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# **FLOURISHING IN ADOLESCENCE**

**A VIRTUAL WORKSHOP**

**PROCEEDINGS OF A WORKSHOP**

*Megan Snair, Rapporteur*

Forum for Children's Well-Being: Promoting  
Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health for Children and Youth

Board on Children, Youth, and Families

Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

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FORUM FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING: PROMOTING  
COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE, AND BEHAVIORAL  
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This Proceedings of a Workshop was reviewed in draft form by individuals chosen for their diverse perspectives and technical expertise. The purpose of this independent review is to provide candid and critical comments that will assist the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in making each published record of proceedings as sound as possible and to ensure that it meets the institutional standards for quality, objectivity, evidence, and responsiveness to the charge. The review comments and draft manuscript remain confidential to protect the integrity of the process.

We thank the following individuals for their review of the record of these proceedings: Claire D. Brindis, Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California, San Francisco, and Patrick E. Killeen, Ridgefield Pediatrics Associates, Ridgefield, CT. We also thank staff member Carla Alvarado for reading and providing helpful comments on this manuscript.

Although the reviewers listed above provided many constructive comments and suggestions, they were not asked to endorse the content of the proceedings record, nor did they see the final draft before its release. The review of this record of proceedings was overseen by Patrick H. DeLeon, F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine and the Graduate School of Nursing, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. He was responsible for making certain that an independent examination of this record of proceedings was carried out in accordance with standards of the National Academies and that all review comments were carefully considered. Responsibility for the final content rests entirely with the rapporteur and the National Academies.



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# 1

## Introduction

The period of development between childhood and adulthood—also known as adolescence—is often a tumultuous time for many individuals as they grapple with newfound independence, explore their world, and navigate social etiquette and cues from their peers, adults, and the systems with which they interact. Adolescence is a dynamic time for both brain development and social pressures, making it a critical period to understand mental, emotional, and behavioral health, yet it is often overlooked in terms of policies and service interventions, which makes many young people feel unheard when communicating their own challenges.

This virtual workshop was organized by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s Forum for Children’s Well-Being (the Forum). The Forum is focused on informing a forward-looking agenda to build a stronger research and practice base around the development and implementation of programs, practices, and policies that focus on the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children and adolescents (including those with disabilities). The workshop was held on May 5, 2020, and included discussions about best practices in providing and supporting adolescent health services and key messaging and communication strategies related to the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of adolescents. Additionally, the workshop featured a panel of youth representatives who shared their own experiences related to mental, emotional, and behavioral health. A full agenda can be found in Appendix A.

## ORGANIZATION OF PROCEEDINGS

This proceedings document is organized into four chapters. Following the introduction with background on the Forum's work, Chapter 2 presents an overview of related reports from the National Academies that have implications for the national agenda on fostering healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development for youth. Chapter 3 highlights best practices for including youth and family voices, as well as youth perspectives on the importance of this approach. Finally, Chapter 4 focuses on implementing possible best practices and crafting effective communication to achieve the flourishing of adolescents. Copies of the speaker slides as well as archived recordings of the workshop can be viewed on the forum website at <https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/05-05-2020/flourishing-in-adolescence-a-virtual-workshop>.

This record of proceedings has been prepared by the workshop rapporteur as a factual summary of what occurred at the workshop. The planning committee's role was limited to planning and convening the workshop. The views contained in the proceedings are those of individual workshop participants and do not necessarily represent the views of all workshop participants, the planning committee, or the National Academies.

## 2

# Implications for the National Agenda on Fostering the Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development of Youth

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has convened multiple committees in recent years focusing on the healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development of children and adolescents. Representatives from three reports shared some of those key findings with the workshop audience. Claire Brindis, codirector of the Adolescent and Young Adult Health National Resource Center at the University of California in San Francisco presented the 2019 National Academies consensus study report on *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (NASEM, 2019b). Nicole Kahn, program officer at the National Academies, gave an overview of the 2020 National Academies consensus study report, *Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century* (NASEM, 2020). Tamar Mendelson, director of the Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, then presented the 2019 National Academies report *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth* (NASEM, 2019a). This chapter provides background contextualization on the charge and recommendations of each report and concludes with a discussion facilitated by Stephanie Jones, professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

### PROMISE OF ADOLESCENCE

Brindis began by introducing participants to the National Academies 2019 report on *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for*



*All Youth.*<sup>1</sup> The study was tasked with providing an evidence-based report examining the following:

- Neurobiological and socio-behavioral characteristics in adolescent development and the influences this period exerts on development trajectories.
- The shaping of adolescent development by early life conditions pertaining to both support and adversity.
- Revelations by science about our ability during the adolescent period to mediate the past developmental challenges of many youth and children.
- Structural inequalities and their ability to promote or threaten adolescent development.
- Historical trauma and its role in health development.
- Suggested ways for changing systems of wealth, health, justice, and child welfare to improve the process and outcomes of adolescent development.
- Ways that systems can recognize and support the formation of resilience, while promoting adolescent agency and the development of positive assets.

### **Inequity and Adolescence**

The study committee placed a thematic focus on the effects of inequity on adolescent development. Brindis stated that inequality in opportunity and access can severely curtail the promise of adolescence for many youths, and that it is important to not only consider individual behavior but also the influence structural inequalities and societal determinants exert on life-course trajectories. Overall, the committee recognized the reality that “adolescence is a period of extraordinary opportunity for learning and exploration and for laying a strong foundation for a successful life” and the need for our nation “to commit itself to a sustained plan for reversing the worsening inequities of childhood disadvantage, thereby enabling all adolescents to flourish,” Brindis said.

### **Interplay between Biology and Environmental Epigenetics**

Brindis elaborated on why the report highlighted the need for focusing on adolescent development specifically, and the influence that epigenetics and the environmental pressures that shape individuals exerts on the way

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of recommendations from this report is provided in Appendix D.

heredity is expressed. The trajectory of an individual's life can be altered depending on the protective factors present at each stage. She defined protective factors within the environment as supportive relationships, access to resources, nutrition, place of residence, quality of air, social interactions, and lifestyle choices. These protective factors are shaped by social determinants such as education, employment, health systems and services, quality of housing, income, access to resources, public safety, physical environment, and social environment. As Figure 2-1 shows, an individual's trajectory can be positively or negatively shaped by various environmental influences. The presence or absence of protective factors can be the difference in a developmental outcome being positive or negative.

In congruence with the epigenetic approach, Brindis explained, the life-course perspective analyzes demographic and social changes by implying that an individual's current circumstances are a result of prior life experiences and circumstances. The epigenetic approach embraces a trajectory model of the life-course perspective and emphasizes the role of brain plasticity in how trajectories in brain circuits and body systems can be positively or negatively influenced depending on the environment.

### **Areas of Opportunity for Reform**

The sensitive yet malleable period of adolescent development presents unique opportunities to influence neurobiological behavior and life trajectories. Brindis stated that because adolescents experience increased curiosity and reward sensitivity, societal incentives should encourage them to embrace longer-term rewards. The increase in cognitive abilities during this developmental period provides a capacity for psycho-social developmental tasks such as developing identity and capacity for self-direction, said Brindis. Furthermore, the adolescent brain's malleability coupled with the adolescent's active role in their own development create timely opportunities for programs that promote beneficial changes in developmental trajectories for youth with a history of adverse experiences. Brindis argued that it is time to reimagine and redesign the systems and settings that adolescents most frequently encounter. To do this, researchers might adopt a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the adolescent developmental period and its implications on life-course trajectories, she said. She highlighted potential changes and opportunities for redesigning education, health, child welfare, and justice systems. These are summarized briefly below.

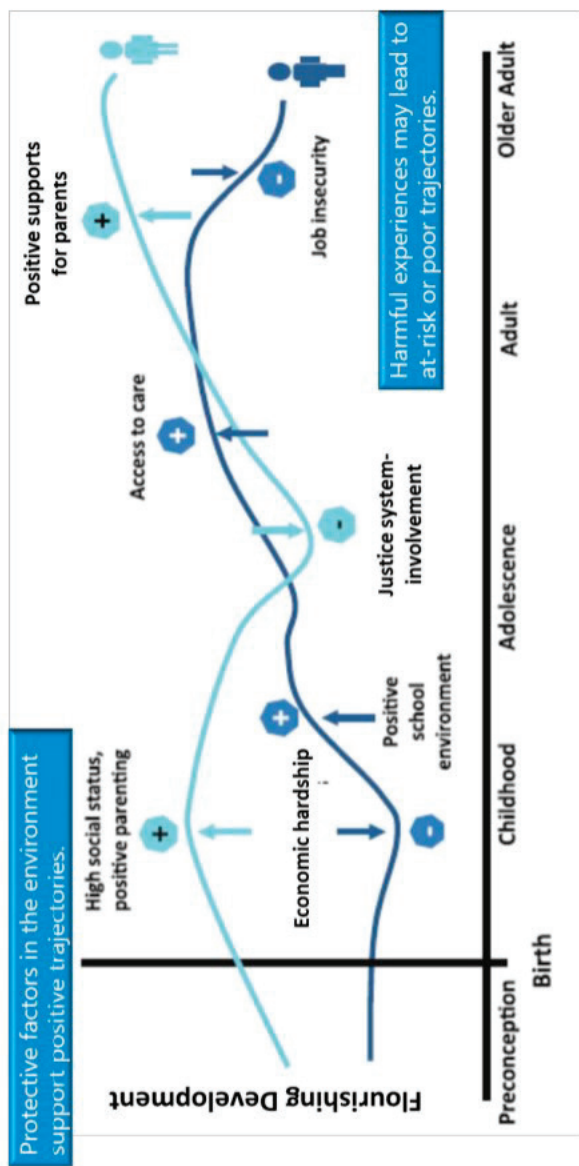


FIGURE 2-1 Developmental trajectories with protective factors and harmful experiences.  
 SOURCE: *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*, Figure 3-2. Adapted from Halfon, N., Larson, K., Lu, M., Tullis, E., and Russ, S. (2014).

### *Education System<sup>2</sup>*

Elaborating on areas of opportunity, Brindis focused on the impact of education in young people's lives. She invited participants to reflect on the needs of young people in imagining a future education system. A key aspect for future consideration is precision education that is differentiated and responsive to academic opportunities. Precision education includes individualized instruction, tutoring, and credentialing. Additionally, Brindis said, we could also consider what nonacademic skills can be incorporated such as decision making, practical knowledge, and adaptability, all of which constitute a successful education.

### *Health System<sup>3</sup>*

Moving on to opportunities in the health system, Brindis stressed the importance of access to appropriate health care services. Access to health care can affect adolescents' well-being not only in the present but throughout their lifetime as they develop habits that will impact both their health and our country's health status, she explained. Financial barriers are associated with limited access to health care, which can contribute to long-standing disparities. Additional health system challenges that adolescents face include inexperience in navigating the complex health care system, confidentiality concerns regarding their care, and an increase in the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.

To address these challenges, Brindis suggested developmentally appropriate changes to provider practices and innovative care models to help adolescents become more engaged in their own care. As an example, she proposed that health systems could offer integrated, comprehensive services that prepare youth for the physical, cognitive, and social changes that take place during adolescence. This process would also include the integration of behavioral health, substance-abuse prevention, and physical health services. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of teaching adolescents to navigate the health system so that they will be able to successfully do so as adults. Brindis also emphasized the importance of providing services that are culturally informed and able to respond to geographic, economic, sexual preference, financial, ethnic, and racial differences.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nap.edu/read/25388/chapter/10> for more information.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.nap.edu/read/25388/chapter/11>.

*Child Welfare System*<sup>4</sup>

Next, Brindis addressed the child welfare system, which presents a unique set of challenges for a particularly vulnerable population. Brindis recognized the progress that Congress has made over the past 20 years, but said that attention is still needed to evaluate what resources are required to accomplish family reunification and prioritize placement with relatives over strangers, as well as what resources are available for children aging out of the foster-care system. At the same time, Brindis said, additional efforts will be required to go beyond the existing progress to address adoption at the state level of some optional federal laws. By doing so, she added, all adolescents associated with the child welfare system will have the opportunity to flourish.

*Justice System*<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the juvenile justice system presents a wide array of opportunities for improvement. These include increased family engagement and greater attention to procedural fairness in terms of such things as interactions with police, legal representation options, and reduced use of juvenile fines and fees. Brindis stated that reforms in these areas within the criminal justice system take into account the differences in the developmental needs of older adolescents and young adults. For instance, she said, attention should be given to reducing the frequency of automatic transfers of juveniles to criminal courts based only on the charged offense, as well as to the creation of developmentally informed correctional programs for young offenders. Brindis acknowledged the work being done in communities across the country such as youth courts and commended the communities trying to find alternatives to incarceration during these vulnerable developmental periods.

**Moving Forward**

Closing her presentation, Brindis emphasized the collective responsibility of society to build systems that support and promote positive adolescent development, and she said that these systems work best when they reflect the specific socio-ecological circumstances of each child. Brindis argued that systems should recognize adolescence as a significant period of learning and discovery and use it to remediate past developmental challenges. “As

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.nap.edu/read/25388/chapter/12>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.nap.edu/read/25388/chapter/13>.

a society, we must harness the promise of adolescence so that all youth can thrive,” she stated.

