitudes and perceptions of bullying. Become strong advocates for understanding attitudes and perceptions of bullying and at-risk populations in order to cultivate safe 4-H environments for youth to thrive.

In order to foster a positive climate, 4-H youth development professionals should increase opportunities for social skills training, and organize opportunities that address bullying, race, sexual orientation, and disabilities. Education efforts should aim to increase awareness of, knowledge about, and ability to identify resources or supports for youth. Discussions should address discrimination, stereotypes, and the importance of considering how race/ethnicity, culture, gender, social economic status, disabilities, and sexual orientation can contribute to bullying relationships.

4-H youth professionals should advocate for children and adolescents allowing for adaptations for diversity. 4-H youth professionals need to be aware of the influence of families, communities, and social contexts when working with bully, victim, and bully-victims. Recognizing the importance of approaching this epidemic from a collaborative effort among professionals is essential for successful outcomes.
Targeted Outcomes:

- 4-H Youth Development Professionals can play a pivotal role in combating oppression and identifying gaps and needs in their 4-H programs and communities. To successfully help members who come from historically oppressed backgrounds, we must promote environments that facilitate social justice, social justices includes equity, equality, and fairness in the distribution of resources. Therefore, it is critical to first determine if there is a gap that is occurring in programming or the community. As a result of the findings, prevention and intervention efforts should be taken in order to bridge the gap.

- It is important to increase our own multicultural competency as 4-H Youth development professional. Self-awareness is critical to becoming a multicultural competent advocate.

- Become competent in the approaches to prevention by implementing prevention efforts to eliminate or at least decrease the incidence of bullying through building the following self-awareness competencies:
  - Understanding the consequences of bullying: Victimization and perpetration
  - Developing therapeutic relationship and counselor self-awareness
  - Understanding the need for anti-bullying policies
  - Learning about protective factors and prevention
  - Learning steps to help parents
  - Learning how mentors can help

Selected References for Additional Reading


**Youth Development Research Briefs** is a collaborative project among 4-H youth development faculty and educators at Oregon State University. The goal of the project is to provide concise summaries of current research relative to 4-H youth development program in:

- Creating and Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships
- Youth Development Practice
- Youth Engagement
- Youth Development Profession

Collaborators participate in the project by reviewing one current article, presenting a summary of the review at the 4-H professional development conference in the spring, and preparing a written review following a prescribed review outline. Each written review contains:

- Topic area that is covered
- A verbatim article abstract
- A complete article citation
- A research brief that covers the article’s contribution to theory and implication for promoting high quality youth development programs and practice
- Selected references for additional reading

**Reference Citations**

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**Individual Briefs (example)**

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