

Working with High Risk Youth

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Youth for Christ USA

**The “Costs” of NOT
working with high
risk youth**

- **A typical career criminal causes \$1.3-\$1.5 million in external costs**
- **A heavy drug user, \$370,000 to \$970,000;**
- **A high-school dropout, \$243,000 to \$388,000.**
- **On average it costs \$40,000 a year to keep a youth in a detention center**

Psalm 139:13-16

The Message (MSG)

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.

I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!

Body and soul, I am marvelously made!

I worship in adoration—what a creation!

You know me inside and out,

you know every bone in my body;

You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,

how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;

all the stages of my life were spread out before you,

The days of my life all prepared

before I'd even lived one day.

**We miss out on a life that was meant for
so much more than this!**

**How do we define a
“high risk” youth?**

External Assets	Support	<p>1. Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</p> <p>2. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</p> <p>3. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</p> <p>4. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</p> <p>5. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</p> <p>6. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</p>
	Empowerment	<p>7. Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</p> <p>8. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</p> <p>9. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</p> <p>10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</p>
	Boundaries & Expectations	<p>11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</p> <p>12. School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences.</p> <p>13. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.</p> <p>14. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</p> <p>15. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</p> <p>16. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</p>
	Constructive Use of Time	<p>17. Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</p> <p>18. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</p> <p>19. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</p> <p>20. Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.</p>

Internal Assets	Commitment to Learning	<p>21. Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</p> <p>22. School Engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</p> <p>23. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</p> <p>24. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school.</p> <p>25. Reading for Pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</p>
	Positive Values	<p>26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people.</p> <p>27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</p> <p>28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</p> <p>29. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."</p> <p>30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</p> <p>31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</p>
	Social Competencies	<p>32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</p> <p>33. Interpersonal Competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</p> <p>34. Cultural Competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</p> <p>36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</p>
	Positive Identity	<p>37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."</p> <p>38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</p> <p>39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."</p> <p>40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</p>

External Assets

Support

1. **Family support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive family communication**—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other adult relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring neighborhood**—Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring school climate**—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent involvement in schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community values youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as resources**—Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to others**—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety**—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries & Expectations

11. **Family boundaries**—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult role models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive peer influence**—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High expectations**—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