### PROMOTING POSITIVE ADOLESCENT HEALTH BEHAVIORS AND OUTCOMES

Nicole Kahn, study director of the related National Academies Committee on Applying Lessons of Optimal Adolescent Health to Improve Behavioral Outcomes for Youth, presented the committee’s 2020 report *Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century*.<sup>6</sup> The committee was tasked with reviewing key questions related to the effective implementation of the national Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program and exploring the existing scientific literature surrounding core components of adolescent health programs using an optimal health lens. Kahn defined these core components as the “active ingredients” of an intervention. Identifying core components allows program directors to focus on the parts of a program that work, which can then be organized in ways to achieve intended results. In addition to these charges, the committee was also tasked with recommending the following:

- A research agenda that incorporated a focus on optimal health for youth.
- Ways in which the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) at the Department of Health and Human Services could use its role to encourage the adoption of promising elements of youth-focused programs and initiatives such as mental and physical health care, adolescent development science, and reproductive health and teen pregnancy care.
- Improvements for OASH youth-focused programs.

#### Committee Findings

Kahn described the main takeaways from the committee’s findings. First, healthy risk taking in adolescence is not only normal but necessary. Instead of conceptualizing all risk taking as negative, Kahn asserted that acknowledging the developmental purposes of risk taking, as well as encouraging and providing opportunities for healthy risks, is beneficial. In addition to this, Kahn also said it is important to help youth discern between healthy and unhealthy risks. Healthy risk environments and opportunities allow youth to explore their environments, practice decision making, and cultivate independence. Examples of healthy risk taking include trying new

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<sup>6</sup> The full list of recommendations from this report is provided in Appendix E.

foods, asking someone out on a date, or trying out for a team sport. Unhealthy risks are things such as driving under the influence, bullying, and having unprotected sex, all things that can have harmful effects on development and result in negative outcomes.

The second key finding from the report was that more research is needed to identify, measure, and evaluate the effective components of adolescent health behavior programs. She said that while the committee did find research that identifies the most common core components of programs, more research is needed to specify which components are most effective. By doing so, shorter and more focused programs can be created which would make them less costly, require less training, and increase their accessibility to diverse populations.

The third key takeaway of the report is that socio-emotional learning and positive youth development programs provide a foundation upon which other specific skills and services such as understanding social norms around drugs and contraceptive access can be built, Kahn continued. These socio-emotional learning and positive youth development programs are responsible for providing critical building-block skills like self-regulation, good decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills, all of which are necessary for youth when learning to discern between healthy and unhealthy risks.

The fourth main finding of the report, Kahn said, is that all programs can benefit from implementing and evaluating policies and practices that promote inclusiveness and equity. Examples of this include the incorporation of diverse cultures and lifestyles and the expansion of the existing cultural resources of families and communities. Merely having policies and practices in place are not enough, Kahn argued, and actions must be taken to ensure that programs are formally measured and evaluated as adolescent behavior programs continue to develop.

The final message of the report, Kahn stated, is that since youth are experts in their own lives and active participants in their own development, it makes sense to involve them in the decision making that affects them.

Kahn closed her presentation with a quote from the 2019 public information gathering session by Natnael Abate, peer educator with Promising Future DC:

And for me, what I think is a thriving person in 2019 is when you're physically, mentally, and emotionally stable. I feel like you accept yourself for who you are, and you're around people that support you emotionally, and you can in return give that support back.

Kahn viewed Abate's insight as a call to action to facilitate environments to ensure that youth can thrive in multiple domains of their lives.

## NATIONAL AGENDA ON FOSTERING THE HEALTHY MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH

Tamar Mendelson, who served as a committee member for the National Academies 2019 report *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth*, presented the committee's statement of task, which was to compose a consensus study on fostering mental, emotional, and behavioral (MEB) health in young people. The committee was specifically requested to review key research, strategy advances, and challenges since the release of the 2009 report *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*. They were also asked to report on recent progress in understanding what is needed for effective implementation strategies as well as to identify program, policy, and research gaps for promoting healthy MEB development. In addition to these charges, the committee was to take the following into consideration: prevalence trends of specific MEB conditions, the current context for health promotion strategies using a public health framework, biological and environmental influences, two-generation approaches, and the use of complementary and integrative approaches such as mindfulness.

### Committee Findings

Mendelson presented the 2019 report as an amplification of two previous National Academies reports: the 2009 report *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*, which itself was an update to the 1994 report *Reducing Risk for Mental Disorders*. The 2019 report included an expanded version of the mental health intervention spectrum originally published in the 1994 report. As Figure 2-2 shows, the 2019 committee added a promotion sector previously not included. Mendelson explained that this new section is included to highlight promotion throughout the various levels of intervention: individual and family, community, and societal.

In considering this spectrum, the committee recommended an expansion of the range of interventions to develop, evaluate, and implement, as well as an increased emphasis on promotion. Mendelson pointed out that while advances in prevention have been made since the 2009 report, the high prevalence of mental disorders is still unacceptable. Many still wait to seek help because of the stigma surrounding mental illness and lack of access to evidence-based care. Mendelson explained that an emphasis on implementation science was also made in the 2019 report with the purpose of increasing the integration of effective strategies into systems of care in the real world.



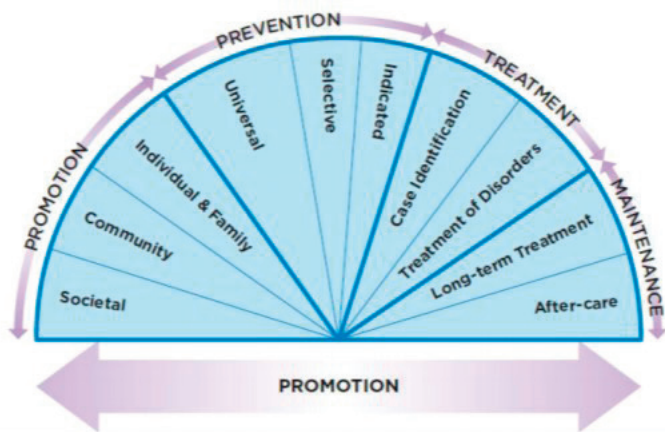


FIGURE 2-2 Mental Health Intervention Spectrum.

SOURCE: NASEM, 2019a, Figure 1-3.

### *Life Course Perspective Model*

Echoing the findings of *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for all Youth*, Mendelson explained how the committee utilized the life-course perspective model to identify possible interventions. Committee members focused on preconception through young adulthood and identified interventions that would have the most optimal developmental effects at each stage of life. The committee, Mendelson explained, felt strongly that focusing solely or primarily on the individual interventions would have a weaker effect on prevalence than was needed. They instead placed an emphasis on community interventions and social policy that would yield more effective community-level and population-level effects.

### *Environmental Impact: Epigenetics*

The report included a dynamic figure explaining the impact of epigenetics on mental health development (see Figure 2-3). Described previously by Brindis as an influential factor in their report, Mendelson noted that this committee explored the complex neurobiological processes that interact with the physical and social environment, which unfolds from the point of preconception through adolescence and also intergenerationally. She explained the various ways in which environments shape neurodevelopment, such as the influential effects of experiences that affect conception, gestation, and childbirth, characteristics of the family and community, and characteristics of the broader society.

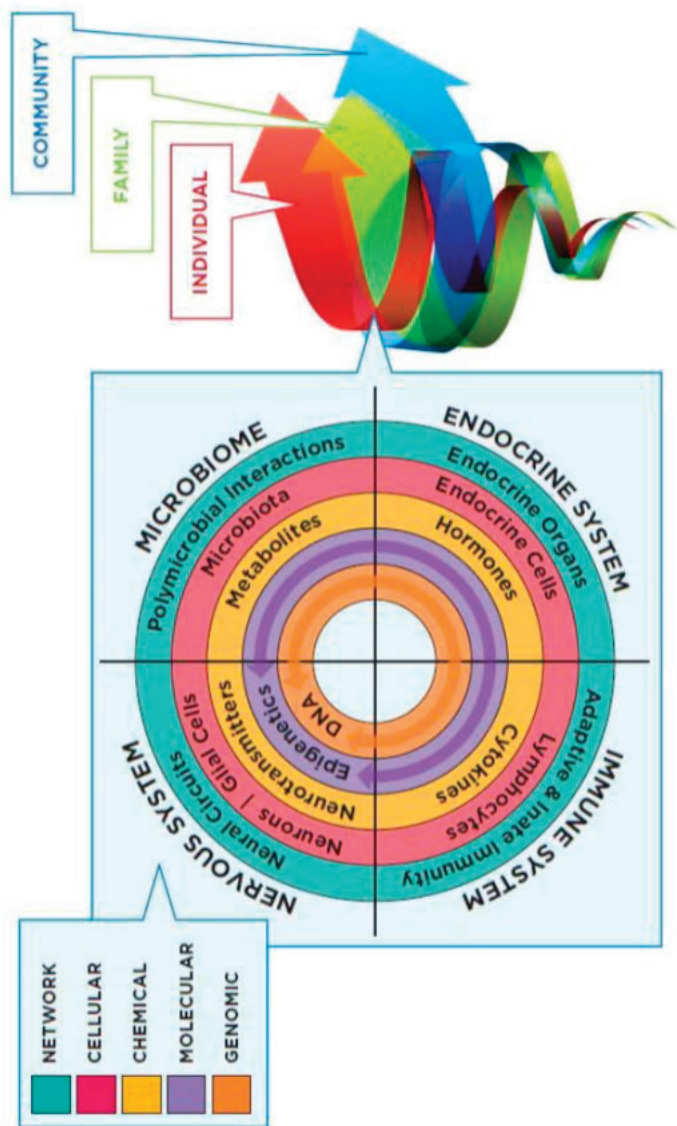


FIGURE 2-3 Environmental and biological influence on developmental stages.  
SOURCE: NASEM, 2019a, Figure 2-2.

### *Implementation Process*

Mendelson emphasized the report's focus on the implementation of programs and policies as a key contributor to effectiveness on a population scale. Identifying core components is a necessary step for the effectiveness of long-term outcomes. In addition to this, she said, adapting programs and policies for diverse settings as well as establishing an ongoing interactive implementation system are equally important. An interactive implementation system might include active engagement with community partners such as community coalitions, a well-trained workforce, active leadership and management, continuous fidelity monitoring feedback to maintain focus, a quality and outcomes monitoring system, evaluation-based learning, and multiple methods of communication with stakeholders.

### *Effective Intervention Strategies*

Based on the ways child development is affected, the report committee included strategies for effective intervention implementation on the generational, educational, health care, community, and policy levels. The committee recommended improvements regarding generational interventions, as well as evaluation methods to measure the impacts of these interventions on offspring. Mendelson emphasized the importance of leveraging the education system for intervention strategies to yield positive health outcomes that can last for years. Primary care settings within health care are also opportune for promoting MEB health, and Mendelson encouraged the audience to consider ways in which MEB health strategies can be effectively integrated into health care. She went on to highlight the importance and benefit of strategies at the community level, saying that living in communities with access to social, economic, and physical resources that promote health and well-being increase the opportunity to thrive. Regarding policy-level strategies, Mendelson stated that while the evidence base regarding the use of local, state, and federal policies to promote MEB health is growing, it is incomplete.

### **Recommendations from the Report Committee**

The report included a list of recommendations regarding state and local level coordination, policy level improvement, funding, and data monitoring, as seen in Box 2-1.

The report also included a specific set of research recommendations, which Mendelson listed:

### BOX 2-1 Committee Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Collaborate with state and local agencies and partners to coordinate highly visible national effort to promote MEB.
- **Recommendation 2:** Use program creation, regulation, and other policy capabilities to promote healthy MEB development.
- **Recommendation 3:** Funding and resources to support implementation efforts, research and demonstration projects, and cross-sector partnerships.
- **Recommendation 4:** Design and implement widespread MEB data monitoring efforts.

SOURCE: Mendelson presentation, May 5, 2020.

1. Design an evaluation of scalable interventions at the population level.
2. Design, evaluate, and implement effective school-based interventions.
3. Develop successful two-generation interventions in health care.
4. Design policy strategies to address effects of social, racial, and economic disparities on MEB health.
5. Design and evaluate implementation strategies.

The recommendations align with the committee’s vision, which Mendelson described as a holistic approach to MEB health and development. This involves stakeholders recognizing the importance of measuring and tracking health and development, community empowerment, public health campaigns raising awareness for program improvement, health care providers and educators working for improvements, businesses investing in the well-being of employees, and governments considering MEB data in policy decisions.

## DISCUSSION

Stephanie Jones summarized the overlapping themes of this discussion, saying that there was much continuity across reports. “We’ve heard about utilizing a life-course perspective with a focus on adolescence, the interplay of risk and protective systems integrated with biology, the essential role of promotion efforts combined with prevention and intervention efforts, and a call for more focus on implementation innovations and scaling of interventions,” she said. Jones also asked the speakers what they thought the next steps would be for reframing the dialogue around adolescence. Brindis pro-

posed that a reframing of the stereotype of adolescents is needed to recognize the potential of adolescents in development. This prompted a question from a participant, who asked how momentum could be gained from the information presented and leveraged into national policy. Kahn responded by highlighting the key relationships that the National Academies have with the federal government, and that this has allowed committee findings to be relayed to officials on the national level. Brindis also added that she believes improvements can be made in effectively translating the existing evidence and highlighting effective policies already implemented across the country to be used as models for national policy. Mendelson echoed support for the points made by both Brindis and Kahn and also stressed the importance of including young people in the process to improve MEB health.

