

ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FACILITATOR GUIDE



TRACK 3, MODULE 3.2:

YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

This curriculum was developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private, nonpartisan philanthropic organization. It is intended as an educational resource for young people with foster care experience and the adult supporters who work with them to improve services, systems and opportunities. In accordance with federal law and the Foundation's policy, this curriculum does not support or endorse specific legislation, political candidates or partisan viewpoints or encourage any lobbying activity.

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ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FACILITATOR GUIDE

Elevating Youth Engagement is a training series for young adults and their adult partners to prepare for collaboration. **The trainings teach the philosophy and practice of authentically engaging young adults in partnerships that promote codesign and leadership development.** The approaches and best practices discussed can be applied to systems-change work, policy and practice advocacy, and other opportunities for young people with foster care experience to use their expertise to inspire change. It contains lessons developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative® and Cetera Inc.

The training is divided into three tracks. Each track contains a set of modules, and each module includes a slide deck, facilitator guide and handouts.

The *Elevating Youth Engagement* training series helps organizations adopt a tested approach for meaningful youth involvement, whether new to youth engagement work or looking to improve existing efforts. The training series also helps young leaders advance their advocacy skills and grow professionally.

Many adult-led organizations involve young people as advocates or partners. These trainings will provide fundamentals of codesign and help adult supporters engage and encourage young leaders as partners while acknowledging and addressing their professional aspirations and developmental needs.

Elevating Youth Engagement begins with the assumption that including young people who have experienced foster care in advocacy and systems-change efforts is necessary. Their ideas and perspectives lead to policy and practice improvements that ensure a better future for young people in foster care and transitioning from foster care into adulthood.

This guide is intended to help prepare facilitators to deliver the *Elevating Youth Engagement* training. The three tracks can be delivered as a comprehensive series or divided into smaller presentations by topic or audience. Facilitators are encouraged to use the materials in the way that best suits their needs and community.

TO LEARN MORE

For more information about the *Elevating Youth Engagement* training series, please contact: webmail@aecf.org.

OVERVIEW OF ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TRAINING MODULES

Track 1: Youth Engagement for Adult Supporters

Module 1.1	Foundations of Authentic Youth Engagement	This module focuses on the benefits of engaging young people and committing to actions that will increase authentic youth engagement.
Module 1.2	Coaching as a Youth Engagement Practice	This module focuses on a coaching approach to advance the professional and personal development of young people who have experienced foster care.

Track 2: Youth Engagement for Young Leaders

Module 2.1	Youth Advocacy 101	This module focuses on building skills to advocate for oneself and others, understanding how child welfare policy and practices are developed and the types of advocacy, and using personal storytelling to influence and educate decision makers.
Module 2.2	Wellness and Advocacy for Young Leaders	This module focuses on the connection between self-awareness, personal wellness and advocacy, and offers tools for young leaders to manage their well-being to minimize harm when advocating.

Track 3: Youth Engagement for Adult Supporters and Young Leaders

Module 3.1	Values and Authentic Youth Engagement	This module focuses on how individual values contribute to self-identity, decision making, relating to others and determining team values.
 Module 3.2	Youth-Adult Partnerships and Adolescent Brain Development	This module focuses on how the experience of foster care affects the adolescent brain and how to incorporate insights about adolescent brain development in youth engagement work.
Module 3.3	Authentic Youth Engagement: Partnership to Action	This module focuses on the elements of authentic youth engagement, practices that increase authentic youth engagement and tools to support young people's leadership development and advocacy skills.
Module 3.4	Action Planning for Authentic Youth Engagement	This module focuses on the Emergent Learning process, and how to inform a youth engagement strategy and develop an action plan.

AUDIENCES FOR THE ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TRAINING SERIES

The Casey Foundation developed the *Elevating Youth Engagement* training series for the following audiences:

- Jim Casey Initiative sites and Jim Casey Initiative network partners;
- youth and young adults with experience in foster care;
- child welfare leaders and staff; and
- professionals, community leaders, mentors and advocates within organizations and other groups that influence or affect outcomes for youth who have experienced foster care, especially those who currently partner with young people in program, practice and policy-level systems-change efforts — or aspire to.

