

More Matters: Strategies to Increase Protective Factors among Alaska Adolescents

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Shared Protective Factors related to Adolescent Health and Development

- Feeling Valued and Mattering to Others
- Emotional Management /Regulation
- Family Connectedness
- Positive School Climate
- Connection to other Positive Adults
- Quality Afterschool Programs and Activities

Definition, Indicators, Strategic Actions and Resources

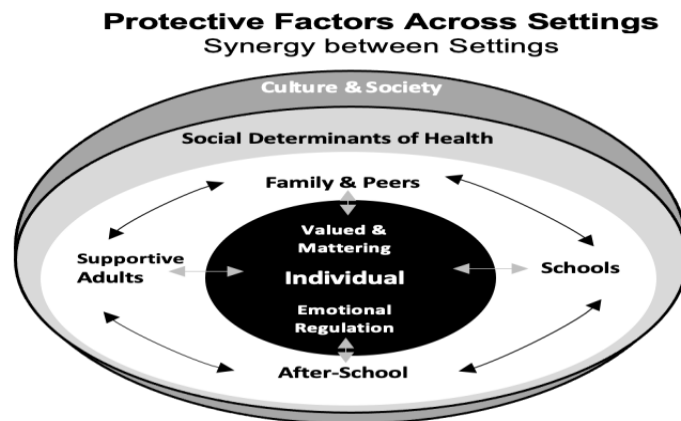
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Introduction

Decades of national research provide ample evidence of the impact protective factors can have on adolescent behavior and development.¹ The evidence is summarized in the literature review [Shared Risk and Protective Factors Impacting Adolescent Behavior and Positive Development](#) (Judd, 2020). This review identifies the risk and protective factors across four broad adolescent health areas: substance misuse, suicide and depression, violence and unhealthy sexual relationships.

How relevant are national studies to Alaska adolescents? A correlational analysis, using a multi-year data set from the Alaska YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) confirmed the relevance of national research to Alaska, across multiple adolescent health domains.² Utermohle (2021), describes the protective factor analysis in his recent paper, [Protective Factors and Adolescent Behavior Paradigm: New YRBS Analysis](#).

In this paper, Utermohle found protective factors are correlated with lower prevalence across most problem behaviors. There also, appears to be an additive effect, demonstrating continued reduction in problem behavior as the number of protective factors increases. While the presence of a single protective factor demonstrated reduced prevalence, Utermohle's analysis found it is the **combination of multiple protective factors across settings** that is associated with lower prevalence on problem behaviors.



Graphic illustrates that within the context of culture and society protective factors can be mutually reinforced and synergistic across settings.

Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Strategies to increase protective factors are closely tied to supportive, trusted relationships and the [Positive Youth Development](#) approach. PYD focuses on young people's capacities, strengths and developmental needs - not solely on their problems, (risks, or negative behaviors). The approach calls for a shift from crisis management and problem reduction to strategies that increase youth contact with supportive, respectful adults using PYD principles:

- Youth are valued and encouraged to participate in design, delivery and evaluation of activities.
- Youth have multiple opportunities for skill building, decision making and leadership.
- Youth contribute to their schools and broader communities through service.

Alaska History with Protective Factors

Alaska has a twenty-five-year history of promoting resiliency, protective factors, Developmental Assets,[®] and positive youth development. This brief, *More Matters: Strategies to Increase Protective Factors among Alaska Adolescents* is a compilation of the recommendations, best practices and personal actions from recent publications, mostly developed and vetted by Alaskans. Primary Alaska resources are specifically referenced throughout this brief.

[State Health Improvement Plan: Healthy Alaskans 2030](#). (2020)

[Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska](#). (2019)

[Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#). (1998, updated 2017)

[Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska](#) (2020)

Strategic Actions to Increase Protective Factors

Protective Factor Feeling valued and mattering to others

YRBS Indicator Percentage of HS students who agree or strongly agree that in their community they feel like they matter to people

HA2030 Indicator #18, also referenced within eight other indicator strategy/action areas.

Description: The perception of being respected, trusted, valued and significant to others. This concept is tied to a young person's belief that they are able to help others and/or make a difference in their school or community. This concept of feeling valued is deeply imbedded with the cultural context. Youth may develop a sense of self-efficacy and mattering to others across multiple settings (family, school, after-school programs, and the larger community). Regardless of the setting, the strategies to increase this protective factor are facilitated by supportive, respectful adults using [Positive Youth Development](#) principles. The perception of mattering to others is most often the result of interaction with other protective factors.

Strategic Actions

Schools Settings

Strategies to increase students' perception of mattering are closely tied to the school climate ([see School Climate, protective factor](#)). Within this setting, student engagement practices emphasize diverse student voice, feedback and leadership in school activities. Recommendations from [HA2030](#), LHI 18:⁴

- Support and maintain student advisory boards to improve school climate and peer interactions.
- Support and maintain student membership on the local school board.
- Support youth and/or student groups or clubs that focus on helping others in the school and/or community (e.g., peer helpers, cross-age tutoring).
- Ensure intentional recruitment to include diverse (inherent and acquired) representation and participation on advisory committees and boards.

