

# Integrating Adolescent Brain Development Into Child Welfare Practice With Older Youth

A Training Curriculum for  
Child Welfare Workers

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## LETTER FROM ANGELO McCLAIN

Dear Colleagues:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is excited to offer this new training curriculum, *Integrating Adolescent Brain Development into Child Welfare Practice with Older Youth*. The curriculum incorporates the latest research from the report “The Adolescent Brain: New Research and its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care” developed by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This new research is combined with knowledge related to trauma, implicit bias, and building social capital and provides strategies on how to more effectively work with older youth who experience the child welfare system.

We thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the NASW Foundation for their support in developing this curriculum. Specifically, we appreciate the efforts of Leslie Gross and Alexandra Lohrbach of the Casey Foundation, Jamie Bennett of Case Commons and NASW consultants Joan Morse and Joan Levy Zlotnik, as well as NASW staff members Cynthia Henderson and Bob Arnold. We also are grateful to Octavia Fugerson, Nyeelah Inniss, Maria Garin Jones and Abyssinia Washington Tabron for providing invaluable feedback as part of the curriculum design committee.

I began my social work career as a child welfare worker, after obtaining my BSW degree in Texas. I eventually spent six years as the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services before joining NASW in 2013. Therefore, I know personally how important utilizing this training can be. I look forward to hearing about how this is put to use throughout the country to improve outcomes for older youth in the child welfare system.

Thank you for your interest.

Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW  
CEO, NASW  
President, NASW Foundation

## HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

*Integrating Adolescent Brain Development into Child Welfare Practice with Older Youth* is a curriculum that has been created by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) for training child welfare workers. NASW received support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to develop this curriculum as part of that Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative's commitment to "Train and equip practitioners to understand the role of trauma and racism, and employ effective practices to help young people understand their experiences and develop effective strategies for healing and growth."<sup>1</sup>

The curriculum was developed for in-service training of child welfare workers, after workers have received their core or pre-service training. However, agencies may find that some of the content in the modules might be applicable for infusion into their core training. This might be especially true for agencies that specifically serve older youth in foster care or youth who are transitioning from foster care. Social work educators might also use this curriculum to enhance courses on child welfare practice, working with adolescents, or in human behavior and the social environment (HBSE) courses.

The curriculum is designed for delivery during a 2 day training session, with Module One to Module Seven being covered on day one and Module Eight to Module Thirteen to be covered on day two. We realize, however, that many agencies and training academies have diverse structures to their training programs, and thus the material can be adapted in different ways to fit your setting and curricula that you are already using. The curriculum includes an array of learning strategies including didactic information, role plays, small and large group discussions, working with partners and self-reflection. There are video and audio files imbedded in the curriculum as well.

We would like to stress that learning about the continuing development of the brain during adolescence and young adulthood is core to the content in this curriculum and underpins the learning objectives. Since many child welfare workers, and actually, most people, know little about new research on the developing brain, we recommend that potential trainees read *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Systems with Adolescent Brain Development* available at <https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/>. It is included in the Appendix along with additional relevant resources that are available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation as well as links to several NASW resources. When you are training from this curriculum you may want to provide copies of some of these resources, along with the PowerPoint slides and the accompanying handouts that are included as part of this training package, to the trainees.

NASW hopes that this is a useful resource. Please help us by disseminating information about its availability through your networks.

**SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE: DAY ONE**

<b>Module Name</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Materials Needed</b>
<b>Module One: Setting the Stage</b>	45 minutes	Walkabout Guided Group Discussion	Four prepared flip charts and markers Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Two: Letter to a Child</b>	60 minutes	Individual Activity Guided Group Discussion Individual Reflections	Handout: Letter to a Child Handout: Reflections - Day One Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Three: Adolescent Development</b>	60 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Pairs activity Audio Story Individual Reflections	Handout: Normal Developmental Tasks Required to Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood – Considering Experiences in Foster Care Handout: Think Back Audio File Handout: Reflections - Day One Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Four: The Developing Adolescent Brain</b>	60 minutes	Quiz Guided Group Discussion Videos Small Group Individual Reflections	Handout: Glossary of Brain Terminology Handout: Quick Quiz Handout: Brain Building Strategies Handout: Reflections - Day One Video: How the Brain Develops Video: Why the Teenage Brain has an Evolutionary Advantage Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Five: The 3R's of Adolescent Brain Development</b>	60 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Pairs activity Audio Stories Case Study: Small Group Activity Individual Reflections	Audio Files: Relationships, Regulation, Rewards Handout: Think Back Case Study: Maria Handout: Quick Quiz Handout: Reflections - Day One Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Six: Trauma and Healing</b>	45 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Small Group Activity Individual Reflections	Handout: Reflections - Day One Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Seven: Changing the Narrative about Adolescence</b>	30 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Small Group Activity	Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides

## SESSION-AT-A-GLANCE: DAY TWO

Module Name	Time	Methods	Materials Needed
<b>Module Eight: Key Learnings</b>	45 minutes	Pairs Activity	Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Nine: Promoting Brain Gains</b>	60 minutes	Video Triad Activity Guided Group Discussion Individual Reflections	Handout: Bio of a Young Person Worksheet: Brain Friendly Interventions Handout: Seven Adolescent Brain-Friendly Interventions Reflections - Day Two Video: Promoting Brain Gains for Youth Emerging from Foster Care Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Ten: Promoting Brain Gains through Positive Youth Development</b>	45 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Pairs Activity 1,2,4 All	Handout: Definitions Easel paper and markers Ball of String Small beach ball Handout: Reflections - Day Two PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Eleven: Examining Our Attitude When Working with Young People</b>	60 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Role Play Individual Reflections	Handout: How We View and Approach Young People Handout: Reflections - Day Two Easel paper and markers PowerPoint Slides
<b>Module Twelve: Promoting Youth Adult Partnership</b>	75 minutes	Guided Group Discussion Small Group Activity	Worksheet: Language Matters When Building Partnership Handout: Language Matters When Building Partnership Handout: Youth / Adult Partnerships: Self – Assessment Tool
<b>Module Thirteen: Developing an Action Plan</b>	45 minutes	Individual Activity	Handout: Action Plan Handout: Reflections - Day One and Two



# CURRICULUM COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

## Competencies

- » Recognize how our own current beliefs and attitudes about adolescence impact our work.
- » Recognize how adolescent brain development influences adolescent thinking and behavior.
- » Recognize the link between early life trauma of abuse and neglect and how adolescent brain development provides opportunities for healing.
- » Recognize the role of trauma and racism, and employ effective practices to help young people understand their experiences and develop effective strategies for healing and growth.
- » Consider socio-cultural assumptions and implicit biases when working with young people.
- » Recognize how youth development principles and practices can enhance outcomes for older youth.
- » Recognize the value of authentically partnering with young people.

## Learning Objectives

### **At the completion of training, participants should be able to:**

- » Describe the transition outcomes of older youth in foster care.
- » Recognize how normal adolescent development is impacted by foster care placement.
- » Recognize how adolescent brain development influences adolescent thinking and behavior.
- » Identify how trauma effects brain development and impacts learning.
- » Apply brain science when interacting with young people by creating authentic partnerships.
- » Identify trauma informed strategies to support better outcomes for young people.
- » Identify strategies to change the way child-serving systems think about adolescence.
- » Recognize how youth development principles and practices can enhance outcomes for older youth.
- » Describe the importance of building social capital with older youth in foster care.
- » Describe how to help older youth build social capital.
- » Describe using effective strategies that support healing and promote growth.
- » Describe the knowledge and skills needed to promote youth-adult partnerships.

## DAY ONE

### Module One: Setting the Stage

#### Learning Objective:

- » **Create an environment that gets participants ready to learn.**

**Time:** 45 minutes

#### Materials:

**Four prepared pieces of easel paper and markers. Each prepared page displays one of the following questions:**

- » What is a strength you have working with young people?
- » What is one challenge you have working with young people?
- » What is one burning issue you would like to see addressed in this training?
- » What is one strategy you have used to engage young people in planning for their future?