OUTCOMES FOR THE ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TRAINING SERIES

This training series is intended to strengthen participants' technical knowledge and skills as well as increase their understanding of the importance of shared decision making.

TECHNICAL LEARNING RESULTS

Participants will gain knowledge of:

- authentic youth engagement and its purpose, guiding values, principles and priorities;
- science related to adolescent brain development;
- the definition and characteristics of authentic youth engagement; and
- practices that increase authentic youth engagement in their work.

ADAPTIVE LEARNING RESULTS

Participants will better understand:

- reasons to practice authentic youth engagement in all areas of their work;
- the ways that experiencing foster care can affect adolescent brain development;
- how authentic youth engagement provides opportunities for leadership development and policy advocacy;
- why it's important to manage well-being as an advocate; and
- how authentic youth-adult partnerships can advance goals to best serve young people with the greatest need within systems-change efforts.

PREPARING FOR THE ELEVATING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TRAININGS

WHO SHOULD FACILITATE?

Facilitators should be comfortable and experienced speaking in front of groups and be willing and able to:

- describe and promote youth-adult partnerships as a critical strategy to improve older youth outcomes;
- use disaggregated data and provide local examples of youth-adult partnerships; and
- speak to all learning results of this training.

Recommendations:

- Young adults and adult system partners should co-facilitate. Co-facilitation is an opportunity to model the philosophies and practices taught during the training in real time. Co-facilitation is also an excellent opportunity for young people to develop leadership skills and, if comfortable, give real-life examples to participants throughout the training.
- Read the brief *Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth-Adult Partnerships* in preparation for this training for background and literature on engaging youth in authentic, meaningful ways.
- Prepare anecdotal examples related to local demographics, policies and the state of child welfare, for relevance.

TIME CONSIDERATIONS

Each *Elevating Youth Engagement* training module can take up to two hours to deliver. To maximize knowledge retention, facilitators are encouraged to offer one or two modules at a time in a session with a break in between. Some modules contain two parts and will need 60 to 90 minutes per part. If it's not feasible to deliver both parts of the training on the same day, it is recommended to deliver part two no more than a week after delivering part one to ensure participant retention.

Plan to take one to two breaks during each module to keep people engaged in the material. Facilitators are encouraged to use their best judgment in deciding break times.

Note: Sample discussion questions are provided in several modules to encourage audience engagement. Facilitators are welcome to include additional discussion questions relevant to the material throughout the training as deemed necessary. Adding discussion questions may increase the length of the training.

Below are additional resources that can provide facilitators and participants with deeper context related to:

CASEY'S APPROACH TO YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

- *A Framework for Effectively Partnering With Young People*
- *In-Depth Case Studies of Authentic Youth Engagement in Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Sites*

ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development*
- *Brain Frames: Short Tools for Positive Interactions With Youth in Foster Care*
- Video: *Why the Teenage Brain Has an Evolutionary Advantage*
- Video: *Promoting Brain Gains for Youth Emerging From Foster Care*
- Video: *The Stages of Adolescent Brain Development*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DELIVERING THE TRAINING IN PERSON

Before the training: Set the room to allow small and large group discussions. Avoid a setup with rows where all participants face the front and away from one another. A U-shape, square or several round tables can accomplish this.

During the training: Provide small fidget toys or snacks.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DELIVERING THE TRAINING VIRTUALLY

Before the training: Provide participants with links or access to a folder that contains the handouts for the module.

During the training: Welcoming participants to the training should include providing training and tech logistics for Zoom or other virtual platforms, such as how to use “Raise Hand,” chat and mute and unmute features. Instruct participants to use a “Raise Hand” feature to ask questions or share during an activity. Participants may be instructed to drop their answers in the chat at the discretion of the facilitator.




















During the discussions: Remember to present in gallery mode so that participation is more interactive.

Facilitator Checklist of Materials for Youth-Adult Partnerships and Adolescent Brain Development

- ☒ Notebook (recommended: for facilitator notes)
- ☒ Journals (recommended: one per participant to complete reflections and take notes)
- ☒ Pens and pencils (recommended: several per participant table)
- ☒ Markers (recommended: several per participant table)
- ☒ Highlighters (recommended: several per participant table)
- ☒ Fidget toys
- ☒ Snacks
- ☒ Sticky note pads (recommended: several per participant table)
- ☒ Flip chart and tape (recommended: several around the room for participant exercises)
- ☒ Chart paper for related questions and ideas to be captured.
Often referred to as “Parking Lot” or a “Garden” board.
- ☒ Computer/projector (for presentation)

YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS AND ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION SUMMARY

The sample agenda below is designed for a two-hour training, but facilitators should feel free to adjust time allotted based on their style, the group and breaks needed.