## 3

# Including Youth and Family Voices as a Means to Help Adolescents Flourish

Presenters and discussion participants repeatedly mentioned that ensuring that adolescents, their families, and their caregivers are heard when creating policies and systems that affect them is essential to understanding how adolescents flourish in life. This chapter describes best practices for including such voices and perspectives as expressed by several national organizations, helping young people relate their first-hand experiences living with mental health conditions, and equipping adults to better support adolescents and help them feel heard.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSION

Leslie Walker-Harding, chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Washington and senior vice president and academic officer for Seattle Children’s Hospital, introduced the panel, saying that we know it is important to include youth and family voices, but we sometimes struggle with the best ways to do that. This section highlights different examples of including important voices from youth and families to bring valued experience into policy and advocacy.

#### Autism Speaks

Kelly Headrick, senior director of state government affairs and grassroots advocacy for Autism Speaks,<sup>1</sup> introduced the mission of her organization,

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.autismspeaks.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIma6ZwJ-86wIVGIvICH1Z5QyEAYASAAEgIYoPD\\_BwE](https://www.autismspeaks.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIma6ZwJ-86wIVGIvICH1Z5QyEAYASAAEgIYoPD_BwE).

saying that they are dedicated to promoting solutions for individuals with autism and their families. Autism refers to a broad spectrum of conditions, she explained. Some consider their autism a gift, but for others it can sometimes be more severe, resulting in many challenges in daily life. Individuals with autism may be nonverbal, have trouble understanding people's feelings or body language, and avoid eye contact. People may notice repetition with words or actions in individuals with autism, which for physical movements is called a "stim." They also really depend on predictable routines, so there are added challenges when those routines are disrupted, such as during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The prevalence of autism has been increasing over the last few decades, which is likely a combination of more testing and environmental factors, Headrick said. In 2020, the prevalence had risen to 1 in 54 children on the autism spectrum, which is up from 1 in 166 in 2004 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

She explained the role of the advocacy team at Autism Speaks, which focuses on relationships among their community members and using their voices and stories to influence public policy. Some of their specific public policy objectives include:

- Federal autism research funding through the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other federal agencies.
- Services and support coverage in private and public insurance plans (speech, behavioral, occupational, and physical therapies).
- Home and community-based services funding and regulation.
- Special education, including transition services into the school system, and then from there into adulthood.
- Personal safety and anti-discrimination.
- New employment.

They also coordinate with researchers and colleagues on relevant efforts. She explained the role of "advocacy ambassadors" who are grassroots volunteers selected to serve as contacts for their respective federal legislators. They are often either on the autism spectrum themselves or have a loved one with autism. Their main responsibilities are to develop relationships with legislators at the federal level, serve as a local media advocacy stakeholder, recruit other volunteers in their area for autism advocacy efforts, and report district activities and meetings as well as any outcomes to Autism Speaks staff members. "We have a goal of having an ambassador for every member of Congress," Headrick commented. "Right now, we have about 350 ambassadors, so we are getting closer to reaching that goal." To recruit these ambassadors, she explained that Autism Speaks conducts a formal application and interview process annually to select ap-

plicants for their roles for each congressional district. Selected candidates participate in a 90-minute training before starting, are given regular policy briefings, and hold monthly conference calls, but Headrick emphasized that these ambassadors do not need to be experts in the policy space. They are encouraged to focus on telling their own story and relating it to current policy advocacy goals. “We really strive to build this community of ambassadors, keeping them connected and trying to speak with a unified voice as much as possible,” she said. Ambassadors often comment on their experiences, especially the sense of satisfaction they get from influencing the decisions of elected officials, said Headrick. Many advocates are able to enhance advocacy skills for other future life activities and often include this role on their resume as evidence of leadership development.

### National Organizations for Youth Safety

Tameka Brown, director of National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS),<sup>2</sup> presented her organization’s work on using an interprofessional approach to engaging young people. The mission of NOYS, which Brown shared, focuses mainly on traffic safety, but it also includes other relevant issues such as injury prevention, substance abuse prevention, and violence prevention. She described interprofessionalism as a practice that is generally used in health care settings but works extremely well in many team settings because it gives value to each team member. She shared her own experiences working in a community-based mental health program and also a nursing school, which taught her that interprofessionalism is crucial for organizations that require a range of perspectives. There are four core competencies:

1. Values and ethics for interprofessional practice
2. Roles and responsibilities
3. Interprofessional communication
4. Teams and teamwork

Brown explained that any discussion of values and ethics should not only consider one’s own area of work, but also understand and incorporate other perspectives. With regard to roles and responsibilities, it is important to use your knowledge appropriately to “stay in your lane,” Brown said. Further, Brown noted that communication should always be clear and timely. In building teams, it is important to effectively build relationships to accomplish the stated mission.

NOYS, Brown said, typically engages youth between the ages of 13 and 23, which crosses two very different generations: Generation Y and Genera-

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://noys.org/>.



tion Z. A lot of outreach takes place through attending youth conferences around the country and by using social media and texting to engage a broader youth population. “Interprofessionalism requires us to view young people as experts and professionals,” Brown explained. Generations Y and Z respond well to being legitimately heard, so NOYS works to engage representatives of these generations at the table as experts in regard to their own safety and that of their peers. NOYS creates a space for them to guide the mission and the organization’s intended outcomes, giving them room to lead. Staff appreciation of the youth encourages meaningful youth engagement. At NOYS, youth do not feel that they are just taking up space at the table. Brown offered a four-step plan for organizations looking to intentionally use interprofessionalism to engage and maintain the empowerment of young people (see Figure 3-1).

To do this well, she explained, youth need to be given specific roles related to the project that will help guide them and measure their performance so they know they are successfully contributing. Emphasizing that they are needed and their input is valued keeps youth committed. Finally, she shared a list of things to do and things to avoid for this process. Things to consciously avoid include tokenizing young people as “others,” asking them to work for free, or having them work in silos. Instead, she said, organizations can design the roles given to youth strategically and intentionally and listen to what they have to say. Part of this process is about changing our minds as adults and seeing young people as valuable professionals who have something important to contribute.

### Youth Thrive

Francie Zimmerman, senior associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), shared that Youth Thrive<sup>3</sup> is focused on increasing opportunities for all young people. They base their work on a Youth Thrive framework (see Figure 3-2), which is built on a myriad of lessons synthesized across a variety of areas including neuroscience, development, and trauma research. They focus on youth from ages 9 to 26 years old and spend a lot of time on the protective factors in the top blue circle.

Differing slightly from other groups on this panel, Zimmerman said Youth Thrive spends most of their time concentrating on the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. They have identified several levers of change to help them implement their framework, but they found youth engagement and leadership to be one of the most powerful catalysts for making the system more responsive to youth needs. There is a myriad of roles that young people can fulfill, she said, and she encouraged the audience to think

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive>.

## STEPS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



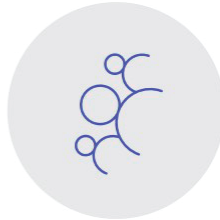
### **STEP 1: DETERMINE PROBLEM**

Problem can be a re-statement of the mission or project purpose.



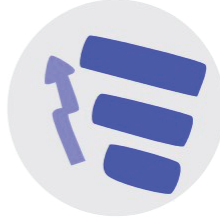
### **STEP 3: PROJECT PLAN**

Create a detailed plan that includes core competencies and specific tasks / roles for youth representation



### **STEP 2: BUILD YOUR TEAM**

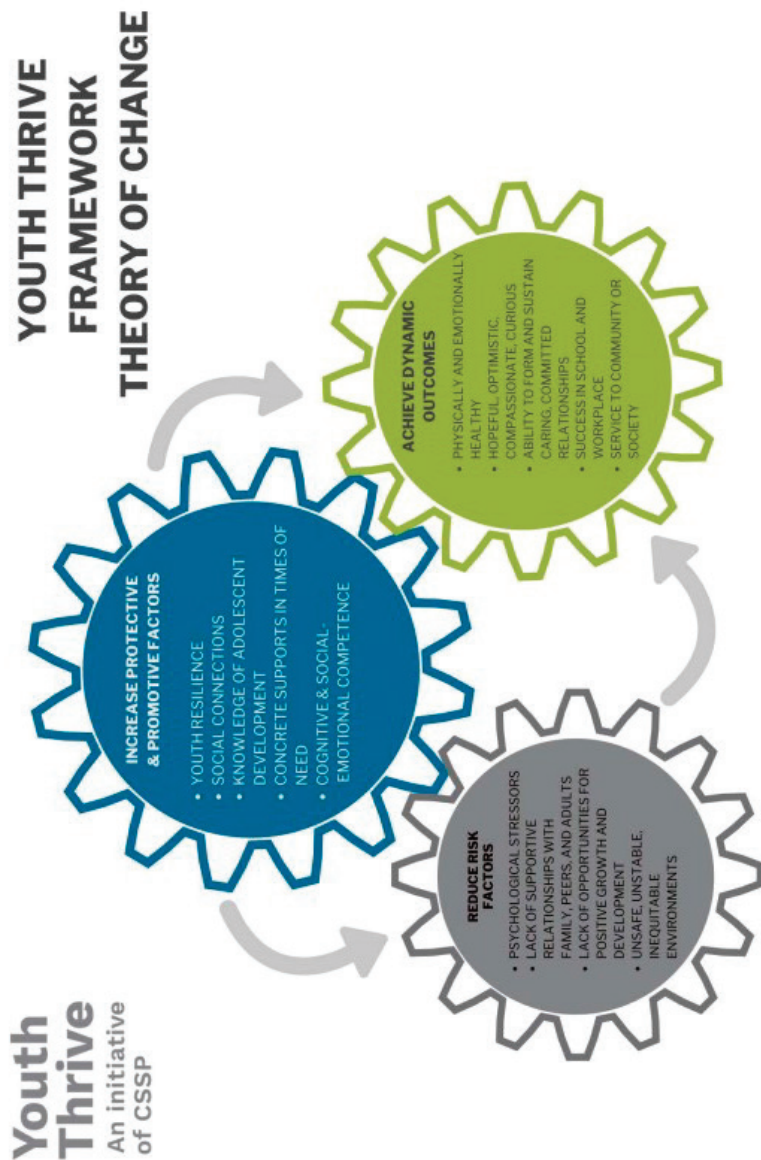
The team should be focused on youth representation as "The Youth Professional"



### **STEP 4: EXECUTE PLAN**

Give youth leaders space to execute the plan with consistent engagement and feedback

**Figure 3-1** Four-step plan to youth engagement.  
SOURCE: Brown presentation, May 5, 2020.



**Figure 3-2** Youth thrive theory of change framework.  
SOURCE: Francie Zimmerman presentation, May 5, 2020. Youth Thrive, an initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive>.

beyond just having someone on a panel. Young people can review written materials, participate in a decision-making body, or act as site visitors and give feedback.

To give a more concrete illustration of the impact of youth on systems and the operational changes needed, Zimmerman presented two examples on how to leverage youth voices in order to change both practice and policy. Regarding practice change, she suggested giving power and authority to young people to develop case plans,<sup>4</sup> which a number of states and jurisdictions have tried. This allows them to choose what they are working on, set their own goals, and choose who will participate. She said this process is developmentally appropriate and changes the level of investment and commitment for young people as their responsibilities increase. It also changes how staff members understand youth and the things that matter to them. Employing a case planning and implementation strategy with youth in the lead can help avoid some of the pitfalls that often arise when youth are ignored or misdiagnosed and labeled with a mental health or behavioral problem.

Another example Zimmerman presented related to policy change. In child welfare, there are often youth advisory boards that are asked to review proposed changes and give feedback. She described a group of well-meaning child welfare managers who proposed a reduction to the youth stipend that young people are given in independent living programs. They thought it would help them learn about self-sufficiency and manage their money better, but upon bringing this idea to the youth advisory board, they were met with strong disagreement. The advisory board said this policy would make it seem like young people were being punished for doing the right thing. Instead of reducing the stipend, the managers made a different decision and held budgeting workshops and created incentives for savings. This was a great example of young people challenging an agency's plans and bringing about more meaningful policy change.

