

**Living on the Edge...
Of What?
Youth Risk and Resiliency**

Children today grow up in a world of unparalleled opportunity: invention, advancement, creature comforts...loneliness, risks, escapes like never before. The edge...of rewarding adventures or danger is sometimes hard for youth to discern

Families or communities may discount or forget these risks OR focus on dangers to the exclusion of growth experiences.

Data on America's youth indicate that we are perhaps investing too little in their present and future. Search Institute data reveal that:

- Sixth to twelfth grade youth report an average of 18/40 assets (personal and environmental traits and conditions for healthy growth)
- Older youth report fewer assets in spite of facing more serious risks
- Only 8% of youth report more than 30/40 assets
- Leadership and resilience tend to increase with age
- Resistance to danger, impulse control, poor health practices decline with age

- Assets identified as "most important" rest on a strong asset base

Additional observations from this data include:

Most common assets
(64-70% youth reported)

- positive future
- family support
- religious activity
- school involvement
- integrity

Most rare assets

- caring school climate
- youth valued
- youth seen as resources
- reading for pleasure
- creative activities

Boys are more at risk for alcohol use, antisocial behavior, gambling, violence; Girls are more at risk for depression, suicide

Perhaps most intriguing in this data is **that the 40 assets explain only 20-30% of variation in risk behavior.**

Source: P.C.Scales. (1999). Reducing risks and building developmental assets. *Journal of School Health*, 69, (3), 113-119.

This newsletter seeks to outline what we do know to help minimize risks and build assets in the coming generations.

Inside this issue:

Intro to Risk&Resiliency Living on the edge... of what?	1
Research & Theory	2
Stats & Facts	3
Educational Materials Individual Disciplines Of Resiliency	5
Family Disciplines of Resiliency	7
Community Disciplines of Resiliency	8
Resources	9
Paradoxes	10

**For additional
resources, visit**

Dreamcatcher
Family Life website

www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/dream.htm

Research Update: Youth Risk and Resiliency

Resilience in Adolescents

M.Dumont & M.A.Provost. (1999). Resilience in adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 28, (3), 343-363. Of 141 8th graders and 156 11th graders, well-adjusted had higher esteem; resilient teens had highest problem-solving coping; vulnerable teens were highest on antisocial and illegal activities with peers. Daily hassles were more troublesome for teens than for typical adults, but appraisal and resources predicted coping effectiveness. Avoidance strategies predicted lower distress, higher esteem and subsequent depression. Family and neighborhood activities were related to lower depression. Perception of control and stress-buffering resources (more typical of resilient kids) reduced negative outcomes.

Effects of Risk Factors

C.L.Jew & K.E.Green. (1998). Effects of risk factors on adolescents' resiliency and coping. *Psychological Reports*, 82, 675-678. Self-reported high-risk status (family violence or, drug abuse, delinquency) of 392 7th-12th graders were associated with resiliency (long-range adaptation) but not coping (short-term adjustment). Resiliency factors predicting long-term adjustment included future orientation (optimism), active skill gain, and independence/risk-taking. Optimism was related to resiliency for all stressors, skills for drugs and delinquency. Independence was not statistically significant for any stressor.

Developmental Theory

M.Stouthamer-Loeber, R.Loeber, D.Farrington, Q.Zhang, W.VanKammen, & E.Maguin. (1993). The double edge of protective and risk factors for delinquency. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 683-701.

- Risk and protective factors (e.g., delinquency or non-delinquency) not necessarily opposite forces since they may have different effects on youth outcomes (e.g., depending on seriousness or frequency of delinquency), esp. in varied culture and age contexts
- Protective effects not equal at all levels of risk (e.g., prolonged exposure to temptation, peer pressure)
- Risk or protective factors show different effects on preventing delinquency vs promoting non-delinquency
- Use of risk status as predictor of resiliency eliminates potential for exploring its protective effects (e.g., how arrest put youth back on track)
- Research focuses mostly on risks (yet promotion of protective factors is more promising)

An empirical test of above-mentioned observations found that:

- Variables such as trustworthiness, school motivation, peer delinquency, supervision, and parent relations had both risk and protective effects
- Variables such as attention deficit and oppositional defiant behavior were consistent risk indicators
- Age and demographic groups showed different risk and protective profiles.