Activity	Topic	Time Estimate
Presentation	Welcome	 4 minutes
Presentation	Agenda	 2 minutes
Presentation	Module Results	 2 minutes
Discussion	Check In	 10 minutes
Presentation	Module Context	 2 minutes
Presentation	Defining Authentic Youth Engagement	 3 minutes
Presentation	The Characteristics of Authentic Youth Engagement	 3 minutes
Presentation	The Experience of Foster Care	 6 minutes
Presentation	The Experience of Foster Care	 3 minutes
Presentation	Consider the Adolescent Brain	 10 minutes
Presentation	The Highlights	 5 minutes
Presentation	How Does It Play Out?	 10 minutes
Presentation	The Experience of Foster Care	 3 minutes
Presentation	Trauma and Adversity	 3 minutes
Presentation	Change the Narrative From Impulsive to Creative Contributors	 3 minutes
Presentation and Discussion	Change the Narrative	 10 minutes
Presentation and Exercise	Reflection Activity	 15 minutes
Presentation	How It Looks in Practice	 5 minutes
Discussion	Check Out	 10 minutes
TOTAL TIME ESTIMATE		ABOUT 2 HOURS

PRESENTATION: WELCOME

4 minutes

Do: Introduce yourself briefly — just your name and title or role — and provide any necessary, brief background about the training. Provide basic information necessary to ensure participants' comfort (food, parking, location of restrooms, breaks).

The sample talking points below are provided as a guide, but facilitators should feel free to add examples relevant to their work and express points in their own words.

Talking Points:

- *Hello everyone! My name is _____, and I have the pleasure of discussing with you all the foundational elements of adolescent brain development and helping you envision what it looks like to engage youth who have experienced foster care in your communities.*



PRESENTATION: AGENDA

2 minutes

Do: Provide a high-level overview of the agenda and briefly describe the flow of the day.

Talking Points:

- *For today's module, we are going to start with a review of results, check in and set some context. We're then going to review how we define authentic youth engagement.*
- *We will go over the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative® approach to authentic youth engagement, which is a field-tested approach.*
- *We will then review how the experience of foster care affects the development of adolescents and the key components of adolescent brain development.*
- *We are going to wrap our day up by applying adolescent brain development to authentic youth engagement, then we will discuss our learnings and check out for the day.*

Agenda

- Review module results
- Check in
- Review of authentic youth engagement
- The experience of foster care
- Adolescent brain development
- Changing the narrative
- Discussion
- Check out

PRESENTATION: MODULE RESULTS

2 minutes

Do: Read results and hold space for any questions or clarity needed.

Talking Points:

- *The results for this session are as follows:*
 - *Participants will understand how the experience of foster care affects the adolescent brain.*

Module Results

Participants will understand:

- how the experience of foster care affects the adolescent brain;
- the developmental milestones occurring in the adolescent brain; and
- how to incorporate insights about adolescent brain development in their work to achieve authentic youth engagement.

- Participants will understand the developmental milestones occurring in the adolescent brain.
- Participants will understand how to incorporate insights about adolescent brain development in their work to achieve authentic youth engagement.

DISCUSSION: CHECK IN

10 minutes

Do: Invite participants to introduce themselves and answer the check-in question. Choose whether you will call on participants or ask participants to speak and then call on another person.

Talking Points:

- *We want to invite you to check in so we can all get to know one another a little better.*
- *When you introduce yourself, please say your name, where you're from (could be the state, city or community you live in) and your role. Please also answer our check-in question: What is one way a relationship affected you positively when you were a teen?*

Check In

- Name
- Location, Role
- What is one way a relationship affected you positively when you were a teen?



PRESENTATION: MODULE CONTEXT

2 minutes

Do: Read the module context.