School – Community Partnerships

Community partnerships can promote *youth development practices* in youth-community-based activities.⁴

- Provide training to community members about youth-centered, culturally relevant, empowerment practices.
- Support and maintain programs that encourage internships, civic engagement and service-learning efforts.
- Support academic credits for community-volunteer projects.
- Support youth and/or student groups or clubs that focus on helping others in the community, social justice issues or local concerns.
- Support intentional outreach efforts to include diverse (inherent and acquired) participation in activities.

“Underlying the activities that promote efficacy and mattering is the awareness that **development is not something adults do to youth, but rather something youth do for themselves with the support of adults.**”

Eccles & Gootman, 2002⁵

Youth-Community Engagement Opportunities

Municipal, Tribal and larger community organizations can play a significant role in youth feeling valued and mattering to others. ([See HA2030, LHI 18, for specific details.](#))

- Provide multiple opportunities for diverse youth inclusion, influence and leadership within local, tribal and state, governments and public agencies (e.g., library, parks, recreation, museums) and youth serving organizations.
- Engage and educate youth and adults about effective ways to work together to improve conditions in the school, community or within the state.
- Align adolescent-related policies and practices with positive youth development principles across youth-serving public agencies, private foundations and tribal entities.

Afterschool Programs

Positive Youth Development Principles are foundational to quality afterschool programs ([see Afterschool protective factor for details](#)). Afterschool programs can increase a young person's feelings of value and mattering by focusing on the following: ⁴

- Youth-centered practices include authentic participation, youth voice (opinions and ideas), choice of roles, contribution, decision-making and leadership opportunities.
- Youth-led activities, projects or initiatives that help others or improve community conditions.
- Genuine, respectful, supportive staff-youth relationships and between peers. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills are taught, practiced and modeled ([see Emotional Regulation](#)).

Families and Caregivers

A young person's sense of value and mattering is closely tied to their culture and family values. (Also see [Family Connectedness protective factor](#).) Below are some ideas from [Helping Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style](#).⁶

- Attend school and community functions and activities in which your kids are involved.
- Encourage your kids to participate in efforts that deal with issues that affect them. Coach them how to give testimony or write letters on topics that are important to them.
- Tell your children their family stories. Let them know it's up to them to preserve the stories and pass them on to their children.
- Ask your children about what they believe and think about things. Let them know you value their input.
- Prepare food together, hunt, fish, garden and harvest together, so everyone has a role.
- Build or fix something together at home, or for neighbors, Elders or others who may be in need.

Roles, responsibilities and expectations within the home and extended family can help a young person understand their value and interconnection to others. Here are some questions to consider:

- What responsibilities and chores do children have to keep the household running smoothly? (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry, garbage, recycling, getting firewood, caring for pets etc.)
- Are the expectations, timeframes and consequences clear and understood by everyone?
- What input do children/youth have in the family rules, roles, chores, and routines? How can you incorporate some of their ideas?
- What role do children/teens have to their younger siblings, cousins, Elders or neighbors?
- How do you acknowledge when children complete their chores or responsibilities, successfully? Do you only notice when they do something wrong?
- What roles do children have in holiday traditions, family celebrations or ceremonies?

Community Members

Additional suggestions from *Helping Kids Succeed*: ⁶

- Hire neighborhood kids to help with gardening, lawn work, shoveling snow, or painting. Mentor and encourage them with the tasks. Thank them, even if you are paying them.
- Give youth specific tasks to help with community celebrations, ceremonies and festivals.
- Encourage local media to recognize youth groups for their community efforts and contributions.
- Attend council meetings, make sure youth needs/opinions are heard. Invite youth to go with you.
- Say thank you (or write a note) to youth groups who have helped on a community project.
- Celebrate a youth's first successful hunt.

Resources

[Alaska Peer Outreach Guidebook](#). (2012) Alaska Youth Advocates, Alaska Division of Public Health, WCFH
[Youth on Boards: Why Youth Leaders Matter](#). (2018) Association of Alaska School Boards
[Involving Youth in Policy Making and Coordination Youth Policy](#). (2005) California Research Bureau.
[Youth Participation in Governance](#). (2005) Hartwood Centre for Community Youth Development
[Youth Participation in Public Policy at the Local Level](#). (2010) National Civic Review

Protective Factor Emotional management / regulation

YRBS Indicators Percentage of HS students who:

- Frequently/almost always are able to control their emotions when they need to.
- Are able to remain quite/extremely calm when things go wrong for them.

HA2030 Indicator None. It is referenced within nine HA 2030 Indicator strategy/action areas.

