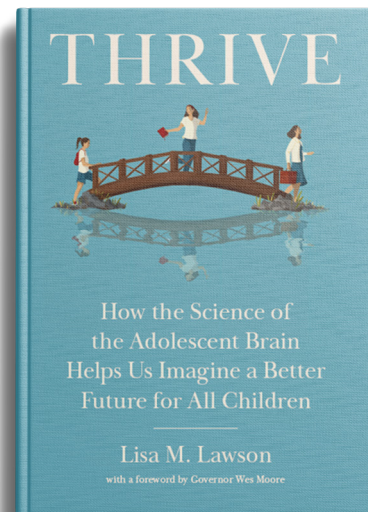


DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **THRIVE** by Lisa M. Lawson

BOOK OVERVIEW

In *Thrive*, Lisa M. Lawson draws on neuroscience, policy experience and storytelling to reframe how we understand adolescence. Rather than seeing it as a turbulent or risky phase, she presents it as a period of potential — a “second window” of brain development ripe for investment and care. Through research, real-life stories and a framework called Thrive by 25, Lawson outlines five building blocks that all young people need to transition into adulthood: basic needs; permanent connections; education and credentials; financial stability and well-being; and youth leadership.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa M. Lawson is president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. She brings corporate, philanthropic and personal experience to her work, having served previously as an executive at UPS and as president of the UPS Foundation. Lawson’s professional and parental insights converge in the book, revealing her deep belief in adolescents’ promise and society’s shared responsibility to help them thrive.

MAJOR THEMES

- **The Adolescent Brain:** Adolescence is not a problem to be managed but a powerful phase of growth and possibility.
- **Access to Opportunity:** Too many youth — especially those in poverty or public systems — face barriers that limit their potential.
- **Community and Connection:** Every adolescent needs caring, consistent adults who help them navigate life’s risks and choices.
- **System Alignment:** Lasting change requires collaboration among families, communities and institutions.
- **Hope and Responsibility:** When we understand the science, we see that adults play an essential role in shaping healthy, thriving futures for adolescents.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Looking Back:** In the book, Lawson describes adolescence as a bridge between childhood and adulthood — a journey that can be both scary and full of possibility. What do you remember about your own adolescence? What was exciting? What was challenging? How does what Lawson shares in *Thrive* help you better understand what was happening in your brain and life during that time?
2. **Then and Now:** Think about the experiences of a young person in your life today — a child, mentee, niece or nephew. How does their experience of adolescence differ from yours? What different kinds of support or opportunities might they need to succeed?

3. **Widening the Lens:** Now that you've reflected on one young person you care about, what does that mean for all youth? What should we, as adults and communities, be thinking about or doing differently? How can we act as guides, not gatekeepers, to help young people cross the bridge of adolescence safely?
4. **Meeting Basic Needs First:** Lawson describes hearing from teens who lacked food, safety or housing. How might that shift our understanding of what it means for adolescents to "achieve" in school or behave in ways adults expect?
5. **The Power of Connection:** What is one permanent connection with an adult that made a difference in your own adolescence? How can communities ensure every young person has one?
6. **Leadership and Voice:** How does Lawson connect youth leadership to brain science? What does it look like when adults share decision making and leadership with young people?
7. **Public Systems Change:** What lessons from Jim Casey's business innovations at UPS does Lawson apply to public systems, including the education, child welfare and juvenile justice systems? In your experience, what makes this kind of collaboration possible or difficult?
8. **Family and Belonging:** How can we support families so they're best positioned to help adolescents thrive?
9. **Rethinking Support for Youth With System Involvement:** How does the book address the challenges faced by young people in foster care or juvenile justice systems? How might a deeper understanding of adolescent development lead to refinement and new approaches in these systems?
10. **Call to Action:** After reading Thrive, what's one concrete step your group, organization or community could take to help young people succeed?

KEY PASSAGES FOR REFLECTION

- "They weren't just little adults; they were distinct, still-developing people filled with possibility."
- "Adolescence lasts twice as long as early childhood, but the internal transformation happening is no less dramatic."
- "We need to build systems that deliver results for youth, not just services."
- "No child finds fulfillment on their own. Our children's successes are the product of the entire village."
- "If we get this right, it will be an incredible, thriving legacy of which we can all be proud."

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- **Mapping Your Bridge:** Invite participants to draw or describe their own "bridge to adulthood." Who or what helped them cross? What made it harder?
- **System Reflection:** Identify one policy or practice in your field that could better reflect what we know about adolescent brain science. What change would you propose?
- **Youth Voices First:** Partner with young people in your community to discuss what thriving looks like from their perspective. Or consider inviting some teenagers close to the group to read the book and discuss it with you.
- **Group Challenge:** Choose one of the five Thrive by 25 pillars and brainstorm a small project your group could champion locally.

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