Talking Points:

- *This module focuses on:*
 - *the experience of foster care; and*
 - *how to apply adolescent brain development to authentic youth engagement.*
- *For this training, we are working from the assumption that all participants here today have a shared value that including young people who have experienced foster care is necessary to improve system policy and practice.*

Module Context

FOCUS:

- The experience of foster care
- How to apply adolescent brain development to authentic youth engagement

ASSUMPTION:

- Participants agree that including young people who have experienced foster care is necessary to improve system policy and practice.

PRESENTATION: DEFINING AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

3 minutes

Do: Read the definition of authentic youth engagement. This definition comes from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Talking Points:

- *Authentic youth engagement is an approach that values the wisdom and expertise of young people. It brings to life the belief that policies and practices will be fundamentally better if we partner with young people who have experienced the foster care system.*

Definition of Authentic Youth Engagement

- It is a philosophical and strategic approach to working with young people.
- Through this signature practice, young people use their individual and collective power and expertise in helping to shape a better future for those in and transitioning from foster care into adulthood.



PRESENTATION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

3 minutes

Do: Elevate the importance of authentic youth engagement and review the characteristics.

Talking Points:

- *Authentic youth engagement values young people's meaningful contribution and recognizes opportunities for professional development.*
- *In other words, authentic youth engagement means providing opportunities for meaningful contributions by young people and intentionally building their professional skills through their leadership and advocacy experiences.*
- *System reform efforts benefit from the ideas of young people, and the work benefits the personal and professional development of the youth.*
- *The characteristics of this type of work include:*
 - *As equal partners, young people build self-esteem and practice problem-solving and leadership skills they will need in adulthood.*
 - *Young people gain access to information, develop new skills and contribute to strategy development. Adults gain insights from the experience and expertise of those most affected and can make better decisions.*
 - *Young people and adults lead together.*

Characteristics of Authentic Youth Engagement

This approach prioritizes young people's expertise and ability to help shape solutions. It also provides **meaningful opportunities** for **professional development**.



PRESENTATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF FOSTER CARE

6 minutes

Do: Give examples of experiences young people may have after entering foster care.

Talking Points:

- *While each person's foster care experience is different, there are common experiences many do face. Many lose opportunities to:*
 - *practice autonomy;*
 - *make normal adolescent mistakes and grow and learn from them; and*
 - *participate in normal and prosocial experiences that promote healthy development.*
- *Many young people in foster care experience having typical adolescent behaviors criminalized or pathologized, e.g., sometimes typical adolescent behavior is seen as a problem to be solved or will be met with harsh consequences that go against what research shows that adolescents need. The consequences might look like being moved to another home and disrupting meaningful relationships.*

The Experience of Foster Care

Upon entering foster care, young people may lose opportunities to:

- make decisions about their lives;
- take developmentally typical risks; and
- experience normal and prosocial adolescent activities, such as after-school clubs or sports.



Ask: What are some examples you have experienced or seen of these common examples?

After participants have answered: Now, let's take a look at some common responses to young people's experiences in foster care.



PRESENTATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF FOSTER CARE

3 minutes

Do: Give examples of common responses to young people's experiences in foster care.

Talking Points:

- Many foster care policies and practices promote strategies such as fixing problems for youth and making decisions based on adults' assumptions that they know what's best for youth. Therefore, the experience of foster care often involves loss of power, autonomy and control for a young adult.
 - These policies and practices do not align with the emerging science of what is happening to the adolescent brain during this time of development. Young people need opportunities to practice making decisions and be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Authentic youth engagement aims to restore the power for young people to make decisions that affect their lives in ways that are healthy and supported.
- While some systems have implemented tools and models to center youth voice in case planning, authentic youth engagement can include going beyond youth engagement at the case level to include youth in strategy development and system change work as well (think micro AND macro levels).

The Experience of Foster Care

Many policies and practices that affect youth in foster care:

- attempt to fix problems for youth;
- result in decisions being made without the young people's input; and
- are based on assumptions that adults know better than young people.

Often, policies and practices do not align with the science of adolescent brain development.



PRESENTATION AND EXERCISE: CONSIDER THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

10 minutes

Do: Review the key concepts of how the adolescent brain is developing and invite participants to reflect and share.