#### Facilitator Notes:

- » **Welcome** participants to *Integrating Adolescent Brain Development into Child Welfare Practice with Older Youth*.
- » **Introduce** yourself to the group, sharing relevant information about your experience in working with older youth who have experienced the child welfare system.
- » **Provide** an overview of training content, sharing the competencies (over-arching statements of the knowledge and skills this learning experience will address) and the learning objectives (specific knowledge and skills participants will be able to demonstrate at the conclusion of the learning experience).
- » **Direct** participants to visit each piece of newsprint and record their response to the question. (This does not need to be in any particular order. Participants may walk from station to station and record their responses. It will be somewhat disorganized but provides a good opportunity for participants to meet, mingle, and begin to engage with the topic material.)
  - › What is a strength you have working with young people?
  - › What is one challenge you have working with young people?
  - › What is one burning issue you would like to see addressed in this training?
  - › What is one strategy you have used to engaged young people in planning for their future?
- » **Note** that the responses will assist the facilitators in meeting the group's learning needs.
- » **Ask** participants to return to their seats when they have answered each of the four questions.

**Note to Facilitator:** Use one additional piece of newsprint and label it “Parking Lot.” This will allow you to record issues that are important but might not be addressed in this training and can be shared with the training department.

- » **Ask** participants to introduce themselves by noting their name, their agency, number of years they have been in their current position, and a burning issue that they would like addressed from the newsprint.

**Thank** participants for sharing and summarize by:

- » Noting similarities or differences in the responses
- » Advising participants that the training will address at least some of their “burning issues” and training needs;
- » Noting that you as a trainer hope to gain new skills and understanding of practice challenges by listening to their experiences:

***Now we are going to think about what outcomes we want for older youth.***

## Module Two: Letter to a Child

### Learning Objective:

- » Describe the transition outcomes of older youth in foster care.


**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » Handout: Letter to a Child
- » Handout: Reflections - Day One

### Facilitators Notes:

- » **State** that we are going to look at youth outcomes from a personal level.

 **Refer** participants to the **Handout: Letter to a Child** and ask participants to think about a young person they are close to or their own child. Ask them to take five minutes to fill in the blanks of the letter. Ask for volunteers to share some of the things they hoped for their young person and record it on one side of the newsprint. Some examples might be to fulfill their dreams, be responsible, to have secure and stable relationships, etc.


- » **Ask** the group to share the types of outcomes that they hope for the young people they work with and what the child welfare system sees as success for young people as they transition from foster care. Record the responses on the opposite side of the easel pad. Some examples are graduate high school, find housing, maintain employment, be financially stable, etc.
- » **Ask** the group, what are some of the differences in the two lists?
- » **Ask** the group, why they think the lists are so different?



**Say:** Let's look at the current statistics<sup>2</sup> for young people as they transition from foster care.

- » **State that more than 23,000 children will age out of the U.S. foster care system every year.**
  - › After reaching the age of 18, 20% of the children who were in foster care will become instantly homeless.
  - › Only 1 out of every 2 foster kids who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by age 24.
  - › There is less than a 3% chance for children who have aged out of foster care to earn a college degree at any point in their life.
  - › 7 out of 10 girls who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant before the age of 21.
  - › The percentage of children who age out of the foster care system and still suffer from the direct effects of PTSD is 25%.
  - › In 2015, states failed to reunite more than 20,000 young people with their families or place in permanent homes

- » **Let's also look at the following qualitative data from former foster youth:**
  - › Former foster youth indicate that they understand the value of relationships and want to be in relationships, but often become frustrated and experience stigmatization by campus staff who are unaware and uninformed of their needs and experiences.<sup>3</sup>
  - › Olson, Scherer, & Cohen (2017) found that young adults emerging from foster care were able to identify and understand problems they were facing, yet struggle with decision-making and problem solving from a residual effect of being in foster care. The study participants describe being required to make decisions quickly while in care, often without supports to help them learn how to consider options in the face of a problem. This frames a common struggle as an environmental result rather than an individual deficit that is common among references to foster youth.<sup>4</sup>
  - › Former foster youth report a strong determination to attend and finish college and are motivated to break the cycle of poverty, change long-term outcomes, and prove they could be successful despite a difficult childhood.<sup>2,5,6</sup>
- » **Ask**, what is the difference between the two types of data?
- » **Ask**, what are former youth in care telling us that can inform our practices to improve outcomes?
- » **Ask**, how do race, gender, and identity influence the data?
- » **Tell** the group, about 55 percent of children in the U.S. foster care system are children of color, and those children generally experience poorer outcomes than white children. To improve outcomes for children of color, child welfare professionals must understand how structural and institutional racism operates within our society and within the child welfare system and affects young people and their families.<sup>7</sup>
- » **Ask** the group, why this data is important?
- » **State** that it grounds us in the reality of what young people who are transitioning out of foster care experience. Just as we discussed in the last activity about changing the narrative for older youth, we owe it to them to change these statistics.
- » **State** that in order to change the narrative in our work with older youth, we need to move towards promoting healthy development by creating a balance between outcomes that focus on ability (graduating high school, finding housing, etc.) and those that focus on building a positive identity.
- » **State** that throughout our time together we are going to explore strategies we can use in our work with young people to promote healthy development.

 **Refer** participants to **Handout: Reflections - Day One**. Tell the group that throughout our time together we have created opportunities for them to reflect on the materials. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the first question: What is one thing I can incorporate into my practice with young people to influence outcomes?

**Now we are going to focus on adolescent development.**

## Module Three: Adolescent Development

### Learning Objective:

- » Recognize how normal adolescent development is impacted by foster care placement.

**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Normal Developmental Tasks Required to Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood – Considering Experiences in Foster Care
- » **Handout:** Think Back
- » **Audio File:** Sixto Cancel
- » **Handout:** Reflections - Day One


### Facilitators Notes:

- » **Ask** the group, when we think of adolescents in general, what words come to mind? Record the responses on the easel pad.
- » **Ask** them to look at the responses and cover the following discussion points:
  - › We often describe young people by their behavior
  - › We are quick to label young people in the child welfare system through their behavior which limits their opportunities
  - › We sometimes label normal adolescent behavior as dysfunctional.




### **Summarize** the following for the group:


- › From birth, children are exposed to people and environments that provide opportunities for physical, social, and psychological growth over time. Age markers determine developmental tasks in relation to physical and motor skills such as learning to tie your shoes, developing healthy relationships with family and peers, and the development of life skills such as goal development and coping with stress. Research indicates that these developmental tasks are learned over time through positive and negative feedback from the environment, most commonly from parents, teachers and peers.<sup>8</sup>
- › As youth reach adolescence, common developmental markers include exploration of peer relationships, increased autonomy from parents, and exploration of future plans for education and career.
- » **Tell** the group that during adolescence young people are trying to answer the following questions<sup>9</sup>
  - › Who am I?
  - › Am I normal?
  - › How do I fit in?

 **Refer** to and review **Handout: Normal Developmental Tasks Required to Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood – Considering Experiences in Foster Care**. It addresses the tasks of adolescence and the effect of foster care experiences on developmental tasks. It also examines how experiencing foster care, in addition to various cultural considerations, may influence the degree to which a young person can take on and engage with those developmental tasks.

- » **Ask** how do race, gender, and identity influence our perceptions of youth behavior?
- » **Tell** the group, we must become aware of the role unconscious and implicit bias can play in our own decisions and actions and understand that experiences with racism and internalized oppression may negatively influence the way young people of color view themselves.<sup>10</sup> Most of all, we must be aware of how important access to opportunities are to helping a young person develop and grow. Only through awareness of these dynamics can we understand young people in the fullness of their identity, experiences, values and customs.<sup>11, 12</sup>

 **Divide** participants into pairs and ask them to pick a developmental task. Based on what youth in foster care might say and cultural considerations, what is one thing you could do to assist a young person with this developmental task? Give them five minutes. Ask for 5 volunteers to share their discussions.