Regarding training, Zimmerman said that is probably where they find the most "aha" moments. Their staff training is co-led by youth with expertise in the child welfare system. The young people themselves have created a very comprehensive curriculum called Youth Thrive 4 Youth (CSSP, undated). They use engaging activities so youth can learn about adolescence and what they are going through, understand their strengths, and gain the tools needed to manage their lives and promote their own healing and health. For those interested in research and evaluation, she

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<sup>4</sup> Case plans are tools used primarily in the social work field to ensure children's safety, well-being, and permanency. For instance, case plans are written documents required by law for children who are receiving foster-care maintenance payments (see <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/caseplanning.pdf>).

described a validated and reliable assessment tool called the Youth Thrive Survey. It is designed to measure the presence and growth of protective and promotive factors as proxy indicators of well-being (CSSP, undated). The survey can be used to inform case planning and practice, as well as for evaluation and quality improvement efforts. The survey tool is currently free to use, she said, and all of the content has been vetted and found appropriate by young people. There is a webinar on CSSP's website explaining how to use it.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Zimmerman shared lessons learned from their experiences, the first being compensation for time. She suggested including those stipends in your budget at the very beginning design stage of a project. Beyond money, think about how to make youth participation worthwhile for them. Are there skills they can build in the process? Can they network? The same type of approach can be used here as when considering professional development opportunities for staff. Next, she said, changing the narrative is very important. Taking a step back to examine videos and reports to see how young people are portrayed can really inform how they will see themselves and how others will see them. Are youth being depicted as broken or described with a list of negative outcomes? Instead of carrying that narrative forward, she encouraged everyone to think about the inequitable policies and problematic environments that have led young people to such outcomes and shift the conversation toward discussions about changing those factors. Additionally, ensure that there aren't barriers keeping young people from participating such as transportation, work, or other obligations. Lastly, she said, if you are asking youth for advice, take it. If they suggest changes, work toward carrying them out. If it is not possible, explain why you cannot make them and keep an active dialogue. Do not wait for the right time, Zimmerman said, because you will never feel quite ready to engage young people. Just figure out small steps you can take to get started. Getting a few young people involved will lead to an increase in interest and participation, and you can continue to build on successes. Start now, though.

### Youth as Self Advocates

Matthew Shapiro, adult ally of Youth as Self Advocates (YASA),<sup>6</sup> described the goal of his work as giving attention to the challenges of youth advocates and exploring how he can support them. He said that trusting that the young people he oversees have a voice of their own can be difficult, as is ensuring that their voices are heard rather than jumping straight

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<sup>5</sup> For additional information, see the CSSP website: <https://cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive/#survey-instrument>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://familyvoices.org/aboutkasa>.

into problem solving. Each year, Shapiro said, YASA decides what issues it wants to tackle, such as lack of transportation for young people with disabilities. They then work to make an advocacy plan for that issue. Shapiro reiterated the importance of the role of the adult ally, saying that knowing the ways the youth work together and their personal strengths and weaknesses are key. Adult allies have to know the youth to be able to lead them to success. Again, it is important to sometimes step back and remember that adults are there in a supportive role, but the ship needs to be steered by the young people. He also agreed with earlier speakers about ensuring that the youth are compensated for their work. He suggested thinking further about how young people can be given more leadership opportunities beyond just a board or advisory role. Mentoring young people in these types of roles is also a key component of being an adult ally, Shapiro noted. When he is working with young people, he always gives out his cell phone number and e-mail address and encourages them to reach out if they have questions about a particular challenge or transition that he has already experienced. What is it like, for example, to transition from high school to college to the work world? Or what is it like to go to college? Shapiro said he tries to make himself available to talk as young people try to navigate these new and different experiences that can sometimes be scary or frustrating.

### **Authentically Incorporating Young People**

“What does it take for adults to be prepared themselves, to be engaged, and to promote youth voices?” Walker-Harding asked during the discussion and question and answer portion of the panel. Headrick replied that when thinking about an organization, it is important to help people understand the value in having youth and family voices represented and to maintain the mindset that those contributing their voices are experts in their own experiences. It is important to think about the culture that exists within that circle and embrace it as an organizing principle. Shapiro added a personal experience, saying that when he was a young person himself, it used to bother him when he was not taken seriously or invited to events just so that the organization could check a box. He explained that it was difficult to tell what his role was, when it was appropriate to speak up, and whether his input was valued or just politely acknowledged. Brown reiterated the point about communication, saying that if a person is making a suggestion or giving requested feedback, their recommendation should be validated in some tangible way. The key here is to stop “othering” young people, she said. It comes down to valuing their place at the table just as much as that of anyone else present. Zimmerman also added that it is important for adults to be mindful and respectful of boundaries that young people set. She shared that she has witnessed situations where adults ask very in-

trusive questions that young people were not ready to answer. In addition to adults being prepared for engagement, they also need to be trained to respect boundaries.

Walker-Harding also highlighted the importance of not tokenizing the voices of young people and asked how many voices are ideal to ensure a broader perspective is heard. Shapiro responded that within YASA, they always try to work in pairs. In addition to providing more than one perspective, it also gives young people additional support in a new setting and helps them lean on one another if needed. A final question was asked about whether consent forms were needed for youth to participate in the activities described by the panelists. Brown said that through NOYS, they always obtain consent from the youth professionals as well as their parents, especially because they work with people as young as 13. NOYS always focuses on cycling in the parent and keeping them in the loop, she said, but the bulk of responsibility for participating remains with the young person.

## YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

Carlos Santos, associate professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, moderated a discussion of first-person youth perspectives on the importance of mental health supports. This section highlights thoughts from adolescents on what supports they need to thrive.

### Detroit Flutter Foundation

DeAngelo Hughes, founder of Detroit Flutter Foundation<sup>7</sup> and sophomore at Ferris State University in Michigan, introduced himself and described how he struggled with difficult feelings of grief at a young age after he lost his mother at age 13. Eventually, these feelings of grief made Hughes feel abandoned, unloved, and unsupported. As he got older, he began feeling lonely. These difficulties led him to launch the Detroit Flutter Foundation during his sophomore year in high school in 2015. With the help of the Future Project, the foundation began helping other youth struggling with loss and grief to find hope and comfort within a community.<sup>8</sup> On Christmas Eve 2018, a suicide attempt put him in the hospital, and he was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder. He explained that he had many personal challenges early in life but did not understand them because after his mom died, he was told it was just grief. Hughes shared that he faced many challenges following his diagnosis, including adjusting to various medications and their side effects

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://detroitflutter.weebly.com>.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Future Project, see <http://thefutureproject.org>.

and believing that his mental health condition now defined who he was. He felt that he had the label of a “crazy person,” and suffered losses in his personal life, even the ability to focus or concentrate. Many young people are diagnosed with mental health disorders in adolescence, he said, which can really affect the course of their education, their ability to work, and their relationships. He also commented on the stigma and heightened life difficulties associated with mental illness, especially for young people. In the year since his diagnosis, Hughes has tried a long list of medications and endured difficult side effects and mood swings, but he is finding what works. Many young people lack needed social support, he said, but also feel embarrassed seeking professional help or fear telling friends and family.

The power of peer-to-peer support is one of the main reasons Hughes started the Detroit Flutter Foundation. It is difficult to talk to someone and trust them, he shared, but peer-to-peer support can help adolescents discuss things that happen on a daily basis and help those with mental illness realize that there is a network of people similar to them. Many adolescents struggle with depression, yet too often adults say things like “You’re too young to stress,” Hughes emphasized. Nearly 43 percent of young people are diagnosed with depression, which can often lead to withdrawal from friends and family. This sometimes results in substance abuse or self-medicating with alcohol or marijuana. Depression can sometimes lead to suicide, he explained, which is the second leading cause of death in young people ages 12 to 24, rates for which have actually increased by 35 percent since 1999. Hughes said that these statistics really speak to him since he contemplated suicide over and over until he came to his breaking point and almost lost his life in 2018. Young people would greatly benefit from having a place to talk about things they are going through in their everyday lives, whether that be depression, loneliness, grief, or trauma. He said many youth feel more comfortable seeking out peer-to-peer models rather than professionals. He advised building more youth-led organizations to support adolescents with what they are going through.

### **Youth as Self-Advocates**

Emily Ball, disability specialist from Manchester Community College and coordinator with YASA, began her remarks with an introduction to her personal life and challenges. She explained that she was born 3 months prematurely with a perforated intestine and hydrocephalus, which made early life complicated. As a toddler, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, which resulted in a string of 25 operations. When she reached puberty, Ball shared, she began experiencing anxiety symptoms. At the time, she did not recognize the symptoms as pointing to anxiety, but 13 years later at age 23, she was put on medication, and it has helped immensely. Ball was



additionally diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 19. Following middle school, Ball experienced intense bullying, but her teachers and the adults in her school environment did not believe her, which led to several depressive episodes and tremendous emotional struggles. She experienced additional challenges after high school while trying to transition to college, but eventually was able to find stability once she was diagnosed as having bipolar II disorder. Bipolar II disorder is a mood disorder categorized by two phases, Ball explained. The primary phase is depression, but there are also phases of hypomania, which can include distress in certain situations, a decreased need for sleep, and a constantly high energy level. Medications are helpful, but highs and lows still occur on the road to breakthrough.

Ball learned through her experiences that her mental health condition played a major role in shaping who she is today. It was really difficult, she said, to identify her symptoms because they came during the formative adolescent years. She emphasized the importance of having a strong support system and a good medical care team to help navigate difficult moments.

### Mental Health Support in Schools

Conor Curran, currently a high school student at Old Mill High School and president of the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils<sup>9</sup> in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, began his presentation by emphasizing the need for advocacy on behalf of school counselors. He said that youth need counselors to play less of an administrative role and maintain lower caseloads so that they can interact more with the students. Unfortunately, this is not possible with current school budgets, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Curran also highlighted the mental health inequities affecting minority communities, noting the lack of bilingual staff needed to serve students for whom English is a second language. In Anne Arundel County, he shared that they have recently created a mental health task force comprised of school staff, counselors, and other relevant stakeholders in the county. Additionally, they have created a mental health teen advisory committee composed of two students from each high school in the district, with which the superintendent meets to talk about the inequities in the system that they witness. Curran believes that conversations would bring great benefits if they happened in school systems countrywide, noting that nothing will happen without meaningful communication.

Despite the complexities of mental health needs and conditions, he said, a student's critical need is mostly to be heard, feel safe, and have a community that they can trust. Many students in the United States in places

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.southriverhi.org/special-programs/chesapeake-regional-association-of-student-councils>.

where the inequities exist do not have such support systems. Counselors and support staff are not able to be sincere and dedicate themselves to the students who need them because their caseloads are too overwhelming. Many students just do not feel heard, which Curran believes is a major flaw in the American education system. Additionally, COVID-19 is presenting a new set of challenges for students. Students usually spend 10 months of the year following a routine that involves daily school attendance, he said, but for the last 6 months, students have been at home instead of being in class experiencing normal personal interactions. This can be damaging to social development, especially for younger students. When the pandemic and stay-at-home orders first started, it was difficult even for counselors to connect with students remotely because of insurance restrictions. Luckily, those have recently been lifted, but it can still be difficult for students and support staff to personally connect like they normally would do during the school day. The moment in which we find ourselves illuminates the need for schools across the country to ensure that their students have adequate resources and equal access to education, whatever form that might take for the near future. Some students do not have the access to technology so vital to distance learning, Curran said, forcing them, for instance, to share one laptop with other school-age children in their family. This can be incredibly stressful, since students feel that their grades and academic future are at stake. He suggested that school systems nationwide implement a pass-fail grading system during the pandemic so that students can focus on staying healthy and safe. School boards should also provide more funding for access to technology and methods for support staff and counselors to reach out to students while they are at home. “All means all,” he noted, emphasizing the need to work together through this and have faith in society to do what is best.

### Helping Adolescents Feel Heard

Santos noted the stigma often related to mental health and asked for the speakers to comment on how they might advise other youth in seeking support. Hughes first suggested talking to a parent, and if not comfortable with that, a student can try a school counselor. He shared that he developed a great relationship with his high school counselor, and that just having someone to talk with who supported him really helped him get the resources he needed. Ball said that if you feel something different going on that you have not noticed before, don't assume it is just part of your personality as she did. Seek help from your parents or a doctor, she said. Curran echoed both responses, saying it is all about reaching out for help from caring people who want the best for you.

In a follow-up question, Santos asked if there were any suggestions on how schools can better support student mental health. Ball said that giving proper attention to the troubles she experienced in high school could have taken up a school psychologist's entire day, so increasing the length of sessions with school counselors beyond 30 minutes each week would help greatly. For school districts in his home state of Michigan, Hughes suggested hiring additional social workers. In Detroit, there are social workers who work with kids with individualized education plans, he said, but the kids without that formal document have no one to talk to when they need it. There is a need for more social workers in schools just to be available for whoever needs them. Curran agreed as well, mentioning that in Maryland, the school maintains one "pupil personnel worker"<sup>10</sup> in every high school. Since schools are fairly large, though, it is extremely difficult for that individual to interact with every student when there are 2,000 students. Hughes emphasized this point as well, saying that the system can't allocate available social workers or psychologists only for kids who are right on the edge and ready to break. Instead, these counselors and support staff should be available further upstream for kids to access before their problems become so dire.

### *Suggestions from Speakers for Adults, Schools, and Organizations*

To further the discussion, Santos also asked how agencies and policy makers could engage young people in their advocacy work. Ball suggested that agencies put out youth-friendly language tip sheets on mental illnesses. Personally, she shared, she did not know much about her mental illness when diagnosed, so she had to dive into really technical medical language that was difficult for a 19-year-old to understand. To address this, those who produce such resources might want to imitate the speaking style of youth in the future. Hughes agreed that language is a big factor, and that change has to start with the policy makers. Once they change it, he said, it might trickle down and help remove the stigma. If more people are talking about it, more resources will be out there for those who need it. Curran added that in his district, the board of education has included a fully voting student member. In Maryland, student voices are being heard, he said, because they have a place at the table with adult members where budgets and policies are created, allowing them to be part of the process.