Talking Points:

- Understanding adolescent brain development provides a rationale for why we should engage youth as partners in our work.
- Let's talk about how the adolescent brain is working during this time in life.
 - We now know that our brains continue to develop into our late 20s with a very specific period of rapid development during adolescence — roughly between ages 12 and 26.
 - Adolescence marks a time of significant and rapid brain development similar to the level of growth that occurs during early childhood.
 - During adolescence, different parts of the brain are integrating and creating more efficient neuropathways for information to flow.
 - The brain is experiencing a boost of neuroplasticity — meaning the brain is very malleable during adolescence.
 - Given all the changes in the brain that we will continue to unpack, adolescence is often the most exciting and memorable time of our lives.
- When it comes to authentic youth engagement and adolescent brain development, engaging youth as partners and sharing decision making create opportunities to participate in experiences that literally shape and wire the brain with lifelong knowledge and skills.

Authentic Youth Engagement: Consider the Adolescent Brain





Ask: Please take three to four minutes to reflect on your most memorable high school moment. Think about the details of that moment. What do you remember about the experience? Who was with you? What were you feeling at that moment? Try to recall as many details as possible. Keep this memory in mind as we discuss the ways the brain is working during this time.

After participants complete their reflections: Now that you have thought back to your own adolescence, let's learn a little more about what is happening in the brain during this time.

PRESENTATION: THE HIGHLIGHTS

5 minutes

Do: Review the physiological characteristics of adolescence.

Talking Points:

- *Experiences matter.*
- *Adolescent brains are developing the “white matter” that helps information flow more efficiently across the brain — for now, they rely heavily on the emotional center of their brain to make decisions.*
- *Neuroplasticity and pruning are the ability of the brain to alter its structure in response to experience; the process by which the brain forms new neural pathways, removes old ones and alters the strength of existing connections. This is an active process during adolescence. The brain is adapting, changing and molding in real time to the experiences it is having. This has profound implications for what young people experience — e.g., no interaction or experience is neutral during adolescence. All interactions and experiences shape the developing adolescent brain.*
- *There is a large amount of dopamine flooding adolescent brains — more than any other time in life. Dopamine is the “pleasure chemical.” This surge in dopamine during adolescence means that young people are wired for exciting and novel experiences — anything that contributes to a surge of dopamine!*
- *Due to the rapid growth of the adolescent brain, and the increased levels of dopamine, adolescent brains are particularly sensitive and experience what is being referred to as the “reminiscence bump.” Essentially, this means memories are more deeply imprinted on our brains during adolescence, making our teenage years the most memorable.*
- *Due to the plasticity of the brain and the reminiscence bump, learning new things and creating new habits and thought patterns during adolescence can deeply shape our identity and stick with us as we transition into adulthood.*
- *The changes happening during this time affect young people across many different biological, social and psychological systems.*

Adolescent Brain Development: The Highlights

Characteristics of adolescence

- It is a developmental window that is similar in milestones to the one in early childhood.
- Different parts of the brain are integrating for more efficient information flow, meaning less reliance on the emotional center of the brain for decision making.
- A surge in the brain's “neuroplasticity” and “pruning” means new neural pathways are formed, old pathways are removed and existing connections are strengthened.
- It's sometimes the most exciting and memorable phase throughout the lifespan.



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PRESENTATION: HOW DOES IT PLAY OUT?

10 minutes

Do: Connect the concepts of risk, reward and relationships to adolescent brain development.

Talking Points:

▪ **The Regulatory System**

- *Young people can evaluate risks as well as adults. However, the intensity of dopamine — the pleasure chemical — flooding their brains, paired with the fact that the prefrontal cortex is still developing, makes controlling impulses and resisting exciting and novel opportunities difficult.*
- *Adolescents and young adults are hard wired to be brave, try new things, take chances and push boundaries.*
- *By age 16, adolescents typically can make mature decisions in situations where they are unhurried and can consult with others when their emotions are less aroused. 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 are feeling pressured by time, are emotionally aroused in some way or are subject to peer pressure.*

▪ **The Reward System**

- *Adolescents are more receptive to reward-based learning than punishment-based learning.*
- *Peer approval, acceptance and praise trigger a flood of dopamine into the brain, reinforcing actions and behaviors.*

▪ **The Relationship System**

- *Young people experience heightened arousal in the brain regions that are sensitive to social acceptance and rejection and are particularly attuned to emotional cues.*
- *Adolescents learn more when they are with their friends and peers.*