As we have just discussed, placement in foster care can hinder development. Family is that essential presence – the thing that never leaves you even if you have to leave it.<sup>13</sup> It is important to understand the roles and dynamics that family plays in development of young adults.

 **Tell** the group that *Family Privilege*, as defined by John Seita (2005) are “benefits, mostly invisible, that come from membership in a stable family... It is an invisible package of assets and pathways that provides us with a sense of belonging, safety, unconditional love and spiritual values.”<sup>14</sup> With *Family Privilege*, children observe parents or older siblings to see the effort it takes to be successful in life. *Family Privilege* provides the chance to hope and to dream.<sup>15</sup>

- » **Ask** the group, what are some “normal” developmental tasks that young people in care are often disconnected from?
  - › Having friends come over to your home;
  - › Having a place to stay when you come home college;
  - › Going on vacation with your family;
  - › Celebrating holidays as a family;
  - › Advantage of extra-curricular activities.
- » **Ask** the group, how can you create opportunities for young people to promote healthy development?


 **Refer** participants to the **Handout: Think Back**. Review the questions with the group:

- » **Ask** participants to take 10 minutes to complete the handout.


 **Divide** the group into pairs. Allow 10 minutes for sharing and reflection using only these two questions:

- › What were some of the positive memories you have of your older adolescence?
- › What were some of your worries during your older adolescence?

- » **Ask** for volunteers to share some of their discussion. Lead a large group discussion comparing how the group's experiences are different and/or similar to young people that they are serving. Draw out from the group the importance of significant people in their journey from adolescence to adulthood.

 **Audio Story:** Sixto Cancel - Now let's hear the voice of a young person who shares his experiences to some of these questions.

- » **Ask** the group, what did they notice about his experiences? What are some of the similarities and differences in experiences?

 **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout:** *Reflections - Day One*. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the second question: How can I incorporate this information into my practice with young people?

***As we will discuss in this training, neuroscience gives us a glimpse into how we can interpret data about young people and advocate for policies that support young people.***



## Module Four: The Developing Adolescent Brain

### Learning Objectives:

- » Recognize how normal adolescent development is impacted by foster care placement.
- » Recognize how adolescent brain development influences adolescent thinking and behavior.

**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Glossary of Brain Terminology
- » **Handout:** Quick Quiz
- » **Handout:** Brain Building Strategies
- » **Handout:** Reflections - Day One
- » **Video:** *How the Brain Develops*
- » **Video:** *Why the Teenage Brain has an Evolutionary Advantage*
- » Easel paper and markers

### Facilitator Notes:



**Tell** the group - in our last activity we discussed how adolescent growth and development must be grounded in a holistic approach to understanding the intersections of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, geographic location and the unique experiences and personalities of each young person. Another component of adolescent development is the science behind brain development specifically during adolescence. Adolescent brain development both shapes and is shaped by the larger experiences, relationships and environments in which young people exist.

- » **Ask** the group, how many are familiar with the latest research on the adolescent brain?

 **Let's do a quick quiz** to gauge the group's knowledge. **Refer participants to the Handout:** Quick Quiz.



**Tell** the group that now we are going to watch a video of *How the Brain Develops*.

- » **Ask**, what are your reactions to the video?
- » **Tell** the group that this is a great way to explain to young people how their brain is developing.
- » **Tell** the group that we are going to go into more depth on adolescent brain development and provide the answers to the quick quiz. Review the following with the group:

The brain develops from the back to the front and from the inside out. **Quick Quiz/A #1**



**Share** the following with the group:

- › **Brain Stem:** First part of the brain to develop. Is developed by the time we are born. Controls unconscious functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature.
- › **Mid Brain:** Second part of the brain to develop. Develops in early childhood. Controls auditory and visual processing, motor regulation, sleep and wake cycle and appetite.
- › **Limbic System:** Third major part of the brain to develop is comprised of several specific structures of the brain such as the hippocampus and the amygdala. This is the emotional center of the brain housing attachment, pleasure, arousal, hormone release, memory and detection of fear.
- › **Prefrontal Cortex:** Last part of the brain to develop. Located right behind the forehead. Houses what are often called executive functions including the ability to control impulses, regulate the emotions coming from the limbic system, engage in introspection, plan ahead, focus attention and think critically. **Quick Quiz/A #2**

Our brains are developing longer throughout the lifespan than we previously thought. Our brains continue to develop until our mid to late 20s. Adolescence spans approximately from ages 10-26 years old.

This window of development is not just categorized by age, but by specific changes happening in the brain.

- » Research shows that humans have a unique ability to mold their own brains through thinking, planning, learning and acting, known as “neuroplasticity,” which is especially malleable during adolescence. This malleability means that our brains are changing shape in response to the experiences and interactions we have when we are adolescents. This has major implications for rewiring and healing from past experiences and trauma. Note: The group will talk about this further in an upcoming module.
- » During adolescence, the brain is pruning away the grey matter that exists between different parts of the brain, which clears for more efficient pathways for synapses to connect and improve communication between cells and different parts of the brain. During adolescence, as many as 30,000 synapses may be lost per second over the entire cerebral cortex. As unused synapses are pruned away, other neurons are being strengthened. The strengthening of neuropathways is a process called myelination. What is being reinforced/acted upon is strengthened (myelination) and what is not reinforced or used is being pruned away. This is the prime time for adolescents to wire their brains in positive ways – to “use it and improve it.” **Quick Quiz/A #4**
- » To leverage this neuroplasticity and opportunity for healing, it is important to understand how young people process information and make decisions. Young people are still developing the ability to use the skills in the prefrontal cortex. Young people are slowly relying less on emotion and impulse to drive decision-making and shift to using the skills in the prefrontal cortex to slow down, engage in reflection and think critically. The prefrontal cortex requires opportunities to practice those skills with supportive adults. **Quick Quiz/A #3**





**Refer** participants to the **Handout:** *Glossary of Brain Terminology* as a reference guide.



**Watch the video:** *Why the Teenage Brain has an Evolutionary Advantage*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=P629TojpvDU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P629TojpvDU)

Adolescence is a unique developmental period, meaning adolescents are not big kids nor are they mini adults, however, child-serving systems are often created for or modeled off of structures developed for young children (ex. Child welfare) or adults (ex. Juvenile justice).

-  **Refer to Handout:** *Brain Building Strategies* and divide participants into small groups of three. Assign each group two strategies and have them generate examples of what practice would look like if you were doing these things.
  - » **Give** the groups ten minutes to generate examples. Distribute easel paper and markers. Ask each group to appoint a recorder and a spokesperson to share the group's ideas. Debrief the activity having each group display their completed newsprint.
  
-  **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout:** *Reflections - Day One*. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the third question: How can I share this information with the young people I work with?

***Now we are going to introduce the 3R's of adolescent brain development.***

## Module Five: The 3Rs of Adolescent Brain Development: Regulation, Relationships, Rewards

### Learning Objectives:

- » Recognize how normal adolescent development is impacted by foster care placement.
- » Recognize how adolescent brain development influences adolescent thinking and behavior.

**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Audio Files:** Relationships, Regulation, Rewards (Nyeelah Inniss)
- » **Handout:** Think Back
- » **Handout:** Case Study - Maria
- » **Handout:** Quick Quiz
- » **Handout:** Reflections - Day One

### Facilitator Notes:



**Tell** the group that in 2014 Laurence Steinberg, in his book, *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of adolescence*,<sup>16</sup> discussed the three major aspects of the brain that are especially active and undergoing changes during adolescence.