Santos asked how school systems can train students to act as suicide prevention peer counselors or social workers. Ball offered a personal story, saying that following the death of a student in her high school, students cre-

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<sup>10</sup> Pupil personnel workers are specialists trained to assess student needs, serve as student advocates, and act as a motivating force in removing barriers to student achievement. For more information, see <http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/SSSP/PPW/index.aspx>.

ated their own suicide prevention organization called “Rachel’s Friends,” which focused on uplifting others and creating activities to help students feel engaged and connected. Hughes elaborated on suicide support, emphasizing that the language around suicide has changed. Instead of asking tangential questions (such as “Are you going to do something stupid?”), current protocol calls for directly asking if people are thinking about hurting themselves. He also suggested bringing more awareness to suicide prevention and noted that while in high school, he helped host panels and assemblies, realizing that many kids would stay afterward to talk to speakers because they had similar feelings. As a result, they were able to bring in more resources, set up activities after school, and address some of the issues with which many students struggle. Curran said that his school system worked with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to administer its Youth Mental Health First Aid training. This allows youth to have difficult conversations with a peer to make sure they are safe and direct them to a professional so they can take further steps. He highlighted the training’s great value, having used it several times, and he suggested scaling it up to make it more widely available. Currently the training lasts 8 hours, so he acknowledged that it is not a great fit for the school curriculum, but they are working on condensing it to be more accessible to high school students.

Building on these suggestions, Santos asked about what type of behavioral supports around mental health and emotional well-being would be useful for youth outside of the school environment. Hughes first emphasized the importance of youth-led organizations out in the community. It involves not just going to a facility for a counseling session, he explained, but maybe also featuring resources on mental health at recreation centers where youth already spend time. Ball added that teaching future students of social work how to work with children and youth is quite important. Curran offered another idea, suggesting that communities or organizations could host community events, bringing in groups and tools that promote mental health awareness and featuring other organizations or advocacy groups to discuss the importance of mental health with the community.

### *How to Leverage Professionals*

Santos asked how professionals such as those present at the workshop, could better support youth. Ball recommended that anyone who works alongside youth with disabilities should go through a mental health training focused on youth experiences. Hughes said that most young people in these situations really just need someone to listen. Young people are often tuned out, both at home and in other settings, so having the ear of someone willing to listen to their concerns is critical. They do not have to respond with solutions, he said. They just have to listen and communicate that they hear and understand you.

*Centering Youth*

Santos asked the panelists why it is often so challenging for youth to be heard. He noted that in some ways, we are more connected in the social media age, but in other ways, it is harder to find community. Ball said that having experienced so much turmoil prior to her diagnosis, she felt great embarrassment that hindered her from admitting that she had emotional disabilities. Curran added that it requires you to put yourself in a very vulnerable position, which can make it difficult to build a community, especially in a group of people you do not know. He added that his school system in Maryland started a restorative justice practice called “Community Circles,” which aims at building those relationships and getting to deeper questions.<sup>11</sup> Santos also asked about the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the illness itself and numerous downstream effects such as school cancellations are affecting the mental health of youth. Hughes replied that it is affecting youth on a huge scale. The quarantine orders make it impossible for youth to see their friends, much less their usual counselors. While they can talk on the phone, the level of privacy is not the same, so many might feel that they are not able to have safe conversations. Additionally, people are losing family members while simultaneously dealing with mental illness, and many are left to grieve in isolation. People have not been able to get away and tap into their usual coping mechanisms and activities to help process feelings. Curran agreed that many students are negatively affected, due to being unaccustomed to being at home all the time and not having their normal social interactions with friends and teachers at school. When they do see other people, everyone seems scared, which impacts how you see society.

Finally, Santos asked for advice on the best ways to encourage young people who might resist seeking mental health services to accept that this is what they need. Hughes agreed that it can be a challenge, admitting that he had experienced this himself. When he first began visiting a therapist in high school, he initially refused to open up and share things that were bothering him, but he learned that it is helpful to be able to talk to someone like himself who is a young person of color with similar experiences, which helps build that trust. Curran added that trust depends on feeling safe to be vulnerable, which is easier with someone who knows what you have gone through on a personal level. Without this commonality of experience, it is difficult for a counselor to be sincere. Santos wrapped up the discussion saying this is really a call to arms involving rethinking how we can engage youth in various efforts and exploring what needs to be done differently.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on Community Circles, see <http://www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com/teaching-restorative-practices-with-classroom-circles.html>.

## 4

# Implementing Best Practices and Crafting Effective Messaging to Help Adolescents Flourish

While there are numerous examples of best practices and lessons learned from firsthand experiences working with adolescents, it is imperative that these lessons and practices get scaled up and disseminated. This chapter reviews suggestions and comments from virtual workshop participants related to their own work and features discussions from a panel of stakeholders invested in branding, messaging, and advocacy related to important adolescent issues such as mental health and wellness.

### LEARNING FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

Several participants shared ideas and comments in the virtual chat during the workshop, focused on answering two specific questions: (1) Has your organization elevated the lived experience in its work?; and (2) How can these best practices that have been shared be adapted and implemented in your own work?

#### Elevating Lived Experiences

In response to the first question, one participant offered that her organization has had to become more creative in terms of reaching clients because their services are delivered in the school and implemented through teacher and staff referrals. She explained that they have had to constantly create a dialogue to engage their partners. Many of the practices discussed in this workshop have provided a new emphasis on keeping the interests of students at the forefront. Another participant representing a county-level

health and human services agency said that they try to focus on client-centered and solution-focused approaches to voluntary case management services, while making youth engagement a priority. Currently, he said, they are trying to balance focusing on adverse childhood experiences with positive childhood experiences (in other words, risk factors and protective factors) to inform their work.

One participant voiced a concern. As a retired educator still very involved in teaching, he did not feel that his lived experience was respected by boards staffed with younger professionals. He does note, though, that when substituting, he does see his more than 45 years of experience respected because it's easier to see in action. Inside community organizations, he said, you will find both ways of thinking, with some members valuing lived experience and others being indifferent to it.

### Implementing and Adapting Best Practices

Several participants provided responses to the second question regarding implementing the best practices presented throughout workshop discussions. One participant suggested that her organization could offer more responsibility to teens on school committees, getting them to engage in professionalism, and bringing the Question, Persuade, and Refer<sup>1</sup> (also known as QPR) training to the table. Another participant added that youth engagement is always a challenge, and despite best intentions, he said, we can have blind spots or misconceptions about certain youth populations or about any age group in the general population. He added that these types of learning opportunities and workshops offer the chance to absorb new information and keep his practice ethical, evidence-based, and meaningful for youth clients and their families.

As another way to implement best practices, Shelley Waters Boots, Funders for Adolescent Science Translation, suggested referring to the National Academies report, *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing the Opportunity for All Youth* (NASEM, 2019b). There are several new studies funded through the Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST) consortium that can be shared, and new research that is summarized through the FrameWorks Institute, which can assist in this process (FrameWorks Institute, 2020).

Tamar Mendelson, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, shared that the potential exists for integrating virtual components into some interventions, or even delivering interventions without in-person contact, which currently is quite valuable. Her team at Johns Hopkins University, for instance, developed a website for school teachers in partnership with

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see <https://qprinstitute.com>.

The Monday Campaigns to provide mindfulness strategies for self-care and for use in the classroom with students (The Monday Campaigns, 2020). While there are undeniable downsides to not having in-person contact, there are also benefits to be found in terms of scale-up and wider dissemination. Texting and smartphone-based interventions for young people are also being increasingly developed and evaluated, so those should be monitored for use as well.

Finally, Patrick Killeen, past president of American Academy of Physician Assistants, commented that he believes there is a great need to enhance the coordination of adolescent care between medical and mental health organizations. The discussion around implementation of the workshop's featured best practices, he said, has raised his awareness of the need to enhance organizational coordination between the American Academy of Physician Assistants and all organizations and funders who continue to support adolescent well-being.

## CRAFTING EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

Deborah Klein Walker, consultant and immediate past president for the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice, highlighted the importance of getting all of the knowledge and evidence from various reports and workshops out to key consumers and stakeholders invested in the flourishing of adolescents. This section features various methods to do so such as reframing messages, leveraging social media, and involving youth voices.

### Reframing Messages

Daniel Busso, director of research at FrameWorks Institute, introduced his work at the social science think tank on how to communicate with the public about adolescents and youth issues. FrameWorks focuses on two things, he explained. First, they study how people use culture to think deeply about issues that everyone cares about. Secondly, they study how the choices we make as communicators matter. Even though they can sometimes seem small or insignificant, these small choices can have really powerful effects on audiences. Framing matters, Busso said, because it actually constitutes the sum of every decision you make as a communicator about what to include in your work and what to leave out. Strategic framing is the process of being intentional about those choices to bring about certain kinds of outcomes. As an example, he presented some of the social science research that FrameWorks has been conducting over the last 3 years, which involves nearly 7,000 members of the American public and uses a variety of different methods.



The first stage of reframing involves figuring out what you are up against, Busso explained, identifying and understanding the dominant narratives and outlining the communication challenges and opportunities they pose. To do this, FrameWorks conducted 30 in-depth interviews across the country with adults and adolescents and 100 shorter interviews filmed in public locations. After playing a video summarizing several of these interviews, he called everyone's attention to some of the patterns and cultural notions that pose the greatest challenges. First, he said, people do not really understand what adolescence is. As was heard in the videos, people think of it more as a way of thinking rather than a discrete stage of development. Secondly, he introduced the "dangerous times" notion that cropped up frequently in the longer interviews. This idea that adolescence is a very risky and precarious time of life that demands that youth be shielded and sheltered makes it difficult for adolescents to promote their own needs for independence and autonomy. The third concept Busso described is called "self-makingness" or individualism. In this concept of adolescence, drive, determination, and willpower determine a young person's outcomes. This is limiting because it makes it more challenging for people to think about the ways that resources and supports shape a person's outcomes, and how those may differ across types of populations.

Next, Busso introduced the belief that peers constitute a largely negative or corrupting influence that can undermine healthy development, in sharp contrast to the reality that healthy peer relationships are essential. He highlighted the "modernity as a threat" idea so well exemplified by the much greater number of risks and negative things that the youth of this generation have to navigate today such as social media, drugs, and alcohol, all of which are perceived as threats and roadblocks to healthy adulthood. Another conceptual model that emerged is the "culture of poverty" belief, which tends to lead people to rationalize negative behavior as a result of bad values at home or a deficient cultural work ethic. This completely obscures the importance of inequities in our society, Busso noted. Support and opportunities for improving healthy development should be accessible to all communities equally. Finally, he pointed out the lack of understanding of cognitive development during this age period, saying that the public generally lacks understanding of the biological changes that drive adolescent outcomes.

To try and address some of these challenging thought models that may block healthy adolescent development and avoid traps in public thinking, Busso offered a few high-level strategies (see Box 4-1).

Busso put a question to the participants: What kind of frames and stories do we want to advance in the public discourse? He outlined several areas where this could be done with the overarching goal of improving the positive image of young people and influencing their development. First,

**BOX 4-1**  
**High-Level Strategies to Tell More  
 Productive Stories about Youth**

1. **Avoid individual outcomes and personal success.** Individual stories without context reinforce unproductive assumptions. Instead, advance the idea that this is an issue of collective importance to society that warrants public policy action.
2. **Don't overemphasize risk and vulnerability.** Avoid stimulating negative thinking and fatalism about adolescence, as this can reinforce the idea that the only role for policies and programs is to protect youth from risk. Discussions should include opportunity as well as risk.
3. **Avoid leaving support up to the imagination.** Don't let the public fill in the blank with solutions you want to avoid.

SOURCE: Busso presentation, May 5, 2020.

we want to focus on community engagement, he said, so it is important to emphasize the contributions that young people make to their communities in our messaging. Stories about individual success are much less effective in advancing this positive vision of young people. Another area to emphasize is the value of programs and policies that allow adolescents to try new things in a space where they can fail and explore safely while they serve as leaders. This is a really powerful antidote to the public's existing thinking that adolescents really just need to be shielded and protected from the world, he commented. Finally, he emphasized the importance of highlighting positive supportive relationships with peers and nonparental adults, as well as amplifying the stories that young people tell about themselves. Creating space for young people to tell their own stories can really shift the balance in public conversations from risk to opportunity. In closing, Busso noted that this was just a quick overview of their research in this area, and he pointed to the adolescent development page of their website, where more information, including recent reports and recommendations, can be found.

### Leveraging Social Media for Mental Health

Introducing Edward Schmit, cofounder of IDONTMIND, Walker stated that since its 2017 launch, this mental health awareness campaign and lifestyle brand has raised more than \$350,000 for mental health organizations across the country. Schmit explained that their mission is to inspire open and honest conversations about mental health, and they try to do it in several creative ways. One of the most important aspects of the

organization is its name, he noted. IDONTMIND is the start of a sentence that opens the door to bigger conversations about mental health such as “I don’t mind” going to therapy, “I don’t mind” asking for help, “I don’t mind” taking a breath. It is a philosophy that removes the burden from someone who is suffering, and the organization has made it a really important part of its public campaign. Their demographic is mainly young people between 18 and 34. They are primarily based in the United States, but they have gathered a larger following in Canada and the United Kingdom as a result of social media.