Description: Emotional management or regulation is part of an overarching set of skills known as Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Emotional regulation is the ability to manage one's emotions and behavior. It includes being able to control impulses, behavior and solve problems constructively. This set of skills enables people to not overreact to upsetting stimuli, calm one's self when upset, adjust to unexpected change, and handle frustration without an outburst. ⁽⁷⁾

The development of emotional regulation is dependent on *co-regulation*. Co-regulation is provided by parents or other adults through warm and responsive interactions. Through modeling, supporting and coaching caregivers facilitate the child's ability to understand, express and modulate their own thoughts, feelings and behavior. ⁽⁷⁾

*A critical consideration is the student's cultural background. For many indigenous cultures, the focus is on interconnectedness and one's relationship to others and the land, not on the 'self.' Thus, emotional regulation may best be understood, taught and modeled in terms behaving in ways that maintain harmony with others, balance with nature and focusing on the "whole person."*⁸

Strategic Actions

Schools and Afterschool Programs

Staff Development and Support

- Train educators, coaches and youth program staff how to teach, model, reinforce, and coach emotional regulation and co-regulation skills. ⁷
- Support staff in their own emotional regulation capacity. Staff can only be effective at co-regulation, if they can successfully emotionally-regulate themselves. Staff supports may include professional development, peer support, stress reduction and mindfulness instruction, reflective supervision, and opportunities for personal "time-outs" as needed. ⁷

Emotional management instruction

Emotional management and other SEL skills can be integrated into activities and practiced throughout the day to enhance student engagement and the learning process. Additionally, direct instruction and practice of age-appropriate skills is essential. ⁷ A [meta-analysis](#) in-school and afterschool programs found the most effective SEL approaches have four common attributes: ⁹

Sequenced: a connected & coordinated set of activities to support skill development

Active: active forms of learning to help youth learn new skills

Focused: at least one component devoted to developing personal or social skills

Explicit: targets specific SEL skills rather than positive development in general terms

The research indicates that the most effective SEL format for skill instruction is when educators use evidence-based methods in the classroom. Some Alaska school districts are adapting these approaches within their cultural contexts. ⁷

Specific classroom and afterschool program settings

Emotional regulation skills evolve as students mature and develop the cognitive capacity for greater regulation, goal setting and decision-making skills. Tips for structured settings from the CDC: ¹⁰

- Co-create and confirm a shared understanding of the rules, expectations, and consequences of behavior.

- Allow and encourage students to identify, label, express, and assess their feelings.
- Provide opportunities for students to identify and practice their own stress management skills and improve their interpersonal and decision-making skills.
- Foster critical and reflective thinking, problem solving, and working effectively with others.
- Use classroom and extracurricular activities to explore and discuss empathy, personal strengths, fairness, kindness, and social responsibility.

Emotional Regulation skill development for ages 12-18 ¹¹

- Growing awareness of, and managing emotions “in the moment”
- Using healthy coping strategies to deal with stress and able to calm down when distressed
- Considering consequences (to others and self) before acting
- Effective decision-making “in the moment” in the context of strong emotion and peer influence
- Solving more complex problems independently, considering consequences and other’s perspectives
- Developing an orientation toward the future
- Goal setting and commitment (planning and organizing time and tasks to achieve goals)
- Using empathy and concern for others to guide goals and decisions

Families and Caregivers

Teaching and modeling emotional regulation (through co-regulation) involves three types of caregiver support: a warm relationship, a structured home setting and skills instruction and coaching.¹² The [Family Connectedness protective factor](#) provides tips for maintaining warm relationships and creating home routines and expectations. Emotional regulation is enhanced by activities that require focus and attention while blocking out distractions. Parents and caregivers can support their children’s social/emotional development further, through the following actions:¹³

- Acknowledge their feelings and ask how they are feeling. If they are unable to say, help them identify their feelings and let them know they are not alone.
- Remind them what is within their “sphere of influence” to manage, when worry arises from uncertainty and a lack of control over circumstances.
- Help them manage their emotions, by modeling your own emotions (co-regulation.) The use of positive “self-talk” can be helpful to counteract uncertainty and uneasy feelings.
- Brainstorm “quiet activities to relieve stress and become calm (e.g., talking to someone, listening to music, doing crafts, beading, carving, playing games, reading, focusing on breath, or another mindfulness activity)
- Brainstorm physical activities they can do alone, with friends or as a family to relieve stress (e.g., walking, dancing, drumming, playing sports, practicing yoga, Eskimo-Indian Olympics, cooking, cleaning or other physical chores, helping someone else.)
- Some youth may naturally “co-regulate” with a respected Elder, aunt, or uncle who is sharing a story, teaching/modeling a skill or providing advice about coping with life.¹³

Resources

[Resources for Parents and Educators with Students at Home](#) Association of Alaska School Boards, website
[Resources for Social Emotional Learning](#) Association of Alaska School Boards, website
[Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska](#) (2021) AASB
[SEL Activities for Families](#) Guilford County Schools, website
[Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-Being During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) Child Trends
[17 Apps to Help Kids Stay Focused & Apps for Kids](#) Common Sense Media
[SEL in an Unplanned Home School Setting](#) SEL Labs
[Reflections on the Relevance of “Self- Regulation” for Native Communities.](#) Admin. Children & Families

Protective Factor: Family Connectedness

YRBS Indicator: Percentage of HS students who had at least one parent who talked with them about what they were doing in school about every day.

HA2030 Indicator: None.

Description: Family connectedness has several features. In general, this protective factor relates to youth's experience of feeling close, supported, understood and loved. This factor is associated with caregiver*/parents' high expectations for their children's education and wellbeing, clear family rules, fair and consistent discipline practices, age-appropriate supervision and monitoring, and being present at key times in the day. Multiple protective factors can be nurtured through intentional parenting strategies. The current YRBS indicator is a proxy measure of family communications and closeness.