- » **Tell** the group, neurological research shows us that young people can evaluate risks as well as adults; however, the intensity of dopamine —the pleasure chemical — flooding the brains can easily outweigh consideration of potential negative outcomes. Positive experiences during adolescence can “fortify healthy neural connections, develop executive function and stimulate learning and healing.” Positive experiences that contradict the negative expectations of a child who has experienced trauma are critical to helping the brain readjust itself.
- » While young people are developing skills to think critically and regulate emotions, they can make steady decisions when they can consult with others, are given enough time and are in calm—environment. This is referred to as “cold cognition,” which results in steadier decision-making. However, young people may still struggle in “hot cognition” situations, when they feel time pressured, are emotionally aroused in some way, or are subject to peer pressure.
- » Let’s look at some “hot cognition” moments that can happen to young people in the foster care system:
  - › I am not given any notice when moving to another home and having to pack up my belongings in a few hours.
  - › At planning meetings, I am unable to explain myself as people are blaming me without listening to what I have to say – maybe it would be easier to just not attend and tell my worker what is going on.
  - › I feel like I am treated differently in independent living programs because of my race and gender identity/expression.




**Ask** the group to take a moment to share with a partner about the following questions:


- › How did you learn some important life skills?
- › What did you learn from a risk you took or a new experience you tried?

 **Listen:** Recording on Regulation (Nyeelah Inniss)

 **Ask** the group, in what ways can you support young people in making thoughtful decisions? (Especially in stressful or high-pressure situations!)

 **Tell** the group, regulation develops in the context of relationships with others. During adolescence, young people experience heightened arousal in the brain regions that are sensitive to social acceptance and rejection. Adolescents are particularly attuned to emotional cues such as facial expressions. Social scenarios are often heightened and magnified during adolescence. This heightened social attunement paired with a continued development around emotional regulation may result in young people reacting strongly out of emotions. Sometimes adults view this as overreacting or being dramatic. Science is showing us that young people are really experiencing the world in intense and emotional ways.

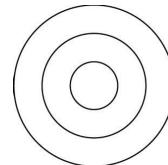
Heightened social attunement also means that adolescents actually learn more when they are with their friends and peers. Such influence can be used to help young people grow together in a nurturing, positive environment because being with peers triggers the reward center of the brain and motivates young people in exciting ways.

 **Ask** the group to take a moment to share with a partner about the following questions:

- › Throughout your older adolescence, who was important to you?
- › What did support look like to you in your adolescence?

 **Listen:** Recording on Relationships (Nyeelah Inniss)

- » **Ask** the group, how do you work with young people to ensure they have lifelong relationships and permanent connections? What have you found to be helpful and/or meaningful in strengthening relationships with the young people you support?
- » **Tell** the group, that one way to help young people mine their relationships is to use a simple mapping tool.
- » **Draw** three circles on the easel pad and ask participants to do the same:
- » **Tell** the group that the inner circle represents people closest to them.
- » **Ask** participants to write the names of those people.
- » **Tell** the group the next circle represents those people and places that did not make it into the inner circle.
- » **Ask** participants to write the names of those people and places.
- » **Tell** the group the outer circle represents those people and places in their network, but they do not see or go to them often.



- » **Ask** participants to write the names of those people and places.
- » **Ask** participant to share their mapping tool with the person on their right. Give participants five minutes to share their mapping tool.



**Ask** participants the following questions:

- › What was it like to share their maps with their partner?
- › How could they use this mapping tool with young people?



**Tell** the group, adolescents are highly motivated by new and exciting experiences. Those experiences and positive reinforcement trigger a flood of dopamine and light up the reward center of the brain. Things such as peer approval, acceptance and praise trigger this flood of dopamine into the brain, reinforcing actions and behavior. Understanding the concept of rewards extends beyond the concept of incentives (material goods, money). Science is helping us understand what motivates and drives adolescent behavior.

Young people learn by doing and are fueled by the dopamine burst. During adolescence, young people have the highest levels of dopamine in their systems, than in either childhood or adulthood. Dopamine is a chemical that links action to pleasure. Adolescents naturally seek new excitement through experiential learning and trying new things (taking risks). These heightened levels of dopamine also contribute to the “reminiscence bump,” meaning experiences we have during adolescence stick with us farther into adulthood. Heightened levels of dopamine paired with a “still developing” prefrontal cortex give scientific rationale for why young people still give in to impulse and are most focused on instant gratification as opposed to long term planning. **Quick Quiz/A #5**

Heightened levels of dopamine paired with a prefrontal cortex that is still developing is what fuels the bravery that young people act on. Adults often term this as “risk taking.”

- › Risk taking is normal and necessary.
- › Healthy response to risk-taking is the responsibility of adult partners.
- › Young people need opportunities to make decisions and have consistent responsibilities in a supportive environment.

Many youth-serving systems are typically risk averse and in child welfare, keeping young people physically safe is a priority. However, because of that, we sometimes forget that young people want and deserve to do normal things (e.g., sleepovers, travel, learn to drive, etc.). We need to promote normalcy for young people as they have taken risks by entering the child welfare system, leaving their families, communities, and friends, and having to adjust to living with a new family.

Research and experience show that children and youth of color are more often perceived as adults and are pathologized and criminalized at higher rates than their white peers.<sup>17,18</sup>



**Ask** the group to take a moment to share with a partner about the following questions:

- › What motivated you during your adolescence?
- › What was your favorite song, book, show or movie during adolescence?
- › Think about a risk you took when you were an adolescent/young adult, what did you learn?
- › How did your network of support respond?



**Listen:** Recording on Rewards (Nyeelah Inniss)

- » **Ask** the group, how are the systems we work in set up to respond to young people engaging in experiential learning or “risk taking?” Considering what you have learned so far, what implications do those responses have on adolescent development?



**Divide** into small groups using a case study to integrate our learning. Allow 15 minutes for the activity. Facilitator should circulate around the room to provide assistance and clarity when necessary. Ask each small group to share the highlights from their conversations for each question.



**Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout:** *Reflections - Day One*. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the fourth question: What is one thing I can do to integrate the 3R's into my practice with young people?

***Tell the group that we are now going to focus on trauma and healing.***

## Module Six: Trauma and Healing

### Learning Objectives:

- » Identify how trauma effects brain development and impacts learning.
- » Identify trauma-informed strategies to support better outcomes for young people.
- » Describe using effective strategies that support healing and promote growth.

**Time:** 45 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Reflections - Day One

### Facilitators Notes:



**Tell** the group that placement in foster care causes trauma for the youth and their families. Three common elements characterize all forms of trauma: the event was unexpected, the individual was unprepared, and there was nothing that the person could do to prevent the event from happening.<sup>19</sup>

However, just as the brain can become “wired” to expect a traumatic environment, it can be “re-wired” through trauma-informed services and positive relationships with caring adults to accept and expect safety and security. These relationships can serve as bridges for healing and growth and build the youth’s social capital that supports them in adulthood. These supportive adults must be grounded in understanding trauma and the behavioral reactions to trauma. Not understanding about trauma can lead to inaccurate labeling in schools, placement disruptions, school suspensions, and ineffective child welfare services.<sup>20</sup>



**Tell** the group, the following are some elements of being trauma-informed when planning with youth<sup>21</sup>:

- › Developing an understanding of trauma that includes an appreciation of its prevalence among young people in foster care and its common consequences.
- › Individualizing the young person.
- › Maximizing the young person’s sense of trust and safety.
- › Assisting the young person in reducing overwhelming emotion.
- › Providing strengths-based services.




**Divide** participants into five small groups. Assign each group an element of trauma-informed practice with youth. Ask each group to think about what their practice would look like for their assigned element. Give them 10 minutes to come up with at least four concrete examples. Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to share their group’s ideas.