In its beginning, Schmit said, IDONTMIND came to the sad realization that people talk more about what they wear than how they feel. This led to an innovative idea: getting people to combine what they wear with how they are actually feeling to invite conversation. In a one-off, two-week-long T-shirt campaign, IDONTMIND raised over \$115,000 for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. That was kind of a “wow” moment, Schmit commented, in which the organization realized this really resonated with people, so they decided to keep it going. Recognizing the popularity of modern-day lifestyle brands—especially with youth—Schmit talked about how they tried to meet people where they are by focusing on branding and minimalist, comfortable designs.

Importantly, IDONTMIND knew it did not want this to look like a mental health campaign of the past or even like a mental health campaign at all. The beauty of the slightly provocative logo on clothing is that it can help strike up organic conversations about mental health that allows messaging and support communication to follow. Schmit said that the campaign’s launch utilized a network of influencers, and they were very fortunate to have well-known celebrities like Heidi Klum and Grant Gustin join the campaign. We know stories can be extremely inspiring, he said. It is really cool to see people you look up to sharing their own story and inspiring you to do the same. Since then, the organization has undergone a big evolution. Starting as a fundraising vehicle for a mental health organization, IDONTMIND slowly developed their own campaign, joining Mental Health America in 2018. This transition also included building their website and a variety of social media platforms, as well as building out the IDONTMIND Journal that publishes weekly articles introducing people to different aspects of mental health and related topics.

### **Instagram Branding and Use**

The IDONTMIND community is extremely engaged on social media, Schmit noted, staying connected with their audience mainly through Instagram. Social media can be a scary place for some people, but it is not going

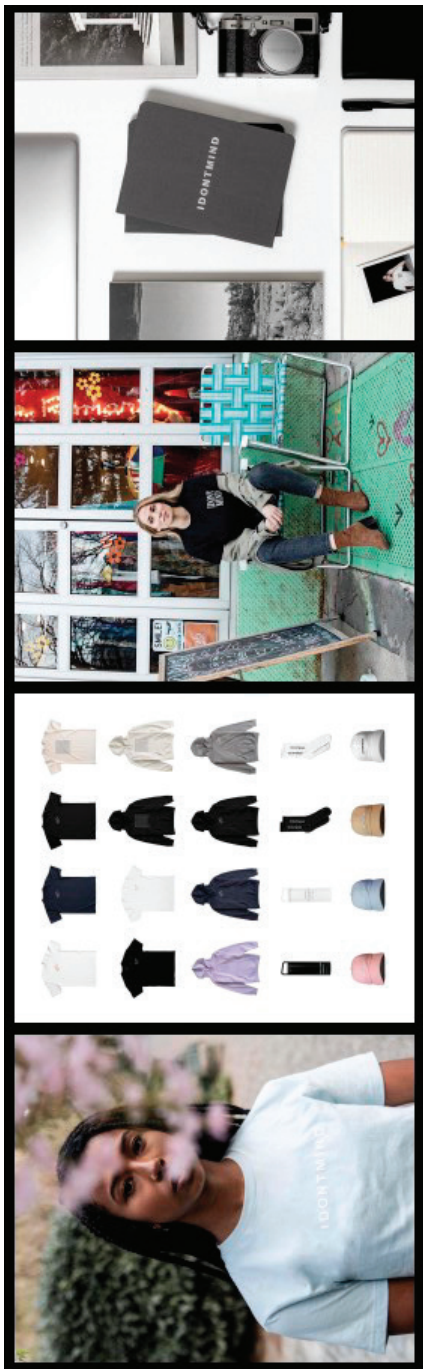


Figure 4-1 Lifestyle and product category for IDONTMIND Instagram branding.  
SOURCE: Edward Schmit presentation, May 5, 2020. IDONTMIND/Mental Health America Instagram account, <https://www.instagram.com/idontmind>.

anywhere, so the campaign wants to be a shining light in that space as much as possible, Schmit said. When you first visit IDONTMIND's Instagram page, you see mostly lifestyle and inspirational posts, and you may not even know that it is a mental health awareness campaign, which is by design (see Figure 4-1). They also have a regular live program on Instagram called "Ask a Therapist" during which they take questions from their audience and get answers from real therapists. This program has helped introduce people to the concept of therapy without the attached stigma.

In addition to creating a consistent aesthetic that followers can trust, Schmit said they also focus on engagement. This includes thinking about how people engage with what they post, what their target demographic needs, and what is actually helpful to them. Finally, he commented that the best way for a campaign to grow is to spread its message widely. This makes it important to figure out what interesting or thought-provoking things will resonate enough to be shared. We think the best way to fight stigma is to encourage open and honest conversations about mental health, Schmit said, but that really has to do with changing the culture. Working on your mental wellness and taking care of your mind should be just as important as going to the gym or other forms of self-care. As a final takeaway, he emphasized that an organization can have a very important mission and message, but if it gives no thought to branding and marketing, the message will not reach many people. Conversely, if an organization has a wonderful aesthetic but no heart, its efforts will also fall flat. It is critical to take your purpose and understand how to communicate with your core audience in a way that makes it really accessible.

### **Involving Youth in Message Development**

Kawanza Billy is the program manager and social impact strategist for Black Swan Academy, where she creates educational content in collaboration with young people to help them advocate for their education and mental health needs. She explained the mission of Black Swan Academy, a program that was founded in 2013 after the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, as empowering Black youth in underserved communities. Through civic leadership and engagement, they give them a comprehensive set of tools to become active social catalysts in their communities. Black Swan Academy has a vision to create a pipeline of Black leaders who are committed to improving themselves as well as their communities, she explained. Black Swan Academy is located in Washington, DC, but focuses mainly on middle- and high-school students in Wards 7 and 8, where 92 percent of residents are Black, the median household income is \$37,000, and more than one-third of the population is under 18. According to research conducted by youth at the academy, Billy said, more than 30 percent of

Black girls and more than 40 percent of Latina girls identified as feeling sad or hopeless. More than 800 Black youth attempted suicide in 2017, 100 percent of students expelled are Black youth, and nearly 100 percent of students arrested at school are young people of color. The youth understand the importance of their work and take their roles very seriously, she added.

“We know that in order for our dream of justice and liberation to become reality, we must approach this unapologetically leading with racial equity, invest in trust with youth leadership, and fight systematic change.”

-Kawanza Billy

They take a youth-centered and youth-led approach at Black Swan Academy. The youth-centered design develops individuals and their social qualities. The youth-led component really lets young people take charge of different aspects of activities such as leading, planning, decision making, facilitation, reflection, and evaluation. The adult staff provide support and encouragement throughout the process. Pride, purpose, and power are the three principles that guide everything Black Swan Academy does as an organization. It aims to restore pride in self and ethnicity, identify purpose through community service, and recognize innate power to impact positive change, Billy explained. To give more of an idea of their work, Billy shared some of their achievements over the past 5 years. The Black Swan Academy has:

- Supported 80 Black youth in middle and high school to gain advocacy, organizing, and public policy skills.
- Hosted 900 middle and high school students at Black Swan Academy youth advocacy summit.
- Awarded 32 small scholarships and awards.
- Reached more than 8,500 community members through service and outreach.
- Supported and led advocacy campaigns that resulted in more funding for mental health professionals in schools, affordable housing, community violence interruption, and legislation that reduces suspensions, prevents childhood lead exposure, and reduces the voting age to 16.

To share some of their lessons on messaging, Billy described a campaign their young people worked on that included the development of a tagline for a youth agenda focusing mainly on mental health and well-being. The

last two agendas they devised ran intersecting campaigns on issues such as housing instability, violence interruption, community services, divesting in police and schools, and providing year-round employment for young people. The academy students realized, Billy said, that all of it ties back to mental health and emotional well-being for young people. This new agenda was named “Love Us, Don’t Harm Us” and was originally launched to run throughout the 2018 school year.<sup>2</sup> Many of the young people doing the work, though, were reporting that while some advocacy demands were being met, students were still not seeing increases in the numbers of social workers or behavioral health providers at their schools and wanted to be more involved in creating true progress on these initiatives. She took the audience step by step through their process, which takes the entire school year, with a strong focus on the budget season (see Box 4-2).

Young people are involved in this entire process, she commented, and all vote yes or no on any content (this included the slide deck she presented at this workshop). Billy explained how academy leaders avoid leading with answers or trying to lead them to answers, but on the other hand,

#### **BOX 4-2**

##### **Black Swan Academy Youth Agenda Development Process**

1. Attendance of Youth Agenda Workshop by multiple middle- and high-school cohorts where participants conducted issue mapping, identified issues that matter to them, and collaborated in interactive activities to pull out content.
2. Post-workshop and direct participation surveys among peers and community members.
3. Community mapping and research talking points by youth to explore possible alignments with their important issues and those of their community.
4. Forming Black youth agenda.
5. Creating one-pagers and social media graphics.
6. Power mapping carried out by exploring positions of public officials related to agenda items and issues of concern.
7. Base-building and mobilizing through message articulation and dissemination to peers.
8. Planning and implementing direct actions.
9. Advocacy week.
10. Evaluation and repetition of the process.

SOURCE: Billy presentation, May 5, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the Black youth agenda, see <https://www.blackswanacademy.org/black-youth-agenda>.

they do try to make everything as engaging as possible by, for instance, creating interactive ways to collect stories by using polls, Google forms, Instagram surveys, and stories. In conclusion, she provided tips they had learned throughout their experiences with youth issue advocacy, such as: (1) Make sure you are using interactive activities when creating content and getting youth involved; (2) You also want to feature images of young people because when youth see others like themselves doing amazing things, it will encourage and inspire them to be involved; (3) Give them space and time to communicate their ideas and theories, as well as provide feedback on content that has been created. Black Swan, she reiterated, is seeking to equip young folks who are ready to champion their own ideas and advocate for themselves by coming alongside them with the tools they need to accomplish this.

## DISCUSSION

To begin the discussion, Walker referred Busso to a question about how to balance the recommendation to avoid promoting individual success while also amplifying youth voices. He replied that the best way to do this is to tell people's stories while directing the attention to the resources that would address the issues. It would be more helpful, for example, to avoid using the "I worked hard to get where I am" narrative and instead focus the personal story on the support and the resources that were (or were not) available to help. Walker asked if it would be possible to integrate multiple FrameWorks agendas or if new questions required starting from scratch each time for different topics. Busso noted that there are often nice synergies between research findings. In doing projects separately, they are actually able to see where there are areas of overlap. They found, for example, that drawing attention to the ways that a child can be more involved in the community and find leadership positions within that context is a really effective strategy, even if a child is in the foster-care or child welfare systems.

The next questions centered around replicating some of these ideas and exploring how they could apply to a wide audience. Schmit noted that the IDONTMIND campaign approach is effective for anyone, whether they do not know much about mental health or are considered high-risk youth. Billy said that Black Swan Academy does have a specific curriculum that was followed last year to solidify their program. They also make available youth trainers who can help others get started on similar advocacy work with youth. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they are also expanding their digital strategy and organizing efforts, so there may be more opportunities there in the future as well.



### Resources for Strong Campaigns

Walker asked each of the presenters to comment on the resources needed to get the required skills and to develop these kinds of youth-centered efforts. Schmit explained that being able to draw upon his background in marketing and fashion greatly helped in the launching of the IDONTMIND campaign. IDONTMIND already had celebrities and influencers in its network to spread the message, he added, but having an interesting message and mission is critical to soliciting help from people like that. They were lucky enough to start with a T-shirt campaign that was able to fund the entire program, and while they still accept donations, they are mostly sustained by sales of apparel and items. Billy said that the Black Swan Academy is able to secure some funding through selling T-shirts and other items, but most funding comes through grants from education foundations. Busso affirmed this, saying that half of the challenge is developing the mission and messaging frame, while the other half involves putting it out in the world to make its impact. What FrameWorks has learned, he continued, is that making lasting change requires working with specialists and experts across different sectors of youth development. He also mentioned that colleagues in the field work with advocates to construct a shared narrative and provide actionable tools and strategies to embed within communications to help make this process work better. Through future workshops like this, he said, we can continue sharing messages and strive to coalesce around a common strategy to talk about adolescence more effectively.

Walker added that this is a really important thing that most researchers really do not know how to do well. She asked how youth development specialists could scale up these dissemination efforts and spread the message further, in response to which Billy mentioned the importance of participation in coalitions and cooperation. The Black Swan Academy worked with quite a few other youth and parent organizations, she said, to get the word out to a larger audience. When there is a citywide message, the academy bring its partners in and grounds its young people in responsible expectations. We want to make sure, Billy said, that they clearly understand the difference between the reach that we have versus the reach we want. It is definitely possible to scale up education messages, she emphasized. It just takes a lot of preplanning and community building among young people and constant efforts to include their voices in the conversation, especially as larger groups that are scaling up can sometimes lose the important youth perspective in the process, which is troubling. Billy also noted that although most of their partners are at the local level, they are working on building more national partners, such as Black Millennials for Flint. Schmit commented that IDONTMIND is lucky to be affiliated with Mental Health

America, so although their team is small, they work mostly at the national level but envision doing more work with individual states in the future.