** For this discussion "parent" refers to the adult primary caregiver(s) of an adolescent's basic needs [e.g., housing, safety, food]. Primary caregivers include biological parents; other biological relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles; and non-biological parents such as adoptive, foster, or stepparents.*

Strategic Actions

School-Family Outreach and Partnerships

Thoughtful and respectful outreach by schools to families can greatly increase parent engagement in their child's learning. Several outreach strategies developed by Alaska educators, are captured in the [Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska](#) publication such as:¹³

- Learn about and build on the local knowledge and values of the community.
- Be part of the community; participate or volunteer in community activities and events.
- Welcome all. Use the school or classroom as a hub for family activities and social events.
- Show you care. Ask parents about their child to better understand their child's strengths and needs.
- Listen deeply and with humility. Recognize the mistrust in education due to past history and trauma.
- Schedule out-of-school opportunities for students and families that match their interests and expertise.
- Develop meaningful school-family partnerships. "Guiding Principles to School-Family Partnerships" are referenced in the [School Connectedness protective factor](#) and are described in depth within the *Stronger Together* publication.¹³

School outreach example: The Bering Straits school district created a "Back to School Readiness Challenge" focused on cultural and family-based activities. Incentives were provided by the school to all students who completed at least half of the activities with their family.

School - Community Partnerships

Family connectedness can be enhanced by programs that focus on strengthening parent-child communication, parental monitoring, age-appropriate supervision and regular family meals. Schools or local organizations can offer formal or informal parent training or parent-to-parent support groups.

Example: The [Anchorage Youth Development Coalition](#) developed a family meals packet as part of their drug-free communities' grant. In addition to healthy recipes, each packet contains 40+ mealtime conversation starters.

Example: [Strengthening Families](#) 10–14 is a program that involves sessions for parents, youth, and families with the goal of improving parents' skills for disciplining, managing emotions and conflict, and communicating with their children; promoting youths' interpersonal and problem-solving skills; and creating family activities to build cohesion and positive parent-child interactions.

Struggling families may not have access or time to attend parenting programs; efforts to sponsor these programs must address the barriers related to transportation, childcare and consider meaningful incentives.

Families and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers can provide structure and support by creating family traditions, daily routines, house rules and emotional check-ins. These guidelines offer the foundation for a family's values and expectations related to relationships, healthy lifestyles and education. Family guidelines provide a shared understanding of:

- ⇒ How family members will behave and treat each other with kindness and respect
- ⇒ How conflict and misunderstandings will be handled
- ⇒ What household chores are done, by who (time expectations and consequences)
- ⇒ The family's spiritual/ cultural/ and or civic beliefs, expectations and responsibilities

Suggestions from family members in the publication, [Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#):⁶

- Tell your children you love them, often, show them in many ways. Always make time for them, be available when they need it.
- Show interest in your child's life. Ask questions about their day, or opinions about what's happening at school, in the community, or world. Listen carefully to what they share.
- Answer your children's/teen's questions honestly. Show you appreciate being asked about anything. Let them know that no topic is, "off limits."
- Eat with your family regularly. Make space for everyone to share what's going on.
- Set limits for how much TV is watched by everyone.
- Explore and nurture your children's interests, even if they are not yours.
- Hold weekly family meetings. Let everyone speak openly but respectfully, make sure to include positive stuff and fun family plans.
- Do fun stuff together. Do sports the family can do together. Teach cooking, sewing, how to fix things or survival skills. Go camping, fishing, berry picking, hunting or a walk, in nature.
- Help your children develop a personal relationship with the Creator.
- Create a quiet space for homework. Take an interest in your child's homework. Be available to help or review if needed. Help with homework even if it's difficult for you. You don't have to teach your child the answer. What you teach them is, how to find out the answer and how to learn. They watch you learn.
- Teach your language or dialect. Children may not be fluent, but they need access to it.

Community Members

More ideas from *Helping Kids Succeed* ⁶ . . .

- When you have friends over to your house, include their children and do family fun activities.
- Talk with other parents about their children. Point out their strengths and the support they give their children.
- Support and be involved in cross-generational cultural activities and celebrations.

Resources

[Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#). (1998, 2017 update) Association of Alaska School Boards

[Resources for Parents and Educators with Students at Home](#) Association of Alaska School Boards

[Keep Connected](#) & [Bringing Developmental Relationships Home](#) Search Institute

[ParenTeen Connect](#) Committee for Children

[Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens](#) Parent Advocacy Network

Family Meal conversation starters: [The Family Dinner project](#) & [ADL Table Talk](#)

[Best Family Movies](#) Common Sense Media

Protective Factor: Positive school climate (safe, supportive and encouraging)

YRBS Indicator: Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree that their teachers really care about them and give them a lot of encouragement

HA2030 Indicator: None. It is referenced within nine HA 2030 Indicator strategy/action areas.