Use the following to augment the discussion<sup>22</sup>:

- » **Talk** about and honor past relationships while recognizing those who will continue to provide support. Understand the role of historical and intergenerational trauma due to racism.



- » **Introduce** activities and practices that are particularly useful in helping young people begin to heal from their experiences of trauma and loss through such practices as mindfulness meditation, restorative yoga and self-guided sports like swimming and running.
  - » **Encourage** young people to discuss their faith and cultural traditions and provide opportunities for them to continue to participate in ways and with people meaningful to them. Some youth may feel that prayer or other spiritual activities are useful for healing.
  - » **Listen** to and respect young people's truths that may not align with your beliefs or experiences.
  - » **Have conversations** with youth about their hopes and dreams for the future.
  - » **Plan** as far in advance as possible with young people about upcoming changes and transitions, including changes in caseworkers. Be open about case planning. Let them know what to expect and what resources they will have.
-  **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout: Reflections - Day One**. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the fifth question: What elements of being trauma-informed when planning with youth will I incorporate into my practice?

## Module Seven: Changing the Narrative about Adolescence

### Learning Objective:

- » Identify strategies to change the way child-serving systems think about adolescence.

**Time:** 30 minutes

### Materials:

- » Easel paper and markers

### Facilitator Notes:



**Share** with the group that dominant media and advocacy narratives leave out important elements of the full story of adolescent development. As a result, members of the public misunderstand adolescence and draw their own (often faulty) conclusions.

- » **Ask:** How does the child welfare system think about adolescence?



**Divide** participants into small groups and ask them to think about our discussions today and develop a campaign slogan and poster to change the narrative amongst child welfare professionals to these three questions:

- › When you hear the words adolescence what comes to mind?
- › How does supporting healthy adolescent brain development contribute to our communities and society?
- › How do social inequities connect to adolescent development and what can be done to address these connections?<sup>23</sup>

- » Have each group **hang their posters** around the room and have everyone walk about to look at them.



**Conduct** a large group discussion using the following questions:

- › What message stood out for you?
- › How do you think that message can change the narrative for youth in care?
- › How can you support changing the narrative through your work with young people?
- › Think about completing this sentence stem, I can.....

- » **Thank** the group for their participation today and share that, when presenting in a two-day format, tomorrow will we be discussing youth engagement and how to promote brain gains.

## DAY TWO BEGINS HERE WHEN DELIVERING IN A TWO-DAY TRAINING FORMAT

### Module Eight: Key Learnings

#### Learning Objective:


- » Identify participants' key learning content from day one.

**Time:** 45 minutes

#### Materials:

- » Easel pad and markers

#### Facilitator Notes:

- » **Welcome** the group back for Day Two of *Integrating Adolescent Brain Development into Child Welfare Practice with Older Youth*. Tell the group, we have a “training ritual entitled key learnings.”
- » **Ask** the group to take two minutes to silently reflect on the materials from Day One of *Integrating Adolescent Brain Development into Child Welfare Practice with Older Youth* and write down two things that stood out for them.
- »  **Divide** participants into pairs and have them share their key learning for five minutes. Tell them that they are going to share their discussions with the large group.
- » **Ask** for a volunteer pair to share their key learnings and proceed around the room until all pairs have reported. Record all key learnings on the easel pad and post around the room so participants can use them as a reference.
- » **State** that yesterday we focused on adolescent brain development and today we are going to use a youth development lens to think about authentic youth engagement and how to promote brain gains.

## Module Nine: Promoting Brain Gains

### Learning Objectives:



- » Apply brain science when interacting with young people by creating authentic partnerships.


**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Bio of a Young Person
- » **Worksheet:** Brain Friendly Interventions
- » **Handout:** Seven Adolescent Brain-Friendly Interventions
- » **Handout:** Reflections – Day Two
- » **Video:** Promoting Brain Gains for Youth Emerging from Foster Care

### Facilitator Notes:

-  **Show** video Promoting Brain Gains for Youth Emerging from Foster Care.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRXQaa-DMXg&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRXQaa-DMXg&feature=youtu.be)
- » **Ask** the following questions to discuss the video:
  - › What is one thing that struck you about this video that pertains to your work with youth?
  - › What are some ways you are currently promoting brain gains in your work?
-  **Ask** the group to think about a young person that they are working with and complete the Handout: Bio of a Young Person. Show the following as a sample:
 

Gender Identity:	Male
Age:	17
Race/Ethnicity:	Hispanic
Permanency Goal	Reunification
Strengths:	Helped to care for younger siblings
	Is bilingual in Spanish and English
	Good Student
	Enjoys writing
Challenges	Has been suspended from school for fighting
	Runs away frequently from kinship foster home
-  **Divide** participants into groups of three and ask them first to share their bios as if they were telling a story about that young person and then use the **Handout: Brain Friendly Interventions**. Give them five minutes to complete their bio about their young person.

Based on the story they have told ask the group to think about what brain friendly interventions they would propose to promote brain gains with this young person.

 **Review the Handout:** *Brain Friendly Interventions* with the group.

- » **Ask** them to think about - how would they involve the young person in planning these brain friendly interventions? It is important to think about how assumptions about the young person may impact our intervention.
- » **Ask** each small group to complete their worksheet for their young person. Give the groups fifteen minutes to complete the activity.
- » **Ask** for four volunteers to present their bio and two top interventions to the large group. After each group, ask if there are other interventions they would suggest to be discussed with the young person. Repeat until all four volunteers have spoken.
- » **Refer** participants to the **Handout:** *Seven Adolescent Brain-Friendly Interventions*. Ask the group to compare and contrast the handout to the large group discussion.
- » **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout:** *Reflections - Day Two*. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the first question: What specific brain friendly interventions can I incorporate into my practice with young people?

***Tell the group now we are going to focus on Positive Youth Development as a strategy to build brain gains.***

## Module 10: Promoting Brain Gains Through Positive Youth Development

### Learning Objective:

- » Recognize how youth development principles and practices can enhance outcomes for older youth.
- » Describe the important of building social capital with older youth in foster care.
- » Describe how to help older youth build social capital

**Time:** 75 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Definitions
- » Easel Paper and Markers
- » Ball of String
- » Small beach ball
- » **Handout:** Reflections – Day Two

### Facilitator Notes:



**Tell** the group, over the last two decades there has been a movement towards utilizing a Positive Youth Development approach when engaging with young people.

- » **Ask:** What does Positive Youth Development mean? Record responses on the easel pad.


Knowing about adolescent brain development helps us understand where young people are at developmentally and informs how we can approach engagement. It stresses how by holding a Positive Youth Development frame to our interactions and work, we are supporting healthy development. Positive Youth Development can counteract the effects of trauma and promote healthy brain development.

Positive Youth Development is not an event or an activity, but, rather a process in which young people engage over time. Having young people serve on a youth board or council is not youth development. Positive Youth Development is about our every interaction with young people.

- » **Refer** participants to the **Handout: Definitions**. State that one definition of Positive Youth Development is from the federal *Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs* and is as follows:

“Positive Youth Development or PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.”<sup>24</sup>

» **Ask** them to read the definition and **write down words** that stand out for them.

 **Divide** into pairs and share their words and create a news headline out of their key words that sums up their positive youth development definition. Give each dyad a piece of paper and marker to write their definition and post it around the room.

» **Ask**, what are some commonalities and differences that they see identified by the group?

» **Continue to reinforce** that this is a process and built through relationships with young people.

» **State** that Positive Youth Development = Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments.

 **Tell** the group, Positive Youth Development approaches involve three types of inputs that can be represented as **Services, Opportunities, and Supports (SOS)**.<sup>25</sup>

**Draw** a large “Y” on the easel pad. At the top, write services, and on the two sides, write supports and opportunities. Use the definitions below to begin a discussion with the group.

