



Positive Connections with Supportive People

“Adolescents thrive in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with supportive adults, whether those are parents, coaches, neighbors, grandparents, teachers, program leaders, or mentors. These types of connections are important for all teens and may be difficult for at-risk youth to find and sustain.”¹

Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow[®] (TAG) Research Reviews highlight research, evaluation reports, and other publications that inform the field about key issues in, and effective practices for, fostering improved health, reducing risky behavior, and improving engagement and healthy development in young people. This Research Review focuses on Positive Connections with Supportive People, one of TAG’s Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents.

'I'm hoping that I can have better relationships': Exploring interpersonal connection for young men.²

Examining how young men entering postsecondary education felt about their interpersonal connections with their parents, family, non-parental adults, and peers, this study conducted interviews with 60 young men and performed a literature review on connection as one of the “Five Cs of Positive Youth Development” (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring). They found that emotional support, such as talking and listening, and acknowledging difficulty both played an important role in meaningful relationships formed with influencers. [Read more](#)

Important non-parental adults and positive youth development across mid- to late-adolescence: The moderating effect of parenting profiles.³

Relationships with parents and important non-parental adults and their influence on positive youth development was examined in this study. The authors found that warmth and acceptance and engagement in multiple domains of their children’s lives—not just in their academic life and school—were key to parent-youth relationships and adolescent well-being. [Read more](#)

Informal mentors and education: Complementary or compensatory resources?⁴

The influence of informal adult mentors in the lives of youth was examined in this study. The authors found that mentors are significant influences on the education of young people, and that this effect remains strong and statistically significant even after the effects of other factors (e.g., social background and parent, peer, teacher, and personal resources) are controlled. Based on these findings, the authors noted the importance of programs linking disadvantaged youths to adults outside the family and that these informal mentoring relationships, particularly teacher mentoring, help young people succeed in educational settings and offer great promise for reducing social inequities. [Read More](#)

Leveraging relational assets for adolescent development: A qualitative investigation of youth–adult 'connection' in positive youth development.⁵

'Connection' in the context of non-parental youth–adult relationships (YARs) was the focus of this research, which sought to understand how youth (ages 11-18) feel connected to important adults in their lives, what facilitates this connection, the different perspectives of youth on these relationships, and areas for improvement in facilitating connection in programs and interventions. The authors provided several observations: 1) connection is an essential aspect of close youth-adult relationships; 2) shared interests or traits was one theme all youth noted as being foundational in their connection; and 3) higher connected youth had lower reported anxiety and relationship avoidance while lower connected youth had higher relationship anxiety and avoidance. [Read more](#)

Person-to-person interventions targeted to parents and other caregivers to improve adolescent health: A community guide systematic review.⁶

Person-to-person targeted interventions can be effective in reducing the number of risky or problem behaviors in adolescents. Based on 12 studies used for final inclusion in this literature review, the authors found sufficient evidence that person-to-person interventions (e.g., face-to-face, direct personal contact) intended to improve their caregivers' parenting skills were effective in reducing adolescent risk behaviors. [Read more](#)

Positive youth development, willful adolescents, and mentoring.⁷

Whether motivation and mentoring result in positive youth development (PYD) was explored in this article. The author primarily focused on the idea that youth are producers of their own growth and that has implications for mentoring, specifically how mentors can help awaken, support, and guide youth's capacity for growth. Several frameworks for future exploration were presented around the process whereby adults can support youth's engagement in positive development. [Read more](#)

Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth.⁸

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) was the first national study of adolescent health designed to measure the social settings of adolescent lives, the ways in which adolescents connected to their social world, and how these social settings and connections influenced health. Add Health found that when families are engaged in their teens' lives and hold high academic expectations, teens were protected from a variety of health risks, including emotional distress, drug use, violent behavior, and early sexual activity. [Read more](#)

Social support from parents, friends, classmates, and teachers in children and adolescents aged 9 to 18 years: Who is perceived as most supportive?⁹