Finally, Cheryl Polk, chief program officer at Safe & Sound, expressed the message that was heard throughout the day by a number of speakers and virtual audience members: Do more to promote adolescent development and let them describe their needs themselves instead of making assumptions for them. The Forum for Children's Well-Being has been discussing relational health for a while, but it now can do more in this space to help adolescents flourish.



## 5

## Summary

Numerous opportunities in a variety of settings to improve the health and well-being of adolescents were highlighted throughout the workshop. While this can be a challenging topic that often gets left out of broader policy conversations, there are several promising practices and exciting research happening around the country to inform future efforts. This chapter summarizes the presentations and discussions that took place and offers suggestions for system changes and mindset shifts to better promote the flourishing of adolescents.

Several recommendations were shared in Chapter 2 from three recent National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus reports on the promotion of youth thriving. Claire Brindis, codirector of the Adolescent and Young Adult Health National Resource Center at the University of California, San Francisco, highlighted the importance of a life-course approach that considers epigenetics and the unique opportunities to influence neurobiological behavior during adolescence. She called for redesigning sectors adolescents interact with, including education, health, child welfare, and the justice system. Nicole Kahn, program officer at the National Academies, elaborated on those opportunities, saying that risk-taking in adolescence is necessary and normal, and systems should work to provide chances for young people to take healthy risks and explore their environments. She also emphasized that youth are experts in their own lives, but social emotional learning programs can provide a foundation upon which other life skills can be built. Kahn also called for more research to effectively evaluate existing programs and ensure that they are cost-effective and accessible to all. Tamar Mendelson, director of the

Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, shared the school's recommendation for the expansion of "health promotion" in the spectrum of mental health interventions, saying that there has not been enough emphasis on mental health promotion and prevention, which has resulted in continued stigma for many mental health disorders. In recognition of the need to increase the integration of effective strategies into real-world scenarios, Mendelson underscored the importance of implementation science, a critical aspect of which includes active engagement with the target community.

Chapter 3 summarized the need for including youth and family voices in order for young people to flourish. Best practices were shared from existing organizations, and young people also shared their own first-hand perspectives on how to do this more effectively. Kelly Headrick, senior director of state government affairs and grassroots advocacy for Autism Speaks, described their advocacy team, who utilize their own personal stories and voices to influence policy makers to consider needed changes. Tameka Brown, director of National Organizations for Youth Safety, shared the benefits of using interprofessionalism to increase youth engagement, saying that adults need to ensure that they are not "othering" youth and actually seeing them as having valuable contributions to public policy discussions. Francie Zimmerman, senior associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, emphasized the identification of structural levers of change as aids to increasing resilience in young people. She noted that youth engagement and leadership resulted in some of the biggest systemic changes they have seen, allowing systems to be more responsive to what young people need. She also offered youth-led and youth-designed training that can be used to help young people understand what they are going through during adolescence and also a validated survey measure to ascertain proxy indicators of well-being (both of these resources are outlined in Appendix C). Speakers from Youth as Self Advocates (YASA) both highlighted again the importance of letting youth lead the way, with adults taking on a supporting role. Matthew Shapiro from YASA also noted the importance of mentoring young people while they are navigating new experiences like going to college. Emily Ball of YASA also echoed the need to have a strong support system. She shared her experience of being diagnosed with mental illness at 19 and the difficulty she encountered learning more about her illness because of the technical medical language in materials. She urged the mental health industry to tailor its public resources to be more comprehensible and appropriate to the youth and particularly to consider writing resource materials to mirror how young people speak. Finally, Conor Curran of the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils, and DeAngelo Hughes, founder of the Detroit Flutter Foundation, both stressed how important it was for young people to have someone available to listen

when needed. Hughes especially called for peer-to-peer support, through which young people can learn that other people are struggling with similar challenges and not feel so alone. He also noted the importance of having therapists and counselors available who look like the young people they are working with so that the young person can be confident that they are encountering an empathetic listener who has experienced similar struggles. Curran also called attention to the effects of the pandemic and the social difficulty of remote learning for many students, but also to the digital divide that those with fewer resources will feel because they cannot access the needed technology as much as their classes demand.

Finally, Chapter 4 featured virtual participants speaking about ways to implement some of these best practices and the difficulty in truly drawing attention to and respecting lived experiences. Some participants shared that continuing to make youth engagement a priority is a constant process. There were also lessons on crafting effective messaging for adolescents. Daniel Busso, director of research at FrameWorks Institute, presented information on reframing to help inform participants about current narratives and point out where energy and efforts can be focused effectively. He also added that creating space for young people to tell their own stories can help the public to see young people through a lens of opportunity instead of just risk. Edward Schmit, cofounder of IDONTMIND, provided social media and branding recommendations around how to launch a successful campaign for mental health. The IDONTMIND team met people where they are by tapping into popular lifestyle clothing and shoe designs and using social media platforms like Instagram that already have millions of users. Schmit particularly underlined the importance of consistency and engagement with audiences and of really taking the time to understand what their users want and what would resonate with them. Finally, Kawanza Billy, program manager for Black Swan Academy, explained their youth-centered and youth-led approach to fighting systemic inequality. She urged the use of many colors and the importance of being creative and engaging when developing content to ensure continual youth involvement. She also suggested featuring other young people who are doing amazing things, as this can inspire youth to do more and stay involved.

In closing, Cheryl Polk, chief program officer at Safe & Sound, stressed that the Forum continue focusing on adolescents and engaging them to help understand what they need instead of making assumptions. She also underscored the importance of viewing adolescence as another important period of development, just like infancy or early childhood, and she looks forward to continuing the conversation within the context of relational health.



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# A

## Workshop Agenda

### Flourishing in Adolescence

#### Forum for Children's Well-Being Spring Virtual Workshop

#### AGENDA

May 5, 2020

- 11:00 AM      Welcome on Behalf of the Forum for Children's Well-Being  
*Cheryl Polk, Forum for Children's Well-Being Cochair, Chief Program Officer, Safe & Sound*
- Suzanne Le Menestrel, @lemenestrels, Forum for Children's Well-Being Director, Senior Program Officer, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*
- 11:10 AM      **A Dialogue on Recent Reports on Adolescent Health: Implications for the National Agenda on Fostering Youths' Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development**  
*Cheryl Polk, Forum for Children's Well-Being Cochair, Chief Program Officer, Safe & Sound, Moderator*

**The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth**

*Claire Brindis, @cbrindis, Committee Member, Professor of Pediatrics and Health Policy, Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Health Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco*

**Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century**

*Nicole Kahn, Study Director and Program Officer, Board on Children, Youth, and Families*

**The National Agenda on Fostering Youth's Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development**

*Tamar Mendelson, @MendelsonTamar, Committee Member, Bloomberg Professor of American Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*

**Reflections on the Panel**

*Stephanie Jones, @hgse, Forum Member, Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education*

12:10 PM

**Hearing from Youth Voices**

*Carlos Santos, @SantosCarlosE, Forum Member, Associate Professor, University of California, Los Angeles Luskin School of Public Affairs, Moderator*

*DeAngelo Hughes, Founder, Detroit Flutter Foundation*

*Emily Ball, Cochair, Family Voices Youth as Self-Advocates (YASA) Representative*

*Conor Curran, Student, Old Mill High School, Mentor Foundation USA Representative*

1:10 PM

**LUNCH BREAK**

1:40 PM

**Best Practices in Inclusion of Youth and Family Voices**

*Leslie Walker-Harding, @AskTeendoc, Forum Member, Chair of the University of Washington School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics, Associate dean for the University of Washington School of Medicine and*

*Senior Vice President/Chief Academic Officer, Seattle Children’s, Moderator*

*Autism Speaks Advocacy Ambassador Program  
Kelly Headrick, Senior Director, State Government Affairs and Grassroots Advocacy*

*National Organizations for Youth Safety  
Tameka “Tami” Brown, Director*

*Youth Thrive  
Francie Zimmerman, Senior Associate*

*Family Voices, Youth as Self-Advocates (YASA)  
Matthew Shapiro, Adult Ally, YASA*

2:40 PM

**VIRTUAL CHAT BREAK**

*Share Your Responses to the Following Questions in the Chat*

- 1) **How has your organization elevated the lived experience in its work?**
- 2) **How can these best practices that have been shared be adapted and implemented in your own work?**

3:00 PM

**How to Craft Effective Messages on Adolescent Flourishing: Implications for the National Agenda on Fostering Youths’ Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development**

*Deborah Klein Walker, @DKWpublichealth, Forum Member, Consultant and Immediate Past President, Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice and Adjunct Professor, Boston University School of Public Health and Tufts University School of Medicine, Moderator*

**Reframing Messages About Youth’s Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health**

*Daniel Busso, @danbusso, Director of Research, Frameworks Institute*

**Framing Effective Messages Related to Mental Health on Social Media**

*Edward Schmit, @Idontmind, Director of IDONTMIND Program, Mental Health America*

*How to Craft Messages with Youth  
Kawanza Billy, @simply\_msilly, Program Manager,  
Black Swan Academy, and Founder and Social Impact  
Strategist, K. Billy Push*

4:00 PM

**FINAL NOTES**

*Cheryl Polk, Forum Cochair*

## B

# Biographical Sketches of Workshop Presenters and Planning Committee Members

**Emily Ball** holds an A.S. degree from Manchester Community College. Professionally, she splits her time among various organizations related to disability. She serves as the youth outreach coordinator for Parents Available to Help. She helped spearhead a program with the University of Connecticut to speak to young children in their classrooms about disability. Besides these specific endeavors, she has also served as one of two youth advisors for the Connecticut Transition Symposium Planning Committee since 2018.

**Harolyn M.E. Belcher** (*Planning Committee*) is the director of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and Center for Diversity in Public Health Leadership Training, Kennedy Krieger Institute. She is the principal investigator for three Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public health leadership training programs that promote diversity in public health research, training, and leadership experiences for undergraduate, public health graduate, medical, dental, pharmacy, and veterinary students. She is co-investigator on a National Institutes of Health grant to conduct a cost comparison of two evidence-based parent interventions for young children with emotional and behavioral problems. Belcher received her B.S. in zoology from Howard University, a medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine, and a master's in health science focusing on mental health in 2002 from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

**Kawanza Billy** is the program manager of the Black Swan Academy. She became involved because she identified with its mission: making young Black leadership more the rule than the exception. She believes that every

young person is a leader and that, when fully equipped with support and tools, they can accomplish anything. She is the founder and social impact strategist at K. Billy Push, a consulting company dedicated to creating and improving social impact initiatives. She received her B.A. from the City University of New York at John Jay College where she majored in political science with a concentration in urban and community affairs. She is known for her ability to utilize creativity in fostering new processes, programs, and systems that affect experience, sustainability, and visibility.

**Claire Brindis**, is a professor of pediatrics and health policy in the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Health Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco. She also serves as director at the university's Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, as well as the co-director of the Adolescent and Young Adult Health National Resource Center. Brindis' research focuses on ameliorating the effects of social, health, and economic disparities among ethnic and racial populations with a particular focus on women and adolescents. Her research analyzes how disparities impact health outcomes, access to quality care and health insurance coverage, and the impact of migration and acculturation affect Latinx health. Brindis is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine. She served on the Institute of Medicine's (now NAM) Committee on Preventive Health Services for Women, which developed recommendations for preventive services for women without co-payments that were adopted as part of health care reform.

**Tameka "Tami" Brown** serves as director of the National Organizations for Youth Safety. In this role, she works with the CEO to manage youth programs, communications, and fundraising initiatives. Previously, Brown served as executive director at the Center for Effective Reading Instruction providing strategic leadership in utilizing evidence-based approaches to reading and learning in promoting high student literacy levels.

**Daniel Busso** is a director of research at the FrameWorks Institute, where he conducts multimethod social science research to investigate patterns of public thinking about socio-political issues. At FrameWorks, he works with a multidisciplinary team of social scientists and communications practitioners who investigate ways to apply innovative framing research methods to social issues and train nonprofit organizations to put the findings into practice. Prior to working at FrameWorks, his past research focused on emotional, cognitive, and neurobiological mechanisms that underlie the association between early adversity and childhood and adolescent mental disorders. He holds a B.S. in psychology from the University of Bath,

England, an M.S. in cognitive science from University College London, as well as master's and doctoral degrees in human development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

**Conor Curran** is a junior at Old Mill High School in Millersville, MD, and is enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Curran has served his local community for the past 6 years advocating for a more equitable school system and increases in mental health resources. Being involved is second nature for Curran as he serves as the president of the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils, the official voice of the students of Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Currently, he is running for the student position on the Anne Arundel County Board of Education in order to help bring about policy changes.

**Kelly Headrick** serves as the senior director of state government affairs and grassroots advocacy for Autism Speaks, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting solutions to the needs of individuals with autism and their families across the spectrum and throughout the life span. In this role, she and her colleagues work—together with volunteer advocates and ambassadors—to promote autism research funding, access to critical autism-related supports and services, access to high-quality special education, and to support other issues of concern to the autism community. Prior to joining the staff of Autism Speaks in early 2020, Headrick worked in a variety of state, regional, and national roles at organizations such as the American Heart Association, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the American Cancer Society, and the Nurse-Family Partnership.