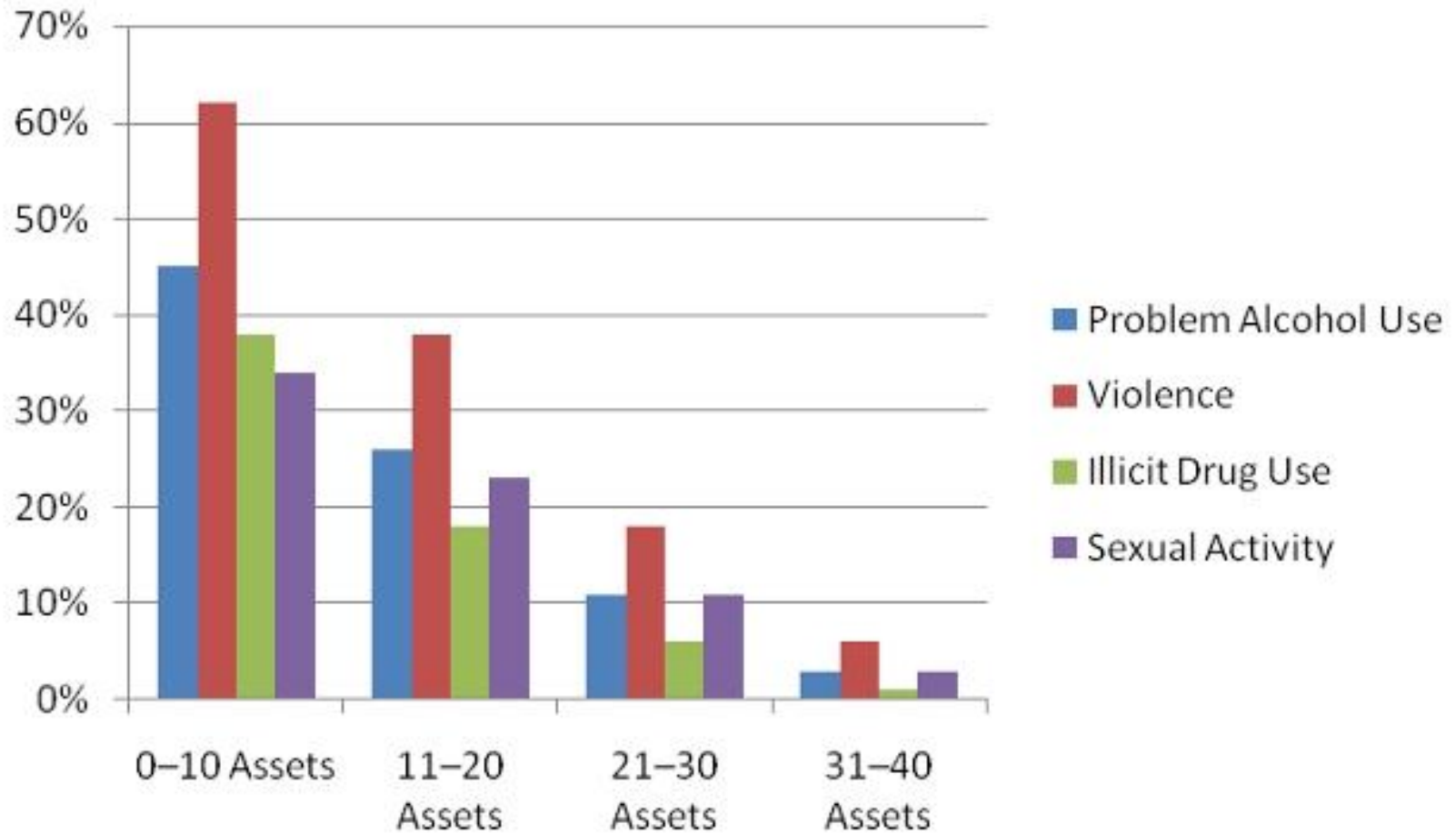
Constructive Use of Time

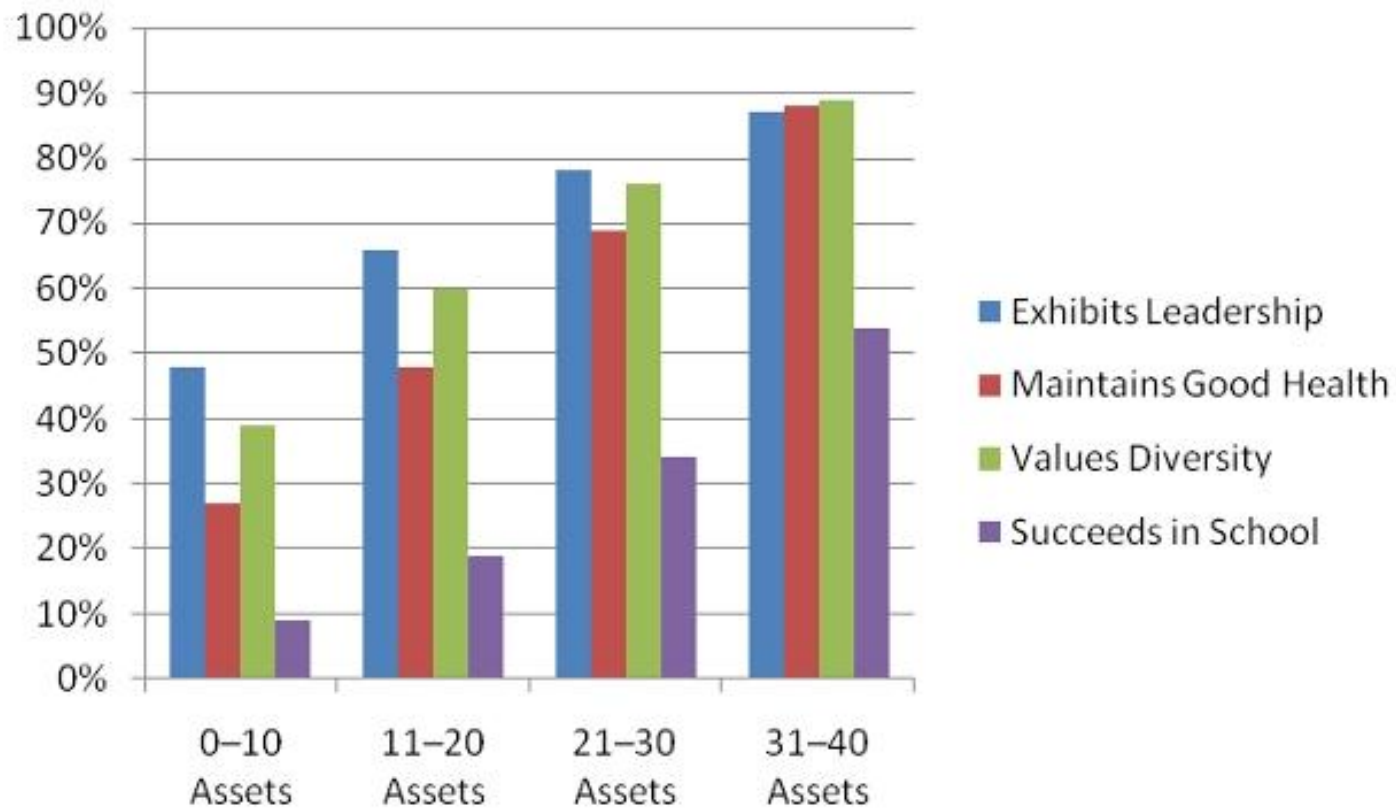
17. **Creative activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
19. **Religious community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at home**—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.