This study focused on perceived support by parents, friends, classmates, and teachers. The authors aimed to shed light on whether adolescents, in a sample of 9- to 18-year-olds, perceived friends as more supportive than parents and, if so, to what extent and at what age. The authors found that perceived support from parents was found to be equal to perceived support from friends among 9- to 15-year-olds, while friend support exceeded parent support among 16- to 18-year-olds. Both were significantly higher than support perceived from classmates and teachers. [Read more](#)

The interest-driven pursuits of 15 year olds: "Sparks" and their association with caring relationships and developmental outcomes.¹⁰

Adolescents' deep interests, or "sparks," can be affected by the support provided by parents, extended family, adults at school, neighbors, friends, mentors, and other caring persons in the development of 15-year-olds' interest-driven activities. Participants were asked three questions regarding the extent to which encouragement, financial help, and transportation to spark-related activities were provided by different people in their lives. The authors' findings were consistent with that of other research suggesting that subjective well-being was derived from engagement in satisfying activities and the sense of connectedness that such engagement provides. Caring relationships with both parents and a variety of non-parental adults proved to be key in the pursuit and development of sparks. [Read more](#)

The long-term economic benefits of natural mentoring relationships for youth.¹¹

Mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) provide youth with a non-parental adult mentor whose purpose is to promote positive growth (e.g., improved self-esteem) and prevent engagement in risky behaviors (e.g., delinquency) through a nurturing relationship. The authors investigated whether the presence of a positive mentor for youth would result in higher educational attainment and earnings as a young adult and whether a natural mentor has a different impact on youth without a father figure. Contrary to what was expected, the presence of natural mentors was not associated with higher future earnings in general; however, youth without a father figure who had a male mentor had higher earnings. [Read more](#)

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- ¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health. (April, 2016). *Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow® 2016 playbook*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- ² Arbeit, M. R., Hershberg, R. M., Rubin, R. O., DeSouza, L. M., & Lerner, J. V. (2016). 'I'm hoping that I can have better relationships': Exploring interpersonal connection for young men. *Qualitative Psychology, 3*(1), 79-97. doi:10.1037/qup0000042.
- ³ Bowers, E., Johnson, S., Buckingham, M., Gasca, S., Warren, D., Lerner, J., & Lerner, R. (2014). Important non-parental adults and positive youth development across mid- to late-adolescence: The moderating effect of parenting profiles. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 43*(6), 897-918. doi:10.1007/s10964-014-0095-x.
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- ⁵ Futch Ehrlich, V. A., Deutsch, N. L., Fox, C. V., Johnson, H. E., & Varga, S. M. (2016). Leveraging relational assets for adolescent development: A qualitative investigation of youth–adult 'connection' in positive youth development. *Qualitative Psychology, 3*(1), 59-78. doi:10.1037/qup0000046.
- ⁶ Burrus, B., Leeks, K. D., Sipe, T.A., Dolina, S., Soler, R., Elder, R., Barrios, L., Greenspan, A., Fishbein, D., Lindegren, M.L., Achrekar, A., & Dittus, P. (2012). Person-to-person interventions targeted to parents and other caregivers to improve adolescent health: A community guide systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 42*(3), 316-26. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2011.12.001.
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- ⁸ Blum, R. W., & Rinehart, P. M. (1997). *Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, MD.
- ⁹ Bokhorst, C. L., Sumter, S. R., & Westenberg, P. M. (2010). Social support from parents, friends, classmates, and teachers in children and adolescents aged 9 to 18 years: Who is perceived as most supportive? *Social Development, 19*(2), 417-426. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9507.2009.00540.x.
- ¹⁰ Ben-Eliyahu, A., Rhodes, J. E., & Scales, P. (2014). The interest-driven pursuits of 15 year olds: "Sparks" and their association with caring relationships and developmental outcomes. *Applied Developmental Science, 18*(2), 76-89. doi:10.1080/10888691.2014.894414.
- ¹¹ Timpe, Z. C., & Lunkenheimer, E. (2015). The long-term economic benefits of natural mentoring relationships for youth. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 56*(1-2), 12-24. doi:10.1007/s10464-015-9735-x.