Description: This protective factor reflects a student's connection and feelings about their school, as a caring, supportive and encouraging environment. Students feel "connected" (bonded) to their school based on their feelings about the people at school, both staff and other students. *A positive school setting provides an environment that has the potential to nurture multiple other protective factors.*

Strategic Actions

School Settings

School-wide efforts to increase positive school climate, described in [HA2030](#) #18⁴ may be achieved by:

- Focused efforts to build culturally responsive supportive relationships with students, families.
- High expectations for student academics, behavior and responsibility.
- Use of building-wide proactive classroom management strategies to maintain a positive atmosphere and reinforces positive behavior.
- Physical and emotional safety, fair and respectful treatment of all students.
- Consistent acknowledgement of all students and recognition for good work.
- Interactive teaching and cooperative learning strategies.
- Student voice in school activities and classroom management.
- Opportunities to learn about the history and culture of people who live in the community.
- Consistent professional learning for school staff to build school climate, increase life and social/emotional skills, and implement trauma-engaged and whole-school practices.

School-Family Partnerships

Meaningful outreach by schools to families can greatly increase a caregiver engagement in their child's learning. The beliefs and values of a school and its staff shape this outreach. A true family partnership requires a shift in mindset and practice.¹³ The Guiding Principles below were compiled from Alaska educators and families as well as national research and are described in depth within the publication, [Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska](#).

Eight Guiding Principles of School Family Partnerships¹³

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| * Approach Families with Humility and Respect | * Establish Strong Communication |
| * Focus on Strengths | * Understand Family Structures |
| * Resist Assumptions | * Celebrate Culture |
| * Seek Understanding | * Be Patient |

Suggestions to increase positive student-teacher connections⁶

Also see "Emotional Regulation protective factor"

- Take time to get to know students and their families. Take interest in their lives. Find out their interests and what they are good at in non-academic areas.⁶
- Smile a lot, make eye contact (as culturally appropriate) Greet students by name. Make each student feel noticed, every day.^{6,10}
- Treat all students with respect, compassion and patience. Encourage open, respectful communication about differing viewpoints.⁶

- Use proactive classroom management strategies to maintain a positive atmosphere that reinforces positive behavior through praise and establishing rules, routines, and expectations.
- Be flexible with instructional strategies to allow for teachable moments, personalization of lessons. Relate learning to students' lives and the real world.
- Engage students in classroom decision-making processes.
- Invite Elders and or cultural leaders into the classroom to teach cultural history.
- Directly and explicitly teach SEL and emotional regulation skills. Allow and encourage students to identify, label, express, and assess their feelings. Provide opportunities for students to improve their interpersonal, stress management, problem solving and decision-making skills.⁷

Student voice and leadership opportunities

The school setting provides ample opportunities for authentic student voice and leadership to help solve problems, provide new ideas and input to decisions that impact the student body. These clubs create a safe space for students to socialize, support each other, and connect with supportive school staff. To increase diverse and authentic student voice, feedback and leadership experiences across school settings the following actions are recommended by [HA2030](#) LHI 18:⁴

- Support and maintain student advisory boards to improve school climate and peer interactions.
- Support and maintain student membership on local school board.
- Support youth and/or student groups or clubs that focus on helping others in the school and/or community (e.g., peer helpers, cross-age tutoring).
- Ensure intentional recruitment to include inherent and acquired diverse representation/ participation on advisory committees and boards.
- Support school-community partnerships that encourage culturally relevant activities that use [youth development practices](#). (Examples: 4-H, culture groups, or service projects focusing on helping people or improving conditions in the community.)

Families and Caregivers

Also see [Family Connectedness protective factor](#)

- Let teachers know you value and support them (their care and concern for students will increase as a result of feeling valued)⁶
- Help out at school events to help make school a warm place for students⁶
- Check in with your children frequently about their experiences and feelings about school.⁶
- Support your teen's involvement in school-based extra-curricular activities.⁶
- Ask teachers about ways to support your teen's learning, social and emotional learning, and co-regulation in and out of school.⁷
- Start off the school year, building strong relationships with staff to have a solid foundation to problem-solve for student's best outcome.⁷

Resources

[Alaska School Climate Resources](#) Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), website
[Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska](#). (2019) AASB & DEED
[School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth](#). (2009) CDC
[Stronger Together: The Power of School and Family Partnership in Alaska](#) (2021) AASB
[Alaska Social Emotional Learning Resources](#) Association of Alaska School Boards, website
[What Kids Can Do](#). (2011). Students as Allies in School Reform: A New Call for Action!
[Youth on Boards: Why Youth Leaders Matter](#). (2018) Association of Alaska School Boards
[Soundout!](#) (2014) Adam Fletcher (Training, tools and TA for meaningful student involvement)
[Alaska Peer Outreach Guidebook](#). (2012) Alaska Youth Advocates, Alaska Division of Public Health, WCFH
[Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#). (2017, update) Association of Alaska School Boards

Protective Factor Connection to other positive adults

YRBS Indicator Percent of HS students with 3 or more adults (besides their parents) who they feel comfortable seeking help from, if they had an important question affecting their life.

HA2030 Indicator #17, also referenced within eight other indicator strategy/action areas.