Internal Assets

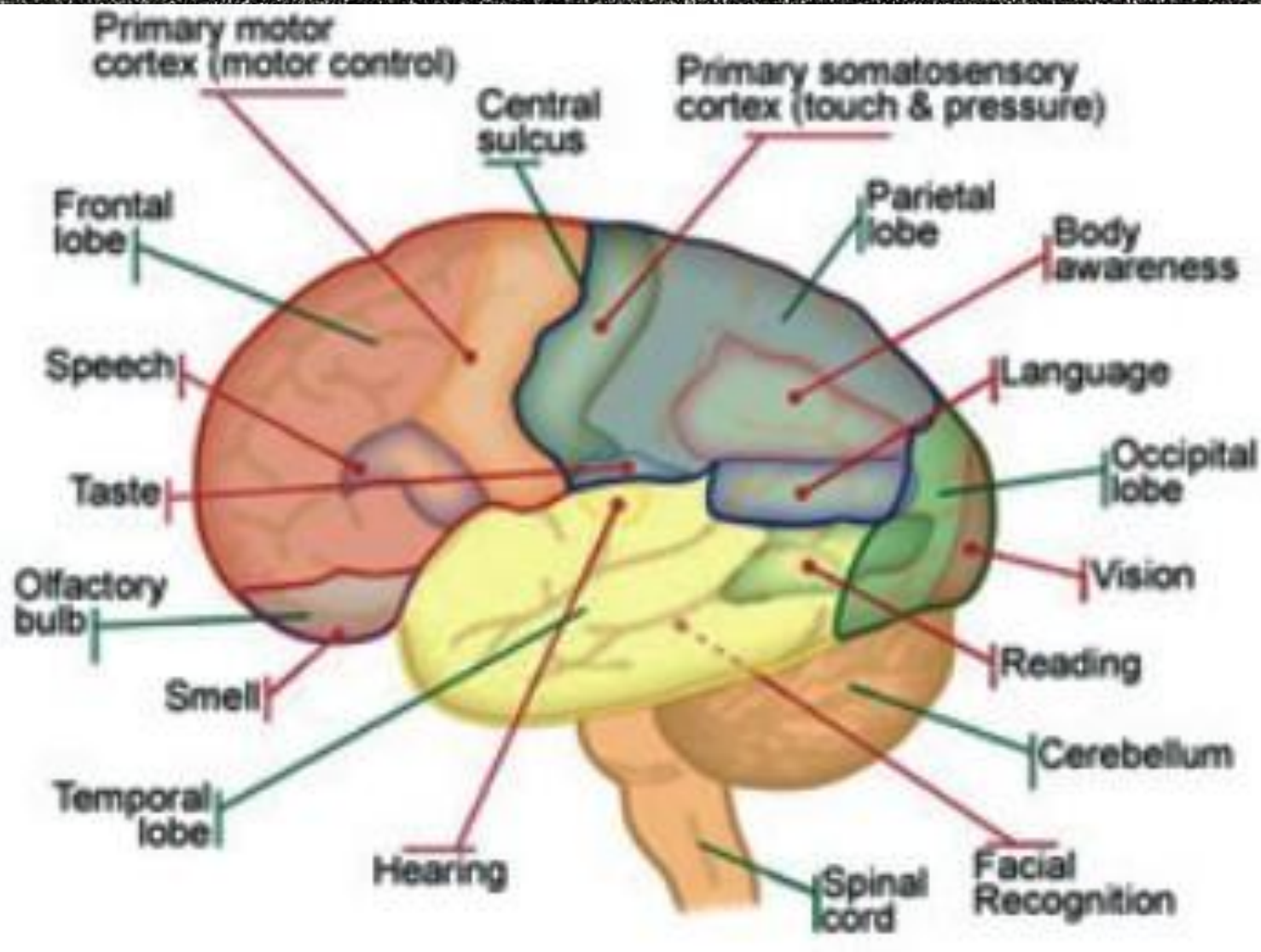
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- Positive Values**
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- Social Competencies**
- 32. **Planning and decision making**—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
 - 33. **Interpersonal Competence**—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
 - 34. **Cultural Competence**—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
 - 35. **Resistance skills**—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
 - 36. **Peaceful conflict resolution**—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
- Positive Identity**
- 37. **Personal power**—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
 - 38. **Self-esteem**—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
 - 39. **Sense of purpose**—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
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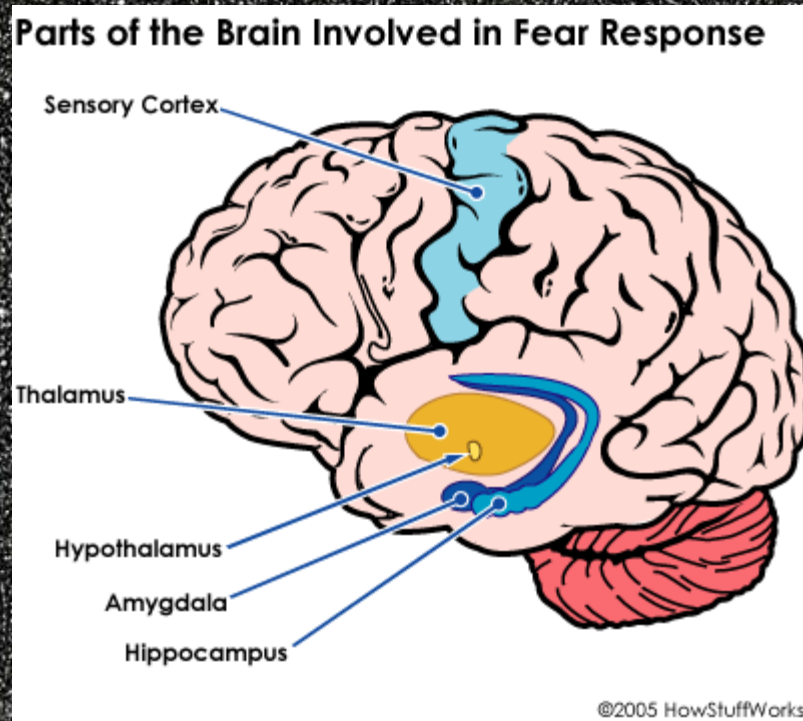
**Why are the 40 assets so
important?**





