

NON-NEGOTIABLES REFLECTION TOOL

SUPPORTING BELONGING & NAVIGATION FOR ADOLESCENTS

Developmental practices are the dynamic supports young people need, in different ways and from different people, throughout their lives. Adults can learn these practices, and develop strategies for putting them in place, whenever and wherever they engage with young people.¹

Why Focus on Developmental Practice?

A wealth of science tells us the elements of practice depicted in the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design are essential for development.² By ensuring young people have these supports, we optimize their ability to experience whatever it is we want them to experience.

How much are developmental practices actually codified and supported within your organization? There are likely many policies, practices, procedures, and programs that your organization says should explicitly support these practices. There could also be mandates that your organization requires that seem counter to these practices.

Why is it important to explore this question? Research has shown that if front-line staff and administrators do not get signals that they should proactively take specific actions in their work, they will tend to be risk-averse or assume that the positive developmental practices that they are employing are actually exceptions to the institutional expectations.³ By reviewing our current operating procedures, policies and practices against the research of what makes a difference, we can work together to ensure that every young person is receiving the most effective services, supports and opportunities possible.

The Guiding Principles for Whole Child Design

The latest in the science of learning and development affirms that learning is optimized when it starts with strong relationships in environments filled with safety and belonging. In these contexts, children and youth can then fully engage in challenging experiences and opportunities. Intentional development of skills, mindsets and habits can be best maximized when these other components are in place. Optimal learning and engagement also require personalization – individualized supports – that takes into account a young person’s specific needs.

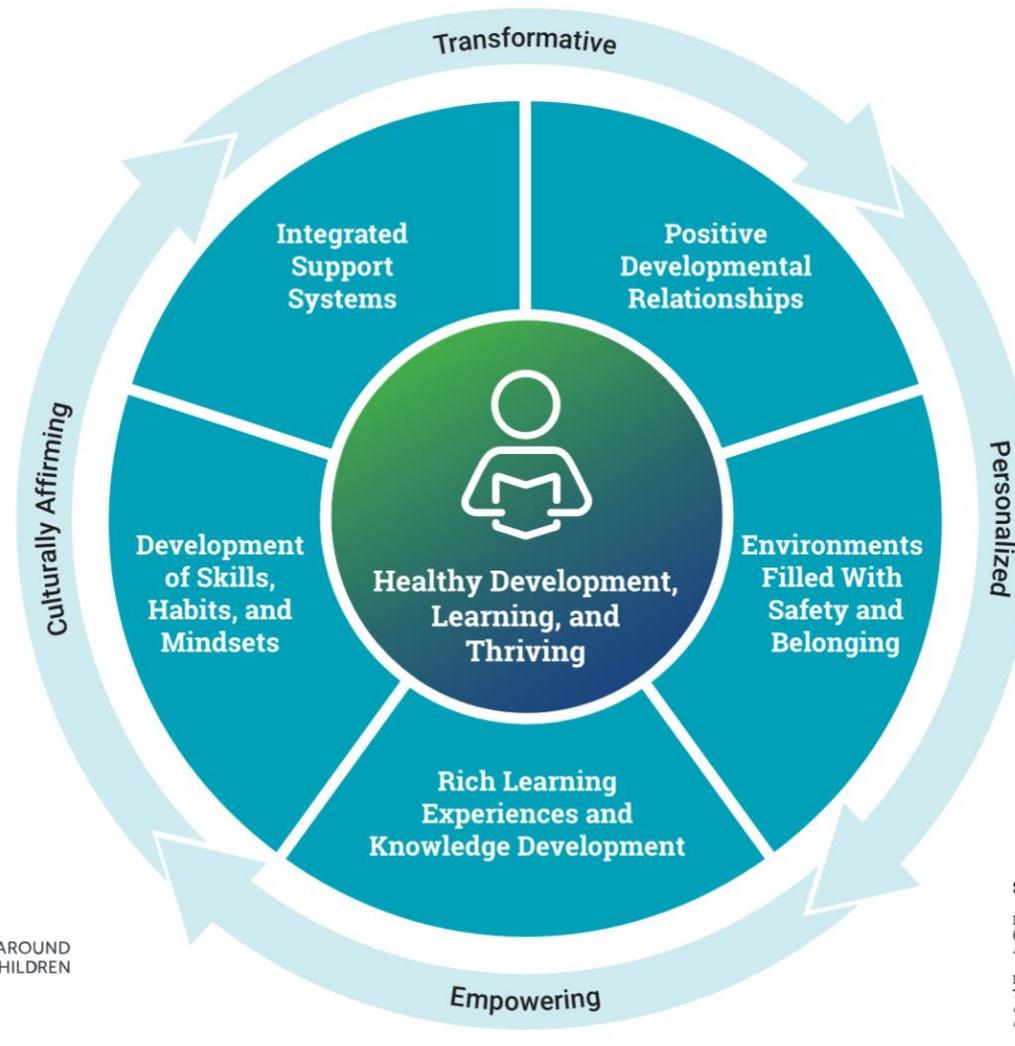
These principles serve as the framing for this tool to reflect on how your program is effectively fostering belonging for youth and young adults.

