

Strengths-based approach/Youth competency development overview

Strengths and competency approaches are

- Scientifically grounded
- Related to restorative justice approach
- Based on research related to assets, protective factors, resiliency
- Ecological - taking into account the youth in her/his environment
- Attentive to diversity
- Based on behavioral science - people with hope and support change more effectively
- Compatible with research on adolescent development - youth are changing rapidly, testing and creating an identity, and growing in their moral development

Philosophy

- People (especially young people) can change
- Youth should leave system better off than they entered
- Service plan should include support from natural helpers and engage community partners
- Relationships are key to success
- There are strengths in every youth, family, and community
- Strengths are fuel for change
- Viewing youth, families, and communities as untapped (or under-tapped) resources allows for creativity in finding solutions to challenges

Youth Competency Assessment

- Developed to help balance collection of risks and needs during assessment and use of this information in service planning, intervention, and supervision
- Tool and process have three main goals. They help the youth
 - Repair harm and develop/strengthen pro-social norms and values
 - Create/strengthen a healthy identity
 - Build/strengthen connections with family, peers, and community
- The YCA increases strength-based practice and improves the use of positive non-verbal cues and positive interview atmosphere
- Staff report improved rapport with youth and families, increased job satisfaction, and increased staff morale

Competency development requires active participation by clients

- A focus on strengths builds engagement, which is crucial to success and change
- Accountability is increased
- Staff report quicker completion of court requirements and reduced need for detention and other sanctions

A strength-based approach is most effective when entire systems use it consistently. Judges, probation staff, treatment providers, schools, and other juvenile justice and community partners can all play a role in positive youth development.