Description: This protective factor refers to the support, care and encouragement youth receive through relationships with adults, other than family members (i.e., teachers, neighbors, coaches, youth group advisors, mentors or ministers). As children grow, they become involved in an expanded network of people. *This protective factor has a synergistic effect with other protective factors.*

Strategic Actions

Schools and Afterschool programs

School-based strategies to increase the number of supportive adults for youth are also described under [Positive School Climate, protective factor](#).

- Strive to understand your student's culture and its verbal and non-verbal communication styles.
- Talk informally with students on a daily basis. Make it a point to ask about things going on in their lives. Get to know them more than as a student.⁶
- Attend community activities so you can build relationships with young people and their families outside of the school setting.⁶
- Try to understand and be sensitive to challenges in a student's life outside of school. Show sensitivity to their feelings and experiences.
- Ensure "safe spaces" in school for LGBTQ youth to receive support services, as well as for youth with differing physical, emotional and mental abilities.⁴

Afterschool-based strategies to increase the number of supportive adults, are also described under [Quality Afterschool, protective factor](#).

- Learn about youth participant's culture and its verbal and non-verbal communication styles.
- When youth share their ideas or opinions, listen carefully. Gently ask follow-up questions to understand their perspective and show genuine interest.
- When youth have problems, help them think through options. Ask them, what they think are the pros and cons of the options.
- Teach and practice SEL skills. Coach and model emotional regulation skills during activities. Discuss and practice "stress-busters" with youth during low tension times (e.g., breathing, movement, mindfulness, pressure point relief, fingerholds, etc.)
- Ensure "safe spaces" in your program for LGBTQ and youth with differing physical, emotional and mental abilities.⁴

Community Partnerships

Community organizations, youth programs, faith communities and local groups can come together to increase youth's experience of positive, supportive, encouraging adults in the community, at large. Partnerships need to be attentive to youth's access and connection to adults -- who are respectful and responsive to youth's self-identity and their cultural context. Below are some recommendations from [Healthy Alaskans 2030](#):⁴

- Increase capacity for evidence-based, formal and informal youth-adult mentoring programs across multiple settings (youth clubs, programs, faith-based groups.)
- Increase youth-adult partnerships and community action projects based on youth voice and empowerment practices ([see Youth Mattering protective factor](#)).
- Promote social norms and expectations for adults to connect positively with young people in their community.

- Engage and educate community adults about ways to interact with youth that promote positive youth development, within the cultural context.
- Maintain and expand community initiatives that teach and promote strength-based, culturally appropriate approaches and interactions between all youth-adults.
- Promote and provide opportunities for community-based cultural activities and traditions that actively engage youth with supportive adults.
- Encourage the use of culturally appropriate youth services by caseworkers and social service providers (e.g., [Cultural Resources for Alaska Families. Traditional Health and Wellness Guide](#)).¹⁰
- Ensure “safe spaces” in the community for LGBTQ youth to receive support services, as well as for youth with differing physical, emotional and mental abilities.⁴

The [Developmental Relationship Framework](#), (Search Institute) identifies five actions adults can take to build supportive relationships with youth.¹⁵ These actions range from simple gestures and exchanges to, one-on-one conversations with youth.

- Express care (*show me that I matter to you*)
- Provide support (*help me complete tasks and achieve goals*)
- Challenge growth (*push me to keep getting better*)
- Expand possibilities (connect me with people and places that broaden my world)
- Share power (*treat me with respect and give me a say*)

See Figure 1: Building Protective Factors through Relationships

Families and Caregivers

As youth mature, the need to connect with people outside the family increases. Caregivers can encourage healthy, respectful relationships with adults outside of the family through actions described in *Helping Kids Succeed*:

- Do things with other families, so your kids can be with other parents and adults. Include other families and adults in your activities.
- Give your kids time with other adults on their own; make sure it's someone you trust and someone your child genuinely likes.
- Involve your kids in youth programs that include lots of time for talking about what's going on in their lives, the highs and lows. Get to know the youth program leaders and support them as needed.

Community Members

Youth feel connection and support from their community based on causal exchanges between known (and anonymous) adults.¹⁶ Culturally appropriate friendliness, warmth and acceptance is conveyed through body language and non-verbal exchanges from smiling and head nods to frowns or angry looks. Tips to show you care from *Helping Kids Succeed*:⁶

- Get to know your friends' children and your children's friends. Ask about their interests and opinions about things, really listen! Follow-up with questions, later when you see them.
- Know the names of neighborhood children/youth. Stop and say 'hi'. Ask them about themselves.
- Take the initiative in building relationships with young people.
- Model healthy attitudes and choices

Resources:

[Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#). (1998, 2017 update) Association of Alaska School Boards

[Developmental Relationships](#) Search Institute, website

[Being Y-AP Savvy A Primer on Creating and Sustaining Youth-Adult Partnerships](#). (2010) ACT for Youth

[Keep Connected](#) Search Institute, website

[Cultural Resources for Alaska Families. Traditional Health and Wellness Guide](#) (2018) Alaska DHSS

Protective Factor: Engaged in Quality Afterschool Programs and Activities

YRBS Indicator: Percentage of high school students who participate in organized afterschool, evening or weekend activities at least twice a week.