Ecosystems/ Stress Theory

C.S.Carver. (1998). Resilience and thriving. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, (2), 245-266.

Argues that thriving focus appreciates growth effects of resilient response to trauma or chronic stress. Identifies thriving with

- decreased reactivity to or faster recovery from later stressors or consistent higher functioning
- gains in knowledge, skill, confidence, sense of security in relationships resulting from coping with stress
- identifies key variables as *confidence*—increased sense of control, efficacy leading to continued engagement with challenge
- mastery*—increased capacity to sort out or manage challenge without giving up

...which perpetuate and even intensify positive outcomes and cycles of thriving

- Factors contributing to thriving deserving attention
- personality factors such as optimism, contextual factors such as social support, and situational factors such as coping with adversity
- Factors detracting from thriving include extent of stress/trauma and personal capacity to adapt and grow
- Sometimes small differences in confidence eventually have quantum effects on persistence and adaptation

Stats and Facts: Youth Risk and Resiliency

Risk and Resiliency Glossary

Risk: a specific status or behavior which indicates increased likelihood of a specific negative outcome (e.g., physical or mental health problem, compromised economic potential, social pathology)

Risk Factor: individual (biological, personality, status), social (peer or family interaction), or environmental (school, neighborhood, community condition) which tends to increase negative or decrease positive outcomes

Protective Factor: individual (biological, personality, status), social (peer or family interaction), or environmental (school, neighborhood, community condition) which tends to decrease negative or increase positive outcomes

Risk Level: A degree of exposure to conditions or behavioral practice related to specific negative outcomes:

- Low risk: not subject to risk antecedents or risk markers
- Moderate: living under conditions or displaying markers of risk
- High risk: experienced conditions or displayed behaviors which mark risk

Risk Antecedent: Macro (poverty, unsafe neighborhood) or family conditions related to bad outcomes

Risk Marker: Behavior or conditions directly related to negative outcomes

Problem Behavior and Outcomes: events indicating escalating risk and or negative outcomes

For information on specific antecedent-marker-outcome paths, consult *Chinook*, 1997, v. 5, No. 2, p. 8.

Source: G.Resnick & M.Burt. (1996). Youth at risk: Definitions and implications for service delivery. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66, (20), 172-188.

A Summary of Key Risk Factors for Wyoming Youth

(based on 5 critical youth risks identified by R.M.Lerner. (1995). Features and principles of effective youth programs. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 87, (4), 16-21; Source noted in parentheses)

School Failure

Dropout Rate: 6.2% (9-12th gr.) (1)
Percent Below Basic Reading, 8th grade: 24% (vs. 28% USA) (2)

Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile Arrest Rate, Driving while intoxicated: 183/100,000 (rank: 13th) (3)
Juvenile Property Crime Arrests: 2,571 per 10,000 youth (vs 2,444 USA) (2)

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol: 55% high school current users, 40% binge drinkers (4)
Smokeless Tobacco: 29% high sch. males
Drugs: among middle school youth, 19% tried marijuana; 57% tried alcohol; 51% tried cigarettes (4)

Violence to Self and Others

Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests: 147 per 10,000 youth (vs. 471 USA) (2)
Suicide: 25% middle school, 17% high school students considered suicide (4)

Precocious Sexual Behavior

Engaged in Sex: 17% middle school, 48% high school (33% active without condom) (4)
Teen Birth Rate: 25% (vs 34% USA) (2)

Sources: (1) US Dept.of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Local Education Universe Survey" (various years); (2) Kids Count Data Bank. (1999). Greenwich, CT: Annie E. Casey Foundation; (3) K.O.Morgan & S.Morgan. (Eds., 1997). Wyoming crime in perspective. Lawrence, KS: Morgan Qunito Press; (4) WY 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Cheyenne: Dept.of Education.