» **Services** could include education, preparation for adulthood activities, after school activities, trauma-informed services which exhibit:

- › Relevant instruction and information;
- › Challenging opportunities to express oneself, to take on new roles, and be part of a group;
- › Supportive adults and peers who provide respect, high standards and expectations, guidance and affirmation to young people.

» **Opportunities** include chances for young people to learn how to interact with the world around them. They are given opportunities to test out ideas and behaviors and experiment with different roles.

The roles must be perceived as challenging and legitimate to young people. These are tasks that are taken on and done by the young person not things that are done to them.

Opportunities are done BY young people and not FOR young people.

Based on this definition, ask what types of opportunities do you provide to the youth with whom you work? Record their answers under opportunities on the easel pad.

» **Ask**, how do opportunities promote brain gains?

- » **Supports** are defined by interpersonal relationships that allow the young person to take full advantage of existing services and opportunities. Supports take on various forms but they must be affirming and respectful, ongoing, and offered by a variety of people. Supports are relationship-driven not transactional.

Supports are done WITH young people rather than TO them.

- » **Ask**, how do supports promote brain gains?
- » **Introduce** the concept of functional helping as opposed to dysfunctional rescuing.<sup>26</sup> Strategies to enhance your role as a functional helper are:
  - › Resist doing things for people that they can do for themselves;
  - › Provide clear and constructive feedback that notes positive behaviors as well as areas for improvement;
  - › Engage young people as partners in formulating plans for improvement of their lives or behaviors

### Optional Activity: My Social Web


Remind the group of the activity we did yesterday where they looked at all the social supports in their network. Ask for five volunteers to come up to the front of the room and form a circle. Ask them to think of people that support them and how they do so. Facilitator starts the activity by holding on to the end of the yarn, naming their support person and what kind of support is given. The facilitator throws the ball of yarn to another person in the circle. The person who catches the ball of yarn names their support person and what kind of support is given. As the activity continues, a web that connects the participants will appear. Make sure that everyone participates at least once.

After the web has been spun, introduce the beach ball. Explain to the group that the ball represents all of us and the web of support is made up of all the people mentioned.

Throw the ball onto the web and encourages the group to move it around without letting it slip through the gaps in the web. If the web cannot support the ball, continue adding to it until the ball bounces easily on the web without falling through.

Use the following questions to debrief the activity:

- » How many different types of people did the group name (family, teachers, friends, extended family, mentors)?
- » What happens to us when the gaps in our support networks are too wide?
- » Which attributes do supportive people have that are important to you?

 **Tell** the group, another way of building networks of support can often be referred to as building social capital.

- » **Ask:** What do we mean when we say, we need to build social capital with young people?
- » **Record** responses on easel pad.



- » **Review** the definition of social capital:<sup>27</sup>
  - › Social capital is comprised of social networks and social relationships, a bonding between similar people and a bridging between diverse people. One scholar described social capital as the value that is created by investing in relationships with others through processes of trust and reciprocity.
- » **Tell** the group, there are three recognized dimensions of social capital:
  - (1) the quantity of an individual’s social relationships,
  - (2) the quality of those relationships, and
  - (3) the value of the resources that partners in social relationships can potentially make available to one another.

Social capital is fundamentally about how people interact with each other.
- » **Ask:** Why is social capital, or building networks of support for young people important in addition to pursuing legal permanency?

**Note to Facilitator:** Young people deserve legal permanency. As part of engaging with older youth it is critical to build life-long connections.

- » **Tell** the group, we are going to explore building social capital with young people. Tell the group we are going to do an activity called 1, 2, 4, All.
- » **Share** the following directions with the group:
- » **Ask** them to silently reflect and write down suggested responses to the following questions for two minutes:
  - › How can you work with young people to build their social capital?
  - › What ideas or actions do you recommend?
  - › How does social capital promote brain gains?



**Divide** into pairs and generate ideas, building on ideas from self-reflection for two minutes.

- » **Share** and develop ideas from your pair in foursomes (notice similarities and differences) for four minutes
- » **Return** to the large group and ask, “What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?” Each group shares one important idea with the large group.

**Note to Facilitator:** During adolescence, peer to peer relationships are heavily trusted and leaned on and that peer relationships fit into social support networks.



**Tell** the group, as we have discussed in day one, science also has contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the impact of trauma on the developing brain. Positive youth development services, opportunities, and supports are essential in counteracting the effects of trauma to promote healthy brain and social development in adolescence. In

addition, research on complex trauma and ambiguous loss reveal the critical need for effective trauma-informed and trauma-specific practices in addressing the identity and grief-related issues that older youth and young adults in foster care are likely to experience. The concepts of resiliency and neuroplasticity provide a foundation for developing trauma-informed child welfare practice and trauma-specific mental health services and supports for young people in foster care.<sup>28</sup>

- » **Tell** the group, Positive Youth Development is not merely a good practice but instead is a neurological imperative. Positive Youth Development is especially critical for young people in care who may be experiencing developmental delays as a result of trauma and loss. Adolescence is a period of “use it and improve it” in brain development. When young people are actively engaged in positive relationships and opportunities to contribute, create, and lead, they “use it” to develop their skills to become successful adults. It is through the formation of internal and external assets—including family and community—that young people thrive. Multiple positive relationships are essential in supporting them in achieving their unique aspirations. The chemistry of the adolescent brain is what often causes young people to seek new excitement through increasingly risky behaviors. Young people need positive youth development opportunities so that they can engage in healthy risk taking via constructive, meaningful activities.<sup>29</sup>
- » **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout: Reflections - Day Two**. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the second question: How can I incorporate a positive youth development philosophy into my practice with young people?

***Now we are going to examine how attitudes influence youth engagement.***

## Module Eleven: Examining Our Attitudes When Working with Young People

### Learning Objectives:


- » Recognize how youth development principles and practices can enhance outcomes for older youth.

**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** How We View and Approach Young People
- » **Handout:** Reflections – Day Two


### Facilitator Notes:

 **Emphasize** the importance of examining our views and attitudes when working with young people. Note that these are influenced by many factors including our own families, policies, work experiences, training, supervision, and even our experiences in seeking and receiving different types of help.

- » **Draw** the following diagram on easel pad:



- » William A. Lofquist in his *Technology of Prevention Workbook* suggests that young people can be viewed in one of three ways. Each viewpoint has an impact on the degree in which we involve them in planning and our approach to services. He examines the spectrum of adult attitudes toward youth which we have adapted to working with families.<sup>30</sup>
- » **Refer to Handout:** How We View and Approach Young People.

 **Share** the following information with the group:

#### Youth being viewed as **Objects**:

*When young people are viewed as objects, the worker has little value for them and has ultimate control over the case. A less extreme view is that the worker knows best and families are the objects of our good intentions. There is little room for youth input or for inclusion of their ideas. This view is worker driven, and values compliance and policy. For young people it creates the sense that things are being done “to” them.*

**Youth being viewed as *Recipients*:**

*This view puts emphasis on young people benefiting from the services offered. Workers include young people in participation in the planning process, but with the focal point on how the young person will benefit from the service. There is no focus on what the young person has to offer, and the worker is in control of the conditions for participation. There is some opportunity for building a sense of ownership in the decision-making process. This viewpoint creates the feeling that things are being done “for” the young person by the worker who knows best.*

**Youth being viewed as *Resources/Partners*:**

*When young people are viewed as resources and partners, it is based on a respect for the contributions they can make. Decision-making and leadership roles are shared between youth, adult, and workers. This is created when workers, along with young people, learn the attitudes and skills needed for shared leadership and decision-making. It creates the feeling of doing “with” for both the worker and the young person.*

**Now let’s think about some of the attitudes towards youth involved in the child welfare system.**

- » What are the prevalent attitudes and approaches youth encounter as they negotiate the various services, supports, and opportunities?
- » Which of the three approaches contributes to building a positive relationship? (When young people are viewed as resources/partners it generally contributes to more positive engagement.)
- » When is the “Object” approach most appropriate? Recipient? Resource? (“Object” might be appropriate in emergencies or when a basic need must be met). Though the intent is to keep the young person safe the impact may feel very different for the young person without information and having someone available they trust to talk with.
- » “Recipient” might be appropriate when there is an agreed upon need that can be readily met. Though the intent or intention is making good on a promise to a young person quickly, the impact on the young person is that they miss out on important information and engaging with the young person in learning.
- » “Resource”/“Partner” is clearly most appropriate when seeking to engage with a young person toward meaningful change.

