

Best Practices for using Positive Youth Development (PYD)

1. Consider making your first questions to a youth a strength based question, for example, “Hey, tell me what you are good at?” Or.... “What do you like to do?”
2. Provide resources about advocacy and other ways to build their leadership (e.g. California Youth Connection (CYC), community service, mentoring, volunteer groups, public speaking, etc.).
3. Assist and encourage youth to participate in age appropriate extra curricular activities (i.e. transportation, supervision, paper work, approval process, etc.).
4. Use positive and empowering language.
5. Raise the bar of expectations while offering support (with college, employment, paper work, etc).
6. Be optimistic and advocate through difficult times.
7. Ask transition aged youth (TAY) what they are interested in, that they haven’t tried before.
8. Participate in PYD activities yourself! Advocate for TAY rights!
9. Validate and attend milestone events for TAY on your caseload (e.g., graduation, sports events, etc.).
10. Share information, resources, and experiences on how to best support TAY among other social workers.

Best Practices for supporting TAY (Transition Aged Youth) in Educational Areas

1. Ask the youth about her/his goals: both educational and career wise.
2. Empower youth to speak with resourceful people in their counties and at school (teachers, counselors, etc.).
3. Keep track of a youth's progress towards goals and know important due dates for things like financial aide and applications.
4. Encourage youth who are underestimating their potential (aim high and help them to aim high!).
5. Ask youth about housing, employment, and things other than academics.
6. Educate yourself about scholarships and other educational opportunities (i.e. Chaffee grants and Guardian Scholars).
7. Discuss building support networks while they are in college.
8. Do simple follow-up with youth once they're in college.
9. Attend milestone events for TAY on your caseload (e.g., graduation, sporting events, etc.).

Best Practices for Kinicare Placement

1. Ask the youth if she/he would like to be placed with kin. Listen to the response. In other words, don't assume kin care is always the best placement.
2. In order to determine the best placement, evaluate pros and cons of kinicare versus other foster placements.
3. Create an action plan for everyone involved in the placement to get the support they need.
4. Remember the youth who still need to have an identified permanent person in their lives because, although placed with kin- they may not feel a permanent connection with them.
5. Ensure that the youth has the same access to resources as youth in other placements (for example, ILSP, CASA, etc.).
6. Ask and identify if the kin is willing to be supportive after emancipation and include that in the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP).
7. Don't assume that kin-care is forever.

Best Practices for Permanency Planning with Youth

1. Important First Step: Figure out how to go about and begin to develop a relationship with the youth that will allow you to have open communication about vulnerable issues, like permanency.
2. Ask the youth who is / was important to her / him.
3. Always use a strengths-based approach when working with youth – never assume any youth is inappropriate for a permanent connection.
4. It's important to understand the differences between “relational” versus placement oriented permanency.
5. When developing a case plan, include a plan of action for youth who are resistant to (or who is working through their grief, loss, rejection, and fears) the concept of permanency and / or a specific relationship.
6. Prepare a plan for helping youth work through grief, loss, rejection and fears.
7. Develop a plan to maintain connection with siblings and other biological or otherwise identified family.
8. Plan for post permanency support. In other words, after a permanent connection is established, how will it be nourished and supported? Who needs to be involved?
9. Always remember that permanency is the youth's choice.

Best Practices for Working with Pregnant & Parenting Foster Youth

1. Ask the youth what she/he wants to do about her/his pregnancy/conception (i.e. provide all birthing/parenting/abortion options/alternatives) and what she/he needs.
2. Get on their side and quick!
3. Acknowledge and deal with your own possible bias around young parenting.
4. Empathize with the experience that the youth is experiencing (avoid judging, blaming, criticizing).
5. Always demonstrate and role model parental patience with a youth – make it a teachable moment about what’s needed in parenting.
6. Recognize that teen parenting can be a positive and empowering experience (remember Rita and Ronda’s story!)
7. Have parenting worksheets available. That is, what to expect and how to deal with certain situations and current knowledge on health/safety issues.
8. Have current resource sheets/knowledge on how get financial help/assistance (you may need to do homework).
9. If you don’t have the time and expertise, knowledge of parenting support, refer youth to an appropriate person and follow-up to make sure they get there.
10. Start early! When a youth is pregnant or is an expectant father, assist them with pre-natal care.
11. Acknowledge the pregnancy in a supportive and ritualized manner with a baby shower, a card, a special physical touch of the belly (ask permission first 😊), etc..

Best Practices for Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth

1. Examine and overcome homophobic biases.
2. Use language that does not assume or privilege one sexual orientation over another.
3. Provide sex education resources for all sexual orientations.
4. Do not place any youth in a homophobic placement; it is not healthy for any youth (no matter if they are gay or straight).
5. Follow up on all homophobic complaints immediately.
6. Place a safety zone sign in your cubicle.
7. Seek out and provide LGBTQ resources while knowing what is available in your community (i.e. local activities and events, drop-in centers, websites, etc.).
8. Be familiar with LGBTQ culture, language, terms, and slang, yo!
9. Bond with youth outside of home – it may make youth feel safer to talk about how their placement is.
10. Ensure that ALL youth are treated fairly in the home.
11. Provide/request more trainings to foster parents and social workers on LGBTQ foster youth.
12. Screen out homophobic foster families and recruit LGBT foster parents.
13. Provide information/education to other youth in the placement and ensure that no youth is being abused because of his/her sexual orientation, or assumed sexual orientation.
14. Recognize and challenge homophobic remarks (“that’s so gay,” “he’s a faggot,” etc.) and break stereotypes.

Best Practices for Working with Youth with Mental Health Needs

1. Ask youth what they want to do with their mental health needs (for example, therapy, support groups, physical activities, medications, etc.)
2. Ensure that the youth trust their psychologists/therapists. If they don't trust the clinician, then explore alternatives with the youth.
3. Be aware and research the medication that the youth is using; get clear if the medication is appropriate and helpful.
4. Be aware of biases you might have regarding youth and mental health issues (and deal with them 😊).
5. Listen to a youth who is telling you that s/he is over-medicated. Take this seriously (see number 3 above).
6. Recognize that a mental health diagnosis does not mean a youth won't be successful in life.
7. Avoid restricting services, activities, and independent opportunities to youth with mental health issues. It is often with opportunities that youth can overcome depression, anxiety, etc.
8. Use positive language when referring to a youth's developmental or mental health diagnosis.
9. Be mindful of the dangers of labeling and the devastating effects that misdiagnosis can have on a youth's life.
10. Always ask yourself, "Is this disorder just normal teenage behavior?"
11. Seek out additional training on transition aged youth with mental health needs.
12. Be aware of successful and positive mental health resources in the community/county.