Stats and Facts: Youth Risk and Resiliency, continued

Resiliency/Competence by Age/Stage

Competence—A pattern of effective adaptation to the environment, influenced by personal capabilities and environmental support, indicated by success with stage tasks, performance, and future capacity

Preschool (0-6)

- **Attachment**—secure emotional bonds with caregivers
- **Autonomy**—independence in exploring beyond caregivers
- **Self-regulation**—emotional control, attention regulation, compliance, prosocial behavior, peer popularity
- **Language development**—mastery of verbal and nonverbal symbols and rituals inherent in positive social interaction

School Age (7-12)

- **Positive Peer Bonds**—acceptance, prosocial friendships
- **School Adjustment**—attendance and appropriate conduct
- **Rule-governed Conduct**—following moral and social rules in consistently supportive family and school settings
- **Academic Achievement**—learning to read, write, calculate, problem-solve, interact with high-achievers

Adolescence (13-19)

- **Successful Transition**—growing into expectations of motivation, cooperation, and contribution
- **Academic Achievement**—learning skills for higher education or work
- **Extracurricular Involvement**—participation/leadership in clubs and other out-of-school activities
- **Close Friendships**—within and across genders

- **Coherent Self-Identity**—attitudes of self-efficacy, responsibility, optimism; bonds with caring adults

Source: A.S.Masten & J.D.Coatsworth. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments. *American Psychologist*, 53, (2), 205-220.

Keys to Positive Youth Development

Relationships with a Caring Adult: use youth-adult pairs, teach listening and asset-building skills

Inclusive Environment: build group identity as welcoming, supportive, sharing leadership and privileges

Value and Practice of Service: invest in helping and teaching others

Opportunity for Mastery: stage- appropriate, sequenced, mentored events, reflection, peer teaching

Physically & Emotionally Safe Setting

Opportunity for Self-Determination: Supportive mentoring (structure, flexibility) for youth goals, projects

Engagement in Learning: shared ownership in real-life concerns

Positive Future: Build on success, learn from failure, set life goals, explore future

Source: K.Astroth. (2000). *Critical elements and practices for 4-H*. Bozeman, MT: MSU Extension.

Reclaiming Youth at Risk

Seeds of Discouragement

Destructive Relationships

Climates of Futility

Learned Irresponsibility

Loss of Purpose

The Circle of Courage

Significance

Competence

Power

Virtue

The Reclaiming Environment

Relating to the Reluctant

Brain-friendly Learning

Discipline for Responsibility

The Courage to Care

Source: L.K.Brendtro, M.Brokenleg, & S.VanBockern. (1990). *Reclaiming youth at risk*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service

Individual Disciplines for Resiliency

Problem solving is a process of organizing and adapting to everything from “What shall I have for breakfast?” to “What shall I do with the rest of my life?” Most of our “problem” language is negative: “math problems,” “family problems,” “medical problems,” or “problems with the law.” These unwelcomed and sometimes overwhelming challenges cause us to forget those exciting experiences of completing a difficult report, mastering a musical composition, taming a bully, or mastering an obstacle course.

Playing with ideas is really the heart of problem solving. Try these games to clear up a confusing situation, work out a conflict, or just have fun imagining...

IS/IS NOT: Describe and compare objects, events, or people using sense labels (what you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell) or opinion labels (what I like, which is better)

- **Fun:** *“That is/not a cool breeze (or cool TV show).”*
- **Peers:** *“What are/are not good rules for our field trip.”*
- **Conflict:** *“Splitting this cookie in half is/is not something you agree about?”*

AND/OR: Explore many possible descriptions or solutions rather than running with the first one that comes to mind.

- **Fun:** *“Let’s have lots of games at our party so people can play checkers or Twister or darts or something else.”*
- **Peers:** *“Each of our friends can do this...and this...and this well.” (vs. stereotyping a single trait/skill or restricting options for contributing)*
- **Conflict:** *“If I don’t get what I want, I can do this and/or this.”*

SOME/ALL: Investigate people, objects, and events to discover generalizations and exceptions, avoiding oversimplified conclusions.