**Ask** the following questions and record responses on the easel pad:

- » Where are you treated as an object? (responses may include: by the IRS, media, health insurance provider)
- » Where are you treated as a recipient? (responses may include: doctor, customer service/shopping, service at restaurant)
- » Where are you treated as a resource/partner? (responses may include: work, family, volunteer)

**Ask** the next series of questions and records their responses on the new easel pad:

- » How does it feel when you are treated as an object? (Responses may include: I get angry, I feel resentful)
- » How does it feel when you are treated as a recipient? (Responses may include: I feel helpless, manipulated, entitled, pampered, grateful someone is doing it for me)
- » How does it feel when you are treated as a resource/partner? (Responses may include: I feel empowered, capable)

**Ask** the next series of questions and record responses on the easel pad:

- » What behaviors might you observe if young people are treated as objects? (Responses may include: aggressive, resentful, resistance, unwilling to engage.)
- » What behaviors might you observe if young people are treated as recipients? (Responses may include: lack of interest, unwilling to engage, resistant.)
- » What behaviors might you observe if young people are treated as resources/partners? (Responses may include: engage with team, participatory, assist in identifying services and solutions.)

**Note** that the way youth feel closely parallels the way you feel when you are treated as an object, recipient, or resource/partner.

**Summarize** the discussion by saying that we have all experienced being treated as objects, recipients and resource/partners. It is critical to make the connection between how young people are treated with how they feel and how they behave.



**Conduct a role play** to give participants an opportunity to experience how the different approaches impact engagement.

- » **Divide** participants into pairs.
- » **Explain** that they are to role play the part of a worker and a youth working on a plan toward high school graduation.
- » **Ask** that the pairs identify one person to be the worker and one to be the youth.
- » **Note** that they will be given two minutes to play the role in each of the three approaches—object, recipient, and resource/partner.
- » **Explain** that the pairs will begin by playing the scenario as if the youth is being approached as an “object”. Remind them that in this situation the worker is basically “doing to” or telling the person what to do.
- » **Ask** participants to begin and call time after 2-3 minutes.


- » **Ask** participants to begin the next role play with the worker now approaching the youth as if the youth is a “recipient”. Remind them that in this situation the worker is basically trying to use persuasion and seeking to get buy-in. We often think of this approach as “doing for”.
- » **Call** time after 2-3 minutes.
- » **Ask** participants to begin the final role play with the worker now approaching the youth as if the youth is a resource/partner. Remind them that as a “resource/partner” the youth’s input and perspective are sought as part of the solution. We often think of this approach as “doing with”.

**Debrief** the role play by asking the following questions of the participants who had the “youth” role:

- » How did the conversation change as the worker used different approaches?
- » What feelings did you have when you were approached as an “object”? “recipient”? “resource”/ “partner”?
- » How did it change your level of motivation or desire to participate in planning or in services?

**Debrief** the role play by asking the following questions of the participants who had the “worker” role:

- » In what ways did your intentions change as you altered your approach?
- » What skills did you employ when you made the shift to partnering with youth?
- » What kinds of questions did you ask when engaging from the resource/partner attitude?
- » Which approach did you find easiest? Most challenging?
- » Did you find yourself reverting back to relating to the youth as an object or a recipient when you were trying to relate to them as a resource/partner?

 **Tell** the group to refer to their **Handout: Reflections - Day Two**. Ask each participant to silently reflect on and answer the third question: How can I move towards working with young people as resources and partners?

- » **Summarize** that now that we have examined prevalent adult attitudes towards youth, let’s look at how to authentically engage with young people. The engagement of young people succeeds best when it is authentic and when it is supported by youth-adult partnerships.

## Module Twelve: Promoting Youth—Adult Partnership

### Learning Objective:

- » Describe the knowledge and skills needed to promote youth-adult partnerships.


**Time:** 75 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Worksheet:** Language Matters When Building Partnership
- » **Handout:** Language Matters When Building Partnership
- » **Handout:** Youth/Adult Partnerships: Self-Assessment Tool

### Facilitator Notes:

- » **State** youth-adult partnership is a Positive Youth Development and engagement strategy.

-  **Tell** the group, youth-adult partnership treats young people as equal partners, cultivates trust, enables young people to build self-esteem, and supports the development of problem-solving and leadership skills they will need in adulthood. Youth-adult partnership requires sharing information, having honest conversations, respecting varied experiences and opinions and setting clear expectations regarding roles and decision-making. A few examples of youth-adult partnership include:
- › collaborating on case plan development;
  - › co-designing and facilitating trainings to educate child welfare professionals; and
  - › co-presenting resources and information to community partners.

The quality of mutuality distinguishes youth-adult partnerships from parent-child, student-teacher, and mentoring relationships.<sup>31</sup>

Mutuality is very different from relationships in which adults take leadership roles and young people are assigned inferior roles, or programs in which youth make all of the decisions while the adults sit back and watch.

- » **Ask:** What are some skills you use when working in partnership with youth? Record responses to on the easel pad.
  - › Use the following to promote discussion:
    - Listening to young people to avoid unintentional harm
    - Including them in all planning conferences and intentionally creating space for them to participate – “nothing about us without us”
    - Focusing on strengths, celebrate success
    - Providing honest and realistic feedback – it is important to make the distinction between feedback and telling young people what they should do. What happens when we as adults tell young people what they should do?
    - Paying attention to the power dynamics and boundary issues – As workers we have inherent power based on our role. It is important to recognize this power; how do you navigate powers that are non-negotiable when trying to engage young people as partners?



**Share** the following with the group:

Often, we engage youth in leadership activities, without acknowledging the power dynamic that exists between the agency and those who are experiencing the child welfare system. We should recognize the implicit biases that may exist within the child welfare system that may stand in the way of full youth engagement. Without addressing such biases, it is difficult to change the culture or system to allow for family and youth voice to be heard and honored. While trying to make decisions in the best interests of those involved, we may inadvertently and unintentionally disempower families and youth if decisions are not made in consultation with the family or youth. When the courts are involved, the disempowerment may be magnified.<sup>32</sup>

- › What do you have authority over in your role? (where do you hold power?)
- › What might it look like to share power with young people?
- › What makes you nervous about that? What excites you about that? What would it take to make those shifts?
- › How can working in partnership build brain gains?

» **Ask**, what conditions need to exist for youth-adult partnerships to flourish?

» **Record** responses on the easel pad.

- › Use the following to augment the discussion:
  - Adults must be willing to share their power and responsibility with young people;
  - Young people need to be willing to take on responsibility;
  - Both need skills to work together respectfully and successfully;
  - Adults need to be adaptable and accessible;
  - Adults need to be knowledgeable about resources;
  - Adults need to be aware of your personal bias;
  - Adults need to resist the urge to take over.



**Share** the following with the group:

“The attitudes adults hold about young people influence the ability of youth-adult partnerships to be effective and of youth engagement to be authentic. Young people can also hold stereotypes about adults that impact youth-adult partnerships. It is therefore critical to address the attitudes and beliefs that each partner holds about the other.<sup>33</sup>”

» **Ask** the group:

- › What are some stereotypes young people hold about adults in the child welfare system? What might be underneath those thoughts/biases?
- › What are some stereotypes adults hold about young people in the child welfare system? What might be underneath those thoughts/biases?




