



THRIVING IN YOUTH

THRIVING

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THRIVE

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Thriving in Youth

What is Thriving?

Thriving is a forward, purposeful motion towards achieving one's full potential.

Thriving is an orientation toward life marked by balance, meaning, and learning from experience, in which one knows and finds resources that foster one's talents, interests, and aspirations, and through which one contributes to the common good.

History of Thriving

Thriving is a relatively new construct within the field of Positive Youth Development. Until recently, there was a dearth of research about thriving, and consequently, the concepts have often been unrecognized, misunderstood or disconnected from on-the-ground practice. As such, Thrive Foundation made significant investments in research from 2000 to 2008 in order to understand the key indicators for thriving, and to ascertain the positive roles of family, school, communities in growing thriving.

Prominent researchers in the field of Positive Youth Development, including Dr. Bill Damon of Stanford's Center on Adolescence, Dr. Linda Wagener of Fuller Seminary, Dr. Peter Benson of Search Institute, and Dr. Rich Lerner of Tufts University, contributed to the definition of thriving and indicators of thriving. They have recently published numerous books and journals that promote thriving concepts. Thrive Foundation is actively translating this academic research to practical application through the development of thriving tools.

How is Thriving Unique?

Thriving is closely related to other youth development concepts, such as Resiliency, Flourishing, Character Strengths and Developmental Assets. However, while thriving clearly builds upon these concepts, it is distinct in several ways, which include:

- Thriving is movement towards reaching one's full potential, or optimum, rather than avoidance of negative outcomes or a focus limited to standard competence. Applicable to all youth throughout their entire development, thriving is not contingent upon facing and overcoming adversity.
- Thriving is founded upon the notion of brain plasticity, or one's undefined capacity for growth and change throughout life.
- Thriving is developmental, which implies movement and an upward life trajectory, while recognizing that natural development also includes stasis and regression.
- Thriving is a holistic view of one's life, encompassing a comprehensive set of indicators, rather than a view of how one is doing in just one or several specific indicators.
- Thriving incorporates the notion of Purpose, which includes having a hopeful future, and the moral component of contribution beyond oneself.
- Thriving is eco-systemic, reflecting the bi-directional influence of a person and his or her environment, and the notion that one is an active contributor to his or her own development.

What are Indicators of Thriving?

Thrive Foundation defined a set of 12 Indicators of Thriving, based on a synopsis of the most recent thriving research. The Indicators are organized within the six "Cs" suggested by Dr. Rich Lerner, Director of Tufts' Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development:

1. **Competence:** Healthy Habits, Life Skills, Love of Learning, Emotional Competence & Social Skills
2. **Connection:** Positive Relationships & Spiritual Growth
3. **Character**
4. **Caring**
5. **Confidence:** Confidence & Persistent Resourcefulness
6. **Contribution:** Purpose



Implications for Practice

To thrive, youth require the guidance of caring, supportive adults who communicate and model high expectations for developing the six C indicators of thriving. These adults support youth to aspire to reach their potential, to grow thriving skills in the face of life's challenges, and to develop goal management skills that facilitate progress towards positive goals. In circumstances of high environmental trauma, youth may need assistance in unpacking adaptive negative behaviors first, before they will fully engage in a positive youth development process.

Adult support requires different but complementary approaches. ¹ Based on his longitudinal research, Dr. Lerner

asserts that "we need to create and support programs that address both the promotion of positive development and prevention of problem behaviors. We cannot simply assume that one takes care of the other." ²

The Thrive Foundation's Theory of Change presents a set of assumptions for the positive development approach, based upon thriving research about how adult guides effectively move youth along a thriving path. The theory of change asserts that...

If Adult Guides model the way and help youth:

- Identify and grow inner passions, or sparks, which is a catalyst of thriving;
- Understand brain development and apply a growth mindset, or the belief that one can continually grow and improve in skills and intelligence;
- Self-reflect on Indicators of thriving & risk factors that get in the way of thriving; and
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- Develop goal management skills that build indicators of thriving.....

Then youth will be on a road to a hopeful future.

In working towards their full potential , youth thrive when they:

- Build positive, sustained relationships with caring adults, with high quality, high quantity time;
- Learn life skills that include self-reflection and goal-management;
- Practice these skills in meaningful home, school and community activities. ³

Recommended Reading



Sparks
by Dr. Peter Benson



Mindset
by Dr. Carol Dweck



Switch
by Chip Heath & Dan Heath



The Path to Purpose
by Dr. William Damon



The Good Teen
by Dr. Richard Lerner

Endnotes

1. Heather Starnes, Live in Peace.
2. Phelps, E., Balsano, A., Fay, K., Peltz, J., Zimmerman, S., Lerner, R., M., & Lerner, J. V. (2007). Nuances in early adolescent development trajectories of positive and of problematic/risk behaviors: Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *Child and Adolescent Clinics of North America*, 16(2), 473-496.
3. Dr. Richard Lerner.