- **Fun:** *(For debate): “Some/all cops are only interested in getting kids in trouble.”*
- **Peers:** *“Are some/all kids in that clique rude, smart?”*
- **Conflict:** *“Are there red hats (or other prize) for some/all?”*

BEFORE/AFTER: Examine sequences of events by which ideas, objects, relationships, or activities are built up or break down to predict or understand how they happen.

- **Fun:** *“Show me how this gadget fits together.”*
- **Peers:** *“What do you do before a test to improve grades?”*
- **Conflict:** *“What will I need to do before we can be friends again?”*

NOW/LATER: Focusing on what can be done at present and what must wait is a critical attitude and skill in decision-making and distribution of resources.

- **Fun:** *“What chores need to be done now so we can have fun later?”*
- **Peers:** *“How much can we spend now and still have enough for later?”*
- **Conflict:** *“If I say/do this now, what will I have to face later?”*

SAME/DIFFERENT: By clarifying ideas and feelings, seeming contradictions can be unscrambled, commonalities found, and differences worked through

- **Fun:** *“How is our favorite fast food place the same/different than last time?”*
- **Peers:** *“Why do different people think the same on this decision?”*
- **Conflict:** *“How do each of you have the same/different opinions, feelings?”*

Family Disciplines for Resiliency

Family nurture and discipline are primary wellsprings of resiliency for children and youth. Families under stress are especially challenged in these roles since they often become the crucible and cradle for conflict resolution. Families who foster resiliency provide:

- Practical and emotional support for children at all ages, including quality and quantity of time together
- Clear and consistently enforced standards promoting safety, health, positive interaction, and school achievement
- Positive connections with individuals (extended family, friends, neighbors, peers, teachers) and institutions (school, church, community-based organizations) which facilitate monitoring, support, and advocacy
- Modeling and facilitative teaching of constructive problem solving, impulse control, achievement, and community service

. Sources: K.Bogenschneider, S.Small, & D.Riley. (1993). *An ecological, risk-focused approach for addressing youth at risk*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Center; D.A.Blyth & E.C. Roehlkepartain. (1993). *Healthy communities, healthy youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute; S.C.Wong, R.F.Catalano, J.D.Hawkins, & P.J. Chappell. (1996). *Communities that care*. Seattle: Developmental Research and Programs, Inc

Rituals of Renewing: Family Resiliency Activities

Families which plan regular times for fun, work, and support activities create opportunities to reduce tensions and build caring. Times with “just family,” “inviting friends,” or sharing with neighborhood or social groups can provide variety and reinforce the family’s connection to the larger community.

Family Pride Board Keep a bulletin board at home for photos, drawings, news clippings, and other mementos. Family members can decorate it for each season and put old material in a scrapbook. Families can bring it as a ticket of admission for school, church, or neighborhood gatherings as a story-starter. Add your own family logo.

Feelings Charades Family members play-act (or replay real events), guess and talk about feelings—without talking. Parents take charge of taking turns.

Who’s Fixing Dinner? Families take turns (or receive cash from a common kitty) planning a menu, shopping, and preparing a unique meal and play host to a group of other families. Children serve the meal. The guests (other families) provide a special thanks.

These and other child, family, and community activities are at the heart of *Families and Schools Together* (FAST), a best-practice program effective in building positive communication and family-to-family support. For more information, contact FAST National Training and Evaluation Center, Graduate School of Family Therapy, Edgewood College, 855 Woodrow Street, Madison, WI (608) 663-2382, www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast

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Community Disciplines for Resiliency

Communities set boundaries and create bonds that shape the climate of risk and resiliency for youth and families. Communities foster resiliency through