**DeAngelo Hughes** is a sophomore at Ferris State University in Michigan, where he is majoring in social work. A mental health and suicide prevention activist, Hughes struggled with feelings of grief and isolation for years after he lost his mother to hypertensive heart disease when he was 13 and then a brother to life incarceration. In 2014, while a high school sophomore on the east side of Detroit, he came up with a vision to support other young people who were experiencing devastating losses and help them find hope and a sense of comfort in community so that, eventually, no young person would ever have to feel as alone as he did when he lost his mother. With coaching from the Future Project, he launched the Detroit Flutter Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting youth and young adults experiencing loss and grief by teaching them coping skills, raising awareness about teen suicide prevention, mental health, and creating a safe space to share stories of traumatic events.



**Stephanie M. Jones** is the Gerald S. Lesser Professor in early childhood development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research, anchored in prevention science, focuses on the effects of poverty and exposure to violence on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of children and youth. Over the last 10 years, her work has focused on both evaluation research addressing the impact of preschool and elementary focused social-emotional learning interventions on behavioral and academic outcomes and classroom practices, as well as new curriculum development, implementation, and testing. Jones' research portfolio emphasizes the importance of conducting rigorous scientific research and program evaluation that results in accessible content for early and middle childhood practitioners and policy makers. Her developmental and experimental research investigates the causes and consequences of social-emotional problems and competencies; strategies for altering the pathways that shape children's social-emotional development; and programs, interventions, and pedagogy that foster social-emotional competencies among children, adults, and social environments. She received her Ph.D. from Yale University.

**Nicole Kahn, Ph.D.**, serves as a program officer for the Board on Children, Youth, and Families at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She is currently the study director for the Committee on Applying Lessons of Optimal Adolescent Health to Improve Behavioral Outcomes for Youth. Before joining the National Academies, Kahn worked as a social research specialist with the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she collaborated on research projects focused on postsecondary educational attainment, adolescent sexuality, and childhood and adolescent precursors of adult chronic disease. She has also worked as a project researcher at the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development in Washington, DC, and served as a Head Start teacher with the Teach for America program in Phoenix, AZ. She received her B.A. in psychology from Bates College, her M.Ed. in early childhood education from Arizona State University, and her Ph.D. in maternal and child health from the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she studied the sexual experiences and related health outcomes of marginalized populations from adolescence through adulthood.

**Tamar Mendelson**, is a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is a Bloomberg Professor of American Health, director of the Center for Adolescent Health, and co-leader of the Adolescent Health area of the Bloomberg American Health Initiative. A clinical psychologist by training, Mendelson studies the prevention of mental health issues and promotion of positive development in urban adolescents. For over 12 years,

she has tested mindfulness-based prevention programs to enhance student mental health and school success in the Baltimore City schools. Through the center and the Bloomberg Initiative, she collaborates with multiple partners to help reduce the number of young people who become disconnected from school, the workforce, and other key supports.

**Cheryl Polk** (*Planning Committee*) is Safe & Sound's first chief program officer. Safe & Sound has worked for more than 45 years to prevent child abuse and reduce its devastating effects. In this position, Polk supervises the agency's clinical and family teams: Integrated Children & Family Services, which seeks to promote mental health, and Community Education & Strategic Partnerships. Prior to this role, she served as president of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Through her 25-year career as a psychologist, academic, and civic volunteer, Polk has promoted healthy child development, especially for children at risk of school failure and their families. She served as the executive director of the Lisa and John Pritzker Family Fund where her insight into early childhood development and philanthropy helped create innovative intervention programs for children exposed to community and interpersonal trauma. Polk received her Ph.D. in psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology-San Francisco at Alliant International University.

**Carlos E. Santos** (*Planning Committee*) is an associate professor at the University of California, Los Angeles' Luskin School of Public Affairs. Santos' research draws on diverse disciplines, theories, and methods to better understand the implications for development and well-being stemming from overlapping oppressions such as racism and heterosexism that create unique conditions shaped by individual social contexts. He is interested in how individuals cope with these overlapping stressors through attitudes produced by belonging to different social groups (such as having pride in one's ethnic, racial, or sexual identity group) and positions one occupies (being undocumented, for instance), and the effect of such coping on mental health, educational outcomes, and civic engagement. Santos received his Ph.D. in developmental psychology from New York University, a master's degree in education from Harvard University, and a bachelor's degree from New York University.

**Edward Schmit** co-founded IDONTMIND, a mental health awareness campaign and lifestyle brand working to inspire conversations about mental health. Since its launch in 2017, IDONTMIND has raised over \$350,000 for mental health organizations across the country, and is now an official program of Mental Health America, which now fully funds the nonprofit. As the IDONTMIND website and social platforms continue to grow into

a major destination for all things mental health, Schmit oversees all day-to-day operations including product design, e-commerce, social media, and partnership management. To his current work, Schmit brings with him over 8 years of experience in design, fashion, and marketing he gained as the former creative director of a New York entertainment agency. He has worked with best-in-class brands like Google, Showtime, Starbucks, Icelandic Provisions, Maybelline, and more.

**Matthew Shapiro** is a 2013 graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University where he completed his B.A. in interdisciplinary studies. Throughout college, he participated in several internships with the White House, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and several disability organizations in Virginia. In 2014, he developed a disability consulting company called 6 Wheels Consulting, LLC. It is the goal of 6 Wheels Consulting to work with businesses of all types to help advance their understanding of disability culture.

**Deborah Klein Walker** (*Planning Committee*) is the current president of the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (formerly the American Orthopsychiatric Association) and a former president of the American Public Health Association and the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs. She formerly served as vice president and senior fellow at Abt Associates, Inc. and as the associate commissioner for programs and prevention at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Prior to state service, Walker was an associate professor of human development at the Harvard School of Public Health and a faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research and policy interests include child and family policy, program implementation and evaluation, public health practice, disability policy, community health systems, health outcomes, and data systems. She received her Ed.D. in human development from Harvard University.

**Leslie R. Walker-Harding**, is the Ford-Morgan Endowed Professor and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics and associate dean at the University of Washington and the chief academic officer and senior vice president of Seattle Children's Hospital. Prior to returning to Seattle, Walker-Harding was chair of the Department of Pediatrics and medical director of Penn State Children's Hospital. From 2007 to 2016, she was the division chief of adolescent medicine and vice chair of faculty development in pediatrics at the University of Washington. Her research has been focused on preventing a broad span of adolescent risk behaviors and conditions including adolescent and young adult substance abuse, ADHD, and adolescent pregnancy. One national focus of hers has been diversity and inclusion in the health

provider workforce as a way of creating excellence in academic medicine and eliminating health disparities.

**David W. Willis** (*Planning Committee*) is a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy. He leads a national initiative to advance early relational health for child health and communities. A board-certified developmental behavioral pediatrician, Willis was a clinician in Oregon for more than 30 years with a practice focused on early childhood development and family therapy. Most recently, he was the first executive director of the Perigee Fund, a Seattle-based philanthropy focused on strengthening the social and emotional development of all babies and toddlers, and on increasing workforce capacity to enhance it. From 2012 to 2018, he served as director of the Division of Home Visiting and Early Childhood Services at the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal Child Health Bureau in Washington, DC, and continues to be a thought leader in home visiting and early childhood systems. Throughout his career, he has worked for the transformation of child health care in coordination with early childhood communities and focused on the advancement of early relational health and young children's social-emotional and developmental well-being. Willis received his M.D. from Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University.

**Francie Zimmerman** is a senior associate at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and works primarily on the Youth Thrive initiative, focusing on adolescents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She coordinates Youth Thrive's National Network and supports New Jersey's implementation efforts. Previously, Zimmerman was director of family services for Acelero Learning Head Start centers in North Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. In philanthropy, Francie established and operated the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's Child Abuse Prevention Program, making grants to national nonprofit organizations for over a decade. Early in her career, she was an advocate for children in foster care, a special-needs adoption caseworker, and an assistant to the director of New York City's secure detention facility for children, ages 10–15 years old. She has a M.S.W. from Hunter College and a B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University.



## C

# Resources Mentioned by Speakers and Participants Throughout the Workshop

### Evidence-Based Research and Reports:

- *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25388/the-promise-of-adolescence-realizing-opportunity-for-all-youth>.
- *Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25552/promoting-positive-adolescent-health-behaviors-and-outcomes-thriving-in-the>.
- *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25201/fostering-healthy-mental-emotional-and-behavioral-development-in-children-and-youth>.
- FrameWorks research provides an overarching framing strategy to effectively communicate about a wide range of issues that affect children and young people: <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/issues/child-and-adolescent-development>.

### Assessments:

- Youth Thrive Survey: Validated and web-based survey instrument measuring the presence, strength, and growth of protective and promotive factors as proxy indicators of well-being. Access is free of charge. <https://cssp.org/resource/youth-thrive-survey-one-pager>.

### Classroom Strategies and Resources:

- Teaching Restorative Practices for Classroom Circles: <https://www.healthiersf.org/RestorativePractices/Resources/documents/RP%20Curriculum%20and%20Scripts%20and%20PowePoints/Classroom%20Curriculum/Teaching%20Restorative%20Practices%20in%20the%20Classroom%207%20lesson%20Curriculum.pdf>.
- Destress Monday, Weekly practices in breathing, mindfulness, and positivity: <https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/destress-monday>.
- Black Youth Agenda, Black Swan Academy: <https://www.blackswanacademy.org/black-youth-agenda>.

### Training Tools

- Youth Thrive 4 Youth: An interactive, accessible, and engaging training curriculum to help youth better understand what they are going through during adolescence and how to optimize their health and well-being. <https://cssp.org/resource/youth-thrive-4-youth-faqs>.
- Full list of training programs from the American Society for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/get-training>.
- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Training: <https://qprinstitute.com>.

## D

### Recommendations from *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*

#### Recommendations for the Education System

- 6-1: Rectify disparities in resources for least-advantaged schools and students.
- 6-2: Design purposeful but flexible pathways through education.
- 6-3: Teach practical knowledge and nonacademic skills, such as decision making, adaptability, and socioemotional competence.
- 6-4: Protect the overall health and well-being of each student.
- 6-5: Foster culturally sensitive learning environments.
- 6-6: Help adolescents and families navigate the education sector.

#### Recommendations for the Health System

- 7-1: Strengthen the financing of health care services for adolescents, including insurance coverage for uninsured or under-insured populations.
- 7-2: Improve access to comprehensive, integrated, coordinated health services for adolescents.
- 7-3: Increase access to behavioral health care and treatment services.



**7-4:** Improve the training and distribution and increase the number of adolescent health care providers.

**7-5:** Improve federal and state data collection on adolescent health and well-being, and conduct adolescent-specific health services research and disseminate the findings.

### **Recommendations for the Child Welfare System**

**8-1:** Reduce racial/ethnic disparities in child welfare system involvement.

**8-2:** Promote broad uptake by the states of federal programs that promote resilience and positive outcomes for adolescents involved in the child welfare system

**8-3:** Provide services to adolescents and their families in the child welfare system that are developmentally informed at the individual, program, and system levels.

**8-4:** Conduct research that reflects all types and ages of adolescents in the child welfare system.

**8-5:** Foster greater collaboration between the child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and health systems.

**8-6:** Provide developmentally appropriate services for adolescents who engage in noncriminal misconduct without justice-system involvement.

### **Recommendations for the Justice System**

**9-1:** Reduce disparities based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability status, and sexual orientation or gender identity and expression among adolescents involved in the justice system.

**9-2:** Ensure that youth maintain supportive relationships while involved in the justice system and receive appropriate guidance and counsel from legal professionals and caregivers.

**9-3:** Implement policies that aim to reduce harm to justice-involved youth in accordance with knowledge from developmental science.

**9-4:** Implement developmentally appropriate and fair policies and practices for adolescents involved in the criminal justice system.

**9-5:** For those youth in the custody of the justice system, ensure that policies and practices are implemented to prioritize the health and educational needs of adolescents and avoid causing harm.



## E

# Recommendations from *Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes*

### Recommendations for Research

**5-1:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should fund additional research aimed at identifying, measuring, and evaluating the effectiveness of specific core components of programs and interventions focused on promoting positive health behaviors and outcomes among adolescents.

**5-2:** The Division of Adolescent and School Health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should

- update and expand the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to include
  - out-of-school youth (e.g., homeless, incarcerated, dropped out), and
  - survey items that reflect a more comprehensive set of sexual risk behaviors with specific definitions; and
- conduct further research on the ideal setting and mode for administering the YRBS with today's adolescents.

### Recommendations for OASH Programs

**5-3:** The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should fund universal, holistic, multicomponent programs that meet all of the following criteria:

- promote and improve the health and well-being of the whole person, laying the foundation for specific, developmentally appropriate behavioral skills development;
- begin in early childhood and are offered during critical developmental windows, from childhood throughout adolescence;
- consider adolescent decision making, exploration, and risk taking as normative;
- engage diverse communities, public policy makers, and societal leaders to improve modifiable social and environmental determinants of health and well-being that disadvantage and stress young people and their families; and
- are theory driven and evidence based.