▪ **Executive Functions**

- *The prefrontal cortex (PFC) governs planning, impulse control, attention and judgment (referred to as “executive functions”) and is one of the last areas of the brain to develop. The delayed development of PFC results in young people relying on the limbic system, which houses the emotional center of the brain.*
- *Emotional reactions can be reframed from “bad behavior” to typical and might change how adults respond or help process behavior with the young person.*
- *The ability to hold onto and work with information, focus thinking, filter distractions and switch gears is like an airport having a highly effective air traffic control system to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways. Scientists refer to these capacities as executive function and self-regulation — a set of skills that relies on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility and self-control.*
- *Now, let’s think about this window of development in the context of spending time in foster care as an adolescent.*

Adolescent Brain Development: How Does It Play Out?

THE REGULATORY SYSTEM

- Impulse control and risk taking
- “Hot cognition” moments

THE RELATIONSHIP SYSTEM

- Sensitivity to social acceptance and rejection
- Best learning in peer groups

THE REWARD SYSTEM

- Receptivity to reward-based learning

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

- Emotional regulation, planning, organizing, introspection, flexibility and critical thinking

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PRESENTATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF FOSTER CARE

3 minutes

Do: Review ways foster care can hinder adolescent brain development.

Talking Points:

- *The foster care system is most concerned with safety. Often, young people have fewer opportunities to make decisions and take risks and participate in experiences that help adolescent brain development because of liability and fears of harm or behavior problems.*
- *The foster care system is usually punishment driven — not reward driven — and there is a tendency to view strong emotions as behavioral issues.*
- *Young people in foster care also have fewer opportunities for experiential learning. Experiential learning is an engaged learning process whereby one “learns by doing” and by reflecting on the experience. It provides opportunities for youth to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for the results. These experiences are best learned in the context of supportive relationships. Often, young people are not able to practice and develop new skills in the context of supportive and interdependent relationships.*
- *Fewer opportunities to learn from mistakes, a lack of support during times of stress and limited autonomy can impact brain development, especially as young people in foster care may be dealing with residual or ongoing traumatic events.*

Adolescent Brain Development: The Experience of Foster Care

Youth may have few opportunities to make independent decisions and take on consistent responsibilities in a supportive environment.

- Risk-averse caregivers
 - Examples: no going to sleepovers or learning to drive
- Independent living classes vs. interdependent relationships and families

Tendency to pathologize behavior that is typical for youth this age

- Strong emotions interpreted as behavioral issues

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PRESENTATION: TRAUMA AND ADVERSITY

3 minutes

Do: Review ways trauma and adversity can hinder adolescent brain development.

Talking Points:

- *Trauma and adversity also interfere with healthy adolescent brain development.*
- *Prolonged exposure to toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences alters the architecture of the developing brain. The overreliance on both the cognitive and emotional capacities needed for survival compromises the neural integration that supports healthy brain development and has physical health consequences too!*
- *Focusing on survival is necessary and normal when facing toxic stress but can be detrimental for young people when their brains learn this as the norm.*
- *Authentic youth engagement leads to experiential learning, which enhances opportunities for healing and skill development that are not focused on survival.*
- *Therefore, engaging youth as partners, understanding and recognizing their experiences, and developing authentic relationships with them are the ways we help impact brain development!*
- *The way adults view young adults impacts the way we engage with them.*

Adolescent Brain Development: Trauma and Adversity

Trauma and adversity interfere with healthy adolescent brain development

- Prolonged exposure to toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences alters the architecture of the developing brain.
- When young people are required to adapt to an environment where chronic stress and frequent transitions are the norm, young brains prime themselves to focus on survival.
- However, this period of rapid change and rewiring poses a critical moment for healing and growth as young people learn from their experiences.



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PRESENTATION: CHANGE THE NARRATIVE FROM IMPULSIVE TO CREATIVE CONTRIBUTORS



3 minutes



Do: Review the importance of challenging and shifting narratives about adolescents.