- Practical support and economic opportunities for low-income families
- Clear and consistently enforced laws and norms promoting safety, health, positive interaction, and extended residence in neighborhoods
- Community development, focused on citizen-led efforts to strengthen neighborhoods, schools, and community-based organizations
- A variety of structured activities for youth and families
- Supportive attitudes toward youth (adult involvement, advocacy, high standards, positive media messages, youth partnerships, restorative justice)

Sources: K.Bogenschneider, S.Small, & D.Riley. (1993). *An ecological, risk-focused approach for addressing youth at risk*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Center; D.A.Blyth & E.C. Roehlkepartain. (1993). *Healthy communities, healthy youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute; S.C.Wong, R.F.Catalano, J.D.Hawkins, & P.J. Chappell. (1996). *Communities that care*. Seattle: Developmental Research and Programs, Inc.

New Millenium Tour of Homes: A Resiliency and Revitalization Activity

Provide youth an opportunity to get adults involved by sponsoring a “tour of homes” including places where youth find safety, acceptance, opportunities to grow and contribute AND places which are dangerous, hostile, or stifling of growth and creativity. The sequence might work this way

- **Good spaces.** With a class, club, or focus group of youth, discuss what places in the community offer positive and negative settings for children and youth (environmentally, socially, intellectually). Brainstorm qualities which make each risky or asset-building (or both). Explore ways to support or replicate positive places, eliminate or improve negative places. Research skills (at the site, kids’ views, zoning, etc.) and creative thinking activities (perspective-taking, alternative uses, enhancement strategies) will enrich discussion over several weeks.
- **Tour features.** Youth select sites to photograph, describe by their advantages or needed improvements. Youth visit and interact with adults at sites (teachers, city council, business owners, landfill manager, etc.). Incorporate communication, diversity competence, and conflict resolution training to enrich interaction. Build interest via tour stops features in the newspaper, on radio or cable TV, and display boards in shop windows. Keep discussion and options in a positive vein.
- **Tour day.** Recruit community sponsors for sites, invite tour participants, and provide prizes or incentives. Plot one or more routes, shuttle vehicles, tour guides, fun activities (bands, drama, refreshments, learning games, role plays) at each featured site. Offer options for participants to experience deficits (dark, unsafe street) or benefits (youth-friendly recreation center) of the site, or share in activities such as discussing, designing improvements, enjoying or building improvements. Use photos, feedback sheets, observers, and interviews to document responses (ideas and work on improvements) of participants.
- **Follow-up.** Hold a community forum, led by youth trained in facilitation, to set goals and commit to projects creating a more child-/youth-friendly community. *For more resources or details on community mapping, see below.*

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Resources and Policy: Youth Risk and Resiliency

Organizations

Admin. for Children & Families, DHHS

www.acf.dhhs.gov
Grants, resources esp. for tribal youth, runaways

Adolescence Directory

www.education.indiana.edu
Fact sheets on every topic related to teens, families

Children, Youth and Families Extension Resource Network

www.cyfernet.org
Extension national and state resources on health, child care, youth & family issues; links to stats, grants, etc.

Creative Partnerships

www.CPPrev.org
Programs and resources for arts with at-risk kids

Community Partnerships with Youth

www.cpyinc.org
Training and resources for youth-adult leadership and service to community

4-H in the USA

www.4h-usa.org
Official 4-H site features resources for competence-building with 8-18 yr.-olds

Justice for Kids

www.usdoj.gov/kidspage
Info and curriculum on crime & violence prevention, safety

National 4-H Council

www.fourhcouncil.edu
Programming resources and training for youth-adult partnerships and projects

National Network for Youth

www.nn4youth.org
Advocacy, training, info sheets on health, high-risk
National Youth Development Information Center

National Resilience Resource Center

http://resilnet.uiuc.edu
Training, resources, research across issues and national boundaries

National Youth Dev. Information Center

www.nydic.org
Publications, research, stats, career, training, funding, evaluation info, sponsored by National Assembly of Social Work Professionals

Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention

http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org
Grants, publications, programs for mentoring, crime prevention

Prevline

(Nat. Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Info)
www.health.org/ncadipromo.htm
Online, newsletter, infosheet, videos on drugs, alcohol

Project Resilience

www.projectresilience.com
Research-based training, publications, and online discussion

Resiliency in Action

www.resiliency.com
Newsletter and books on building resiliency, esp. in schools. New book on *Mentoring for Resiliency* looks promising

Search Institute

www.search-institute.org
Assessments, training, info and curriculum resources for asset-building, many settings

Youthwork

www.youthwork.com
Advocacy, training, resource center—good links to asset-building and risk-reduction

Resources

• Books and Curricula

M.W. Fraser. (Ed., 1998). *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.