**Share** the following:

Everyone will need to understand that it takes time to achieve true, meaningful youth-adult partnerships—time to feel comfortable with one another, to agree on areas of importance, and to come to decisions that are agreed on by both the young person and the adult.<sup>34</sup>




The system may stand in the way of full youth engagement. Without addressing such biases, it is difficult to change the culture or system to allow for family and youth voice to be heard and honored. While trying to make decisions in the best interests of those involved, we may inadvertently and unintentionally disempower families and youth if decisions are not made in consultation with the family or youth. When the courts are involved, the disempowerment may be magnified.<sup>35</sup>

 **State** that when working with young people our language matters. The words we use to describe youth, as well as the language we use while interacting with youth shapes the work that happens within the partnership relationship. Workers serving young people can use intentional language to signify shared power, acknowledge autonomy and agency among youth, and invite youth into experiential learning for skill development.

- » Language principles to consider for increased partnership:
  - › Focus on “we” and “us” language rather than “I” or “you”
  - › Refer to youth with strengths-based, developmentally appropriate terms to reduce hierarchal, authoritative language.
  - › Do not jump directly to offering fixes or solutions. In most cases, youth have some ideas to consider while experiencing a challenge.
  - › Be clear with boundaries and non-negotiables while also seeking opportunities for autonomy and agency in challenging situations.

***Now we are going to do an activity that focuses on language.***

 **Divide** participants into small groups.

 **Refer** them to **Worksheet: *Language Matters When Building Partnership***. Tell the group they have ten minutes to think of different language to try and how it contributes to working in partnership with young people.

- › **Debrief** the activity by asking each small group to share their responses to one question.
- » **Refer** participants to the **Handout: *Language Matters When Building Partnership***.
  - › **Ask** the group how making minor changes in their language may assist in promoting their engagement with youth they are working with?
- » **Tell** the group that working in partnership is a process and it takes time. It begins by examining your practice.
- » **Refer** participants to **Handout: *Youth/Adult Partnerships: Self – Assessment Tool***. Give them five minutes to complete the assessment tool,
- » **Ask** them to identify two things that they are willing to work on in the next three weeks.
- » **Ask** for volunteers to share with the group.
- » **Summarize** the importance to working with young people in partnership.

## Module Thirteen: Developing an Action Plan

### Learning Objective:

- » **Develop an action plan to transfer learning to the workplace.**


**Time:** 45 minutes

### Materials:

- » **Handout:** Action Plan
- » **Handout:** Reflections – Day One and Two

### Facilitator Notes:

- » Participants will prepare to transfer learning by developing an action plan using their reflections handouts. We want to be sure that you start thinking about your plan for applying this two-day learning experience to enhance your work.

 **Refer** participants to **Handout:** *Action Plan*.

- » **Ask** participants to develop their personal action plan.
  - › As a result of this training I have acquired the following new knowledge, skills and attitudes:
  - › As a result of this training I am going to discuss the following learning strengths and needs with my supervisor:
  - › As a result of this training I am going to do the following or make the following specific changes using the new knowledge, skills and attitudes in the next month in my practice with young people:
- » **Lead** a discussion where each participant shares one learning highlight with the larger group.
  - › Let's hear your learning highlights.

***Thank you for your active participation.***

## END THE TRAINING SESSION

## Endnotes

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## Resources from the Annie E. Casey Foundation: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

### ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

**The Adolescent Brain** (2011) [www.aecf.org/resources/the-adolescent-brain-foster-care/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-adolescent-brain-foster-care/)

**The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Systems with Adolescent Brain Development** (2017)

[www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/)

#### Brain Frames – Short Practice Guides:

- » **Permanency** [www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-permanence-2017.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-permanence-2017.pdf)
- » **Housing Stability** [www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-stablehousing-2017.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-stablehousing-2017.pdf)
- » **Connections to School and Work** [www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-education-2017.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-education-2017.pdf)
- » **Supporting Young Parents** [www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-youngparents-2017.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-youngparents-2017.pdf)
- » **Healing and Resilience** [www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-resilience-2017.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-resilience-2017.pdf)

#### Adolescent Brain Research Toolkit for Legal Professionals (Created by the American Bar Association):

[www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/project-areas/youth-engagement-project/adolescent-brain-research-toolkit/](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/project-areas/youth-engagement-project/adolescent-brain-research-toolkit/)

- » **How Adolescent Brain Science Supports Youth Engagement in Court Hearings and Case Planning**  
[www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\\_law/youthengagement/how-adolescent-brain-science-supports-youth-engagement.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/youthengagement/how-adolescent-brain-science-supports-youth-engagement.pdf)
- » **Adolescent Brain Science Case Scenarios**  
[www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\\_law/youthengagement/adolescent-brain-case-scenarios.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/youthengagement/adolescent-brain-case-scenarios.pdf)
- » **Brain Frames: How Attorneys Can Engage Youth in Case Planning and Court Hearings**  
[www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\\_law/youthengagement/brain-frames.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/youthengagement/brain-frames.pdf)
- » **Quick Reference Guide: Federal Laws Supporting Youth in Foster Care Transitioning to Adulthood**  
[www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\\_law/youthengagement/quick-reference-guide-laws.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/youthengagement/quick-reference-guide-laws.pdf)

#### VIDEO: Promoting Brain Gains for Youth Emerging from Foster Care (4 Minute Video)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRXQaa-DMXg&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRXQaa-DMXg&feature=youtu.be)

### AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

#### A Framework for Effectively Partnering with Young People (2019)

[www.aecf.org/resources/a-framework-for-effectively-partnering-with-young-people/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/a-framework-for-effectively-partnering-with-young-people/)

#### Equity Conversation Guides for Young Leaders and Partners

[www.aecf.org/series/equity-conversation-guides-for-young-leaders-and-partners/](http://www.aecf.org/series/equity-conversation-guides-for-young-leaders-and-partners/)

- » **Understanding the Basics: Core Concepts and Terms** (2018) [www.aecf.org/resources/digging-deep/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/digging-deep/)
- » **Digging Deep: Historical Context of Child Welfare Systems** (2018) [www.aecf.org/resources/digging-deep/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/digging-deep/)
- » **Discovering Self: Identity and Culture** (2018) [www.aecf.org/resources/discovering-self/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/discovering-self/)
- » **Sharing Power: History and Contributions of Organizing in the Continuum of Youth Engagement** (2018)  
[www.aecf.org/resources/sharing-power/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/sharing-power/)

### **Realizing the Power of Youth and Young Adult Voice Through Youth Leadership Boards**

[www.aecf.org/resources/realizing-the-power-of-youth-and-young-adult-voice/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/realizing-the-power-of-youth-and-young-adult-voice/)

## **Resources from the National Association of Social Workers**

[www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)

### **NASW Standards for Social Work Practice with Adolescents**

[https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rUt4ybE\\_GW4%3D&portalid=0](https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rUt4ybE_GW4%3D&portalid=0)

### **NASW Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice**

<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=PonPTDEBrn4%3D&portalid=0>

### **NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare**

[www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=\\_Flu\\_UDcEac%3d&portalid=0](http://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=_Flu_UDcEac%3d&portalid=0)

### **NASW Code of Ethics**

[www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics](http://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics)

### **NASW Child Welfare Practice Tools, Professional Development, Policies and News**

[www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Child-Welfare](http://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Child-Welfare)

### **NASW Child Welfare Practice Specialty Section**

[www.socialworkers.org/careers/specialty-practice-sections/child-welfare](http://www.socialworkers.org/careers/specialty-practice-sections/child-welfare)

### **NASW Press**

How to Screen Adoptive and Foster Parents: A Workbook for Professionals and Students. (2013; Dickerson, Allen & Pollack).

[www.naswpress.org/publications/children/screen-adoptive-foster-parents.html](http://www.naswpress.org/publications/children/screen-adoptive-foster-parents.html)