¹ Stephanie Malia Krauss, Karen Pittman, and Caitlin Johnson; The Forum for Youth Investment (2016) *Ready by Design: The Science (and Art) of Youth Readiness*.

² Linda Darling-Hammond, Lisa Flook, Channa Cook-Harvey, Brigid Barron & David Osher (2019) *Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development*, Applied Developmental Science.

³ The Forum for Youth Investment (2014) *Collective Impact for Policymakers: Working Together for Children and Youth*. <https://forumfyi.org/knowledge-center/collective-impact-for-policymakers/>

Essential Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole-Child Design



Sources:

Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children. (2021). *Design principles for schools: Putting the science of learning and development into action.*

Forum for Youth Investment (with Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children) (2021). *Design principles for community-based settings: Putting the science of learning and development into action.*

Adapted from [Design Principles for Community-Based Settings: Putting the Science of Learning & Development Into Action](#)

Instructions: Using the columns on the right, please rate each of the below categories from 1 (low) to 5 (high) on how important you feel it is and how well it is currently being practiced across your program, organization, agency, or system.

	DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICES	ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE <i>EQUITABLE ECOSYSTEMS</i> WORKGROUP	HOW IMPORTANT? 1 (LOW) – 5 (HIGH)	HOW MUCH PRACTICED? 1 (LOW) – 5 (HIGH)
POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS	Form developmental relationships between adults and young people that promote leadership and help young people discover their strengths, expand their possibilities, and challenge growth.	Consider how well adults in the learning setting are encouraging and cultivating intergenerational relationships across the communities in which youth and young adults live and whether these relationships are centered to deepen cultural and community connections. Culturally-centered models of youth-led leadership should be understood and encouraged in ways that build on the strengths and possibilities that youth and young adults bring.		
	Foster meaningful relationships among young people across shared identity and difference and building intentional connection around shared experiences.	Consider how settings acknowledge and engage youth and young adults across difference (identity, experiences within the setting and in the larger ecosystem) and how intentional connection is nuanced to acknowledge what young people bring to their experiences.		
	Cultivate relationships with family members using a strengths-based lens that provides opportunities for engagement and collaborative decision-making	Consider a broad range of supportive others that youth and young adults identify, including family members, community elders, natural teachers, and natural advocates that might be engaged.		
ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY & BELONGING	Cultivate safety and consistency , implementing routines that support risk-taking, helping young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed	One articulated measure of safety for youth and young adults is a sense of belonging which enables young people to build personal connections and serves as a foundation for developing agency. Consider whether youth and young adults who are seeking to build alternative positive narratives, have opportunities to do so and supports to navigate other environments using these alternative narratives.		
	Build community using positive behavior management practices, fostering positive peer to peer relationships, and co-developing program expectations with young people.	Many settings have leveraged the power of healing-centered practices and culturally-centered ritual and celebration as ways to cultivate positive community, including co-creating inclusive, ceremonial practices with youth and young adults.		
	Be culturally responsive and inclusive , using affirmations that establish the value of every young persons’ many identities and abilities, building on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families, and developing young people’s knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs.	Consider how adult staff are acknowledged and supported in the ongoing work of inclusion and the need to be in constant dialogue with young people. Beyond cultural responsiveness and inclusion, settings should acknowledge that efforts by youth and young adults to integrate identity often lead them to assert their agency and critically engage in positive change. Consider how adults in the setting are positioned to support young people, particularly those identities that have been marginalized.		