Strengthening Families curricula, Iowa State Extension features parallel tracks for pre-teen youth and parents and family activities for preventing risks, building competencies.

R.J. Haggerty, et al. (Eds, 1996). *Stress, risk, and resiliency in children and adolescents*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.

• Films on videotape

touching on resiliency themes:

The Horse Whisperer
Life is Beautiful
October Sky
A River Runs Through It
Stepmom

The latest newsletter of the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives (www.imhi.org) suggests 5 questions to ask about these and other media

- How do characters become resilient?
- How do families and communities promote resiliency?
- How do others intervene?
- What is the struggle?
- How do experiences change characters?

Paradoxes: A Parting Thought

Three Strands of Resiliency

The three typical descriptions of resiliency and metaphors which “spin” from them provide useful material for understanding and working with children and families:

Absence of pathology (disease status)

- Feeling (or acting) well means more than just not being sick
“These boys are incarcerated as criminals...[yet] they seem they often seem naïve and childlike as they talk about their life...”—James Garbarino, *Lost Boys* (Free Press, 1999, p.22) on interviewing violent juvenile offenders in prison
- *Paradoxical Thinking*: Appreciate the wounded side of juvenile murderers or depressive episodes of high-achieving girls who overcome abuse

Capacity to bounce back or recover following a severe stress

- A setback always has costs, but it can also produce rewards
“In their early 30s, [teen moms] were significantly more inner-directed than were low-risk women of the same age who had not become mothers at such an early age.”
—Emmy Werner & Ruth Smith, *Overcoming the Odds* (Cornell, 1992, p.92)
- *Paradoxical Thinking*: Consider the learning potential of struggles or failure AND elements which made the difference between “flying” and “crashing”

Sustaining healthy function despite stress

- A struggle can cultivate strength or sap energy. The “tipping point” is influenced by many factors, past and present, individual and collective. It’s a complex interplay.
“...if one knows the future that awaits [inner city kids], it is terrible to see their eyes look up at you with friendliness and trust—to see this and to know what is in store for them.”
—Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (Crown, 1991, p.45)
- *Paradoxical Thinking*: Imagine how resilient or successful you or your children might be in an inner city neighborhood

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Best Practices for Involving Youth on Boards and in Governance

- Adapting policy and by-laws (equal rights, roles, responsibilities)
- Creating a youth-friendly environment (respect, involvement, fun, arrangements for practical needs such as food, compensation, transportation, supervision)
- Communicating effectively (openness, common language, conflict resolution)
- Providing orientation, training, on-going support (ground rules and roles, issues and skills including budgets, action plans, assertiveness, fund raising as well as project competencies, support and periodic reflection)

Source: Youth in Governance Wingspread Conference (1996). Igniting youth governance: Best practices and worst practices.

Degrees of Youth Participation (most participatory to least participatory)

- Youth-initiated, shared decision-making with adults (partnership, mentorship, leadership)
- Youth-initiated and directed small-scale projects without adult supervision
- Adult-initiated projects involving youth decision-making and work
- Youth consulted and informed on adult-operated projects
- Youth assigned but informed on purposes, decisions, participation
- Tokenism, involving youth but omitting decision input or feedback
- Decoration, with limited youth awareness or choice but no input
- Manipulation involving youth as servants of adult projects

Source: International Youth Foundation, 32 S. Second Street, Suite 500, Baltimore, MD 21200.

Bickert & Wolin: How Schools Can Build Resiliency