HA2030 Indicator: None. It is referenced within nine 2030 Indicator strategy and action areas.

Description: This protective factor refers to structured activities or programs (before, after school, on weekends or summer-based) that are supervised by a responsible, trained adult who provides age-appropriate guidance and autonomy. Quality programs have supportive staff; a friendly and respectful climate; intentional skill instruction, youth-centered practices, continuous improvement and focused efforts to recruit and retain staff and students. In a [meta-analysis](#) of afterschool programs, four factors (summarized by the **SAFE** acronym) distinguished effective from ineffective programs:⁹

1. **Sequenced** approaches (skill instruction through connected and coordinated activities)
2. **Active** learning (emphasis on practicing of new skills)
3. **Focused** (specific time and attention dedicated to skill development)
4. **Explicit** (clear definition of skills)

[Positive Youth Development](#) (PYD) principles³ are foundational to quality afterschool programs. The afterschool setting is not only a protective factor in itself, but an environment that can nurture several other protective factors (*see [Mattering](#), [Emotional Regulation](#), [Supportive Adults](#) for additional ideas.*)

Strategic Actions

Schools and Community Organizations

Best Practices

Afterschool programs reside both in schools and community settings. Regardless of the location, best practices must be infused within the program to truly make it a quality afterschool program. In addition to the SAFE and PYD practices already noted, quality afterschool programs are characterized by the following elements:

- Safe, welcoming, supportive settings.
- Authentic, respectful, supportive relationships with youth.
- Culturally relevant, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and emotional regulation skills are taught, modeled and practiced.
- Youth-centered practices for genuine participation include: *
 - ⇒ “Youth voice” (seeking youth opinions and ideas),
 - ⇒ Choices of roles and responsibilities,
 - ⇒ Opportunities for contribution, decision-making and leadership.

* *Elements especially important for older-youth programs, ([also see Youth Mattering protective factor and Figure 2: Youth-Centered Practices](#)).*

Professional development training and support is critical to quality afterschool programming. It must be culturally relevant, include PYD and SEL practices. Two Alaska training examples:

Example: The **Youth Program Quality Initiative** (YPQI) sponsored by the [Alaska Afterschool Network](#) will provide youth-worker methods training. It’s based on the [National Research Council](#) landmark publication describing the core elements of successful youth development programs.³

The youth methods training covers how-to, best-practices in each area:

- Safe Environment – physical, emotional safety and inclusive practices
- Supportive Environment - welcoming, encouraging, conflict resolution, active learning and skill building
- Interaction – belonging, empathy, cooperative learning and leadership opportunities
- Engagement – planning, choices, problem solving, mindfulness and reflection

The backbone of this training is the YPQA assessment process that evaluates the quality of youth programming and identifies staff training needs. Critical components of the process is assuring youth are involved in decision making in the organization and there is adequate staff development time and space.

Example: The Anchorage Youth Development Coalition sponsors the, **Second Order Change**, a leadership development series and professional learning community. It is designed to strengthen organizational staff's social emotional competence in delivering high quality youth development programs.

School Settings

Most afterschool programs are hosted on the school site, out of convenience for the attending students. In larger communities specialized afterschool programs for older youth maybe held off-site (to be more welcoming and inclusive for students from multiple schools). In smaller towns and villages, the school building may be the most appropriate and only location possible. Regardless of the setting, schools can increase quality programming and participation through:

- Partnering with community organizations to make facilities available for afterschool programs.
- Provide stipends or incentives for school staff to facilitate and provide support to youth clubs & groups.
- Create a bulletin board to let students know about different youth activities in the community.

Afterschool Programs

Quality afterschool programs incorporate the SAFE and PYD best practice elements and are facilitated by trained, youth-friendly staff. Actual program activities typically include at least one of these areas:

Best practices for each area may be found at the [Alaska Afterschool Network](#) or in the resources below.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| ★ Academic Enrichment | ★ STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) activities |
| ★ Substance Misuse Prevention | ★ Culture and/or Arts activities |
| ★ Social Emotional Learning | ★ Community engagement projects |

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and emotional regulation skills can be integrated and reinforced throughout program activities. All program staff can model and practice co-regulation, so participants learn how to manage emotions and deal with stress. (*See [Supportive Adults and Emotional Regulation](#).*)

Community engagement projects incorporate culturally relevant activities designed to improve community conditions or help others; these projects often include:

- Youth-conducted research/surveys to assess local issues, identify solutions and develop action plans.
- Youth-adult partnerships to accomplish community action projects

Examples: [Citizen Science projects](#), [Banning Plastic Bags](#), [Mental Health Advocacy through Storytelling](#)

Family and Caregivers

Families can support and encourage their children to be involved in afterschool programs and urge them to stick with a program for at least several months. Additional ideas from [Helping Kids Succeed- Alaskan Style](#)⁶ include:

- Explore your child's interests and talents. Nurture those through information you find from movies, articles, books, in nature and community programs.
- Attend your child/teen's events, activities and games.
- Arrange with parents of other children to share transportation, fundraising and supervision if needed.