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RICH INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCES	Use scaffolding and differentiation techniques to support individual learning styles, assessing and adjusting programming to fit the interests, strengths, and needs of young people while providing asset based personalized supports as well as fostering cooperative learning.	For many youth and young adults, their learning and interests dovetail with the robust intellectual and social challenges that present themselves in their larger ecosystem (e.g., racial justice). Consider how youth and young adults are partnered with and supported as they exercise agency in response to these issues and take their responses into other ecosystem contexts.		
	Facilitate inquiry-based approaches to learning to help youth be active learners, providing regular and thoughtful feedback and creating opportunities for young people to reflect and revise.	Consider how youth and young adults’ inquiry and criticism of systems and settings that influence their lives is facilitated. Consider how youth and young adults’ assessments of these settings are affirmed and how transferable skills learned in one setting are explicitly identify so they that can be applied to navigate, self-advocate, and/or promote change in another. Where possible, settings should identify where youth and young adults and their co-collaborators can affect change.		
	Adopt a culturally responsive approach to learning by explicitly connecting students’ diverse experiences and cultural assets with program content, promote racial-ethnic identity development, voice, and agency, and facilitating conversations around equity and social justice.	A culturally responsive approach to learning goes beyond inclusion and centers cultural and community knowledge systems, including modes of learning. This has implications for program design and evaluation.		
DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, MINDSETS AND HABITS	Integrate social and emotional learning in a culturally responsive context, fostering awareness and understanding of young peoples’ emotions, providing them with strategies that supports them to both express and manage emotions, and doing so in a way that ensures cultural sensitivity and responsiveness.	Settings should develop language for naming belonging and othering that connects to young people’s experience and provides tools for youth and young adults to directly address challenges as they arise – allowing them to build an integrated social and emotional learning skill set.		
	Develop productive mindsets and habits by nurturing growth mindset, providing opportunities for planning and goal setting, and supporting interpersonal skills like empathy, collaboration and problem solving.	Settings should disrupt deficit-based narratives and nurture a growth mindset that allows youth and young adults to reimagine identities by providing culturally responsive opportunities for collaboration, mastery, problem-solving, and meaningful personal and communal goal setting.		
	Incorporate healing-centered practices , employing responsive strategies based on the principles of safety, trust, collaboration, choice, and empowerment and promoting physical and mental wellbeing through mindfulness strategies, breathing exercises, and other stress.	Consider how youth and young adults are provided opportunities to respond to injustice in the systems that influence their lives and in the wider ecosystem. Settings should recognize and incorporate communal strategies to support wellbeing.		

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INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS	Connect youth to supplemental learning opportunities by partnering with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports, monitoring young people’s academic growth, and adding adult capacity to the school day.	Non-traditional environments can be a source of both core and supplemental learning opportunities, particularly those that support whole-person learning. Settings should seek partnerships with community-based and cultural institutions, mentors, and social justice efforts that align with young people’s academic and social emotional needs.		
	Promote access to other supports and opportunities that foster health and well-being by ensuring mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health in addition to academic supports and participating in whole-school comprehensive community partnership models.	Consider connection to the physical and psychological means and supports that help youth and young adults to fully participate in programs and positive developmental experiences, including connecting them to basic resources, providing stability through routines, and facilitating smooth “hand-offs” as they connect to other supports.		



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