Talking Points:

- *To authentically and effectively engage young people, it's important that we both understand "what's going on in there" and support a positive and strengths-based narrative of young people.*
- *Adults should challenge and change the narrative: Instead of labeling young people as defiant, lazy or annoying, we recognize that they are growing individuals who are motivated by exciting things and that is normal at their age.*
- *Young people are:*
 - *uniquely primed for learning;*
 - *more sensitive and receptive to the influence of others; and*
 - *motivated by curiosity, passion and excitement.*
- *Adults should also reinforce "stretch opportunities" — young people need to take on challenges or opportunities to build and reinforce skills. These experiences should be slightly beyond their current capability but not unattainable. Opportunities to learn through doing (opportunities to manage money, work after-school jobs, make decisions about the future) support adolescent brain development.*
- *Let's take some time to reflect on and apply your learning about adolescent brain development.*

Change the Narrative From Impulsive to Creative Contributors

Young people are:

- uniquely primed for learning;
- more sensitive and receptive to the influence of others; and
- motivated by curiosity, passion and excitement.



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PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION: CHANGE THE NARRATIVE



10 minutes



Do: Invite the participants to reflect and share in a large group discussion.

PART 1: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Let the participants know they have two to three minutes to individually reflect on the discussion question and that they will be invited to answer the question in a large group discussion.

Large Group Discussion: Change the Narrative

What opportunities do young people need to support their adolescent brain development?



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Ask: *What opportunities do young people need to support their adolescent brain development?*

PART 2: LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask if anyone would like to share their answers to the question: *We would like to hear your reflections. Please feel free to share with the group your ideas about what opportunities young people need to support adolescent brain development.*

Note: Make sure participants know to keep it brief.

Sample Answers:

- The ability to try new things.
- Exposure to new culture and new social experiences.
- The opportunity to take on consistent responsibilities.

PRESENTATION AND EXERCISE: REFLECTION ACTIVITY

15 minutes

Do: Invite the participants to reflect and share in group discussion.

PART 1: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Let the participants know they have two to three minutes for individual reflection and that they will then break into small groups to discuss before a large group discussion.

Reflection Activity

Individual Reflection

What experiences have been impactful in your life and may have contributed to your brain development in a positive way?

Small Group Discussion

- Identify a specific example of when adolescent brain development was not considered.
- Identify ways you may be able to influence a practice to better incorporate the science of adolescent brain development.

Ask each participant to answer the question: *What experiences have been impactful in your life and may have contributed to your brain development in a positive way? You will answer the small group discussion questions later — please focus on the individual reflection question for now.*

PART 2: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask participants to get into small groups to discuss: *In groups of three to four, you'll have about seven minutes for each person to participate in the discussion: Identify a specific example of when adolescent brain development was not considered. Identify ways you may be able to influence a practice to better incorporate the science of adolescent brain development. A few groups will be asked to share out.*

PART 3: LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask if anyone would like to report out for their small group: *We would like to hear highlights from your small group discussions. Please feel free to share your examples and ideas.*

Note: Make sure participants know to keep it brief.



PRESENTATION: HOW IT LOOKS IN PRACTICE

5 minutes

Do: Review the benefits of authentic youth engagement for organizations and communities.

Talking Points:

- *As previously mentioned, authentic youth engagement requires true partnerships between youth and adults, opportunities for young people, preparation and support.*
- **Youth-adult partnership is** true partnering between young people and adults that enables young people to build self-esteem, practice problem-solving skills and build leadership skills they will need in adulthood. These partnerships give them the chance to strengthen the parts of the brain that drive those skills.
- **Opportunity promotes** optimal growth and development, experiential learning, healthy risk taking and participation in normal everyday activities that contribute to social confidence and positive identity formation.
- **Preparation** empowers youth to make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives.
- **Support** can be physical and/or emotional and is tailored to meet the unique needs of the young person. It also includes financial support in recognizing the expertise, time and talent that young people bring to our work and their communities.

How It Looks in Practice

Implement these four practices in partnership with each other and in the context of adolescent brain development to achieve authentic youth engagement:

- Youth-adult partnership
- Opportunity
- Preparation
- Support



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CHECK OUT

10 minutes

Do: Invite participants to answer the checkout question. Choose whether you will call on participants or ask participants to speak and then call on another person.

Ask: *What support do you need to better incorporate the science of adolescent brain development in your work?*

Check Out

What support do you need to better incorporate the science of adolescent brain development in your work?



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