Resources

[Alaska Afterschool Network](#) - statewide organization focused on increasing afterschool and expanded learning

[Expanding Minds and Opportunities](#) T. Peterson, editor - a compendium of afterschool program studies

[Mizzen](#) Mott Foundation - free App of over 1,000 high-quality afterschool lesson plans

[Beyond the Bell](#) American Institutes of Research, website

[Six Tips for Increasing Meaningful Youth Engagement in Programs](#). (undated) Youth Power Learning.

[Youth Participatory Action Research, Curriculum](#) (2014) Oregon Health Department






Figure 1: Building Protective Factors through Relationships

The Developmental Relationships Framework by the Search Institute provides a snapshot of key elements and actions.



The Developmental Relationships Framework

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives.

Elements	Actions	Definitions
 1. Express Care Show me that I matter to you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be Dependable.....Be someone I can trust. • Listen.....Really pay attention when we are together. • Believe in me.....Make me feel known and valued. • Be warm.....Show me you enjoy being with me. • Encourage.....Praise me for my efforts and achievements. 	
 2. Challenge Growth Push me to keep getting better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect my Best.....Expect me to live up to my potential. • Stretch.....Push me to go further. • Hold me accountable.....Insist I take responsibility for my actions. • Reflect on failures.....Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks. 	
 3. Provide Support Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate.....Guide me through hard situations and systems. • Empower.....Build my confidence to take charge of my life. • Advocate.....Stand up for me when I need it. • Set boundaries.....Put limits in place that keep me on track. 	
 4. Share Power Treat me with respect and give me a say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect me.....Take me seriously and treat me fairly. • Include me.....Involve me in decisions that affect me. • Collaborate.....Work with me to solve problems and reach goals. • Let me lead.....Create opportunities for me to take action and lead. 	
 5. Expand Possibilities Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire.....Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. • Broaden horizons.....Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. • Connect.....Introduce me to people who can help me grow. 	

NOTE: Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.

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Figure 2: Building Protective Factors through Youth-Centered Practices

Youth Programs (Non-academic or sports)	Youth in Organizational Decision-Making and Governance	Youth as Community Change Agents
<p>Youth are involved in programs, activities, or projects that help others. Projects are typically done by youth <i>with adult support</i>. (<u>Not</u> adult-led efforts directed to youth).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth provide leadership, direction, coordination, and follow-through. Youth help decide the rules, plan the activities, conduct the projects and evaluate progress. <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer helpers Peer outreach workers Peer educators, cross-age teachers Tutors Cross-age mentors Youth courts Youth artists and actors Culture clubs & activities Youth in service to help others Youth news reporters Youth media bloggers Youth run businesses 	<p>Youth (<i>with adult allies</i>) are involved in a range of decision-making roles within an organization (at the local, regional or statewide level). Decision-making roles range from giving input, consultation and advocacy to, having voting responsibilities and privileges. (<i>Typically, youth become interested in this role <u>after</u> volunteering for an organization; over time, they become connected to its staff and mission.</i>)</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>Youth Voice - opinions and ideas Youth feedback is solicited and considered about an organization's programs or services (task force, focus groups, youth surveys etc.)</p> <p>Youth Consultants/Advisors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth are "consultants" and provide input, plan and evaluate programs within the organization. Youth contribute to and influence the development of policy and structural changes of an organization. Youth advisory group, council, or commission <u>to</u> boards, administrations and legislative bodies. <p>Youth in Governance Roles (<i>Shared leadership, decision-making, voting privileges and responsibilities for youth-oriented organizations</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth philanthropy (youth make funding decisions on youth-planned and led-projects). Youth inclusion on organizational committees for continuous improvement, processing and evaluation. Youth inclusion in hiring, funding, strategic planning, organizational policies, grant writing. Youth serve on organizational boards of directors or commissions. 	<p>Young people (<i>with adults</i>) work to improve conditions in the community, environment, region or state. Success is mostly achieved through <u>group</u> efforts, not individual.</p> <p>Youth-led processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth identify issues important to them and their community. Youth research and analyze the causes and solutions Youth learn community organizing and advocacy strategies Youth develop and carry out action plans to effect change in their community <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth forums, focus groups, youth-conducted surveys - identify issues, problems and potential solutions; follow-up action groups supported. "Youth-Adult Partnerships" organized to improve community conditions. Youth involved in "Participatory Action Research" to better understand issues. Youth group performs ongoing service activities to improve community conditions. Youth advocate for social justice issues. Youth participate in "public affairs" though forums; contacting public officials, media; organizing community awareness events. Youth participate in elections, campaigns, voter registration, issue advocacy, legislation or host candidate debates.
<p>Adapted by Becky Judd, from: Act for Youth (2004) <i>Strengthening Youth Involvement</i>. LISTEN (2003) <i>An Emerging Model for Working with Youth</i>. Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth. <i>Youth Civic Engagement</i>; Youth Forum for Youth Investment (2001) <i>Youth Action: Youth Contributing to Communities Supporting Youth</i>; Alaska Youth in Governance Initiative, DHSS/DBH and AASB (2009). Also see: https://youth.gov/youth-topics/tag/game-plan/approaches</p>		

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