**So what does this
look like in
the teens I work
with?**





Thalamus - decides where to send incoming sensory data (from eyes, ears, mouth, skin)

Sensory cortex - interprets sensory data

Hippocampus - stores and retrieves conscious memories; processes sets of stimuli to establish context

Amygdala - decodes emotions; determines possible threat; stores fear memories

Hypothalamus - activates "fight or flight" response

Survival Mode

Fight or Flight 24/7

- Lives for immediate gratification, and postponement of rewards is unacceptable
- Exhibits learned behaviors. Attitudes and behavior patterns are learned from others, a shocking and discouraging sign of the gratification, and postponement of rewards is unacceptable
- Has a weak conscience and is less affected by guilt than the average person

- Uses people without becoming attached. People become “tools” in his quest for meaning
- No respect for law, tradition, or persons in authority
- Capable of loyalties and selfish love. The bases for his friendships are difficult for the average citizen to understand, but these are realistic relationships for troubled youth

- Believes that his behavior is all right. From his perspective his motives are justified and behavior reasonable.
- Pleasure is guiding life principle. Self-centered, materialistic, and status-oriented values scream, “I want it, and I want it now”
- Is lonely — peer group does not meet needs for love and self worth.

**So....How do I address this
with the youth I work with??**

- Our teens need a safe encouraging environment
- Our teens need strong bonds of connection with adult role models who take an invested interest in them
- Our teens need to feel they are a part of a caring community that values them as persons of great worth regardless of their behavior

- Our teens need a distinctive set of rules and consequences which are taught to them **within the context of relationship** where they know that the person who both developed the rules and carries out the consequences has their best interest at heart and not just the common good
- Our teens need to make their own decisions and their own choices, yet know that we will stand by them if those choices lead to bad consequences. However, they do not need us to change the severity of the consequence but to help them work through those consequences to a positive end.
- Our teens need to know that their confidences will be kept with the exception where they indicate harm to themselves or others and that this exception is based on our care and concern for them.

- **Take a genuine interest in something positive about the student. (Play up strengths)**
- **Create Boundaries**
- **Find ways to develop the student interest**

PETER L. BENSON, Ph.D.

Creator of SEARCH INSTITUTE'S DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

FOREWORD BY ALMA POWELL

Sparks



How Parents Can Help Ignite
the *Hidden Strengths*
of TEENAGERS

The 10 most common sparks among American teenagers

Creative Arts

Athletics

Learning (e.g., languages, science, history)

Reading

Helping, serving

Spirituality, religion

Nature, ecology, environment

Living a quality life (e.g., joy, tolerance, caring)

Animal welfare

Leading

- **Build trust through consistency**
- **Be a good listener**

- **Believe that youth are valued and are worth the effort**
- **Be available**
- **Go the extra mile**
- **Be consistent—“I will not give up”**

- **Be authentic**
- **Be intentional in your interactions**
- **Don't make gaining trust the main goal**
- **Celebrate small successes**
Expect failures

Its not about the right program,

Young Adolescents Should Not be Aggregated in Groups: This is the most important recommendation

Amount of Time in a Group Should be Minimized: The amount of time that a young person spends in a setting with more antisocial peers should be minimized

Opportunities for Unstructured Interaction with Antisocial Peers Should be Minimized: When antisocial young people are placed together, they should not be allowed to interact freely or without supervision by trained adults. Care should be taken to minimize interaction before and after group sessions.

Dodge, Dishion, and Lansford (2006)

Program Directors Should Create and Maintain a Prosocial Peer Culture: Strategies include minimizing the ratio of delinquent to non-delinquent young people in a group, maximizing the ratio of adult leaders to young people, and infusing an already prosocial group with new delinquent members only gradually and only while maintaining positive peer culture.

Group Settings Should be Highly Structured and Led by Well-Trained Adult Leaders: Training and supervision of adult leaders is essential.

Dodge, Dishion and Lansford (2006)

Relationships trump
programs
100% of the time.

What program do YOU remember?

Strategies for working with high risk youth

**Youth for Christ
Juvenile Justice Ministries**