

Challenge Day –Theoretical Foundation

Positive Youth Development Constructs

In 1999, the Department of Health and Human Services defined and operationalized the concepts of Positive Youth Development (PYD) (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/PostiveYouthDev99/chapter2.htm>). As an assets focused, non-categorical program that focuses on supporting youth before problem behaviors occur, Challenge Day targets many of the defined components of PYD.

- Promotes Bonding – Challenge Day Programs promote bonding with adults, positive peers, school staff, and other community leaders.
- Fosters Resilience – Through increasing self-compassion, self-efficacy and shifting to a paradigm of hope and possibility, the Challenge Day Programs increase resiliency and promote individual capacity.
- Emotional Competence – Challenge Day Programs enhance skills for identifying, acknowledging and accepting emotions in self and others through empathy, healthy emotional expression and exploring alternatives to risky behavior.
- Moral Competence – Through the exploration of social oppression, youth increase their understanding of social justice and have increased empathy for its manifestations.
- Fosters Self-Efficacy – By addressing self-defeating cognitions and shifting towards a paradigm of hope and possibility, Challenge Day Programs foster self-efficacy.
- Fosters Belief in the Future – With the paradigm shift towards hope and possibility in the Challenge Day Programs, internal locus of control and personal accountability are enhanced leading to optimism about a healthy, productive future.
- Provides Opportunities for Pro-social Involvement – Invited to be the difference they want to see in the world, participants step into activities where they can have a positive impact on their peers, school and community.
- Fosters Pro-social Norms – As Challenge Day strives to “make kindness cool” participants adopt social norms and standards for positive, healthy social interactions. The Challenger Program provides specific skills for interventions and contributions to shift existing norms.

Social Networks and Social Support

Challenge Day is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that increases social support and social networks and focuses on community building. Social support can be described in 4 categories:

1. **emotional support** – provision of empathy, love, trust and caring;
2. **instrumental support** – provision of tangible aid and services;
3. **informational support** – provision of advice, suggestions, and information a person can use to address problems;
4. **appraisal support** – provision of information that is useful for self-evaluation (constructive feedback, affirmation and social comparison) (Heaney & Isreal, 1997). Studies looking at social support have concluded, “...social relationships, social networks, and social support have important causal effects on health, exposure to stress and the relationship between stress and health” (House, 1987).

The Challenge Day Program integrates the key components of proven social network interventions including enhancing existing social networks and linkages, developing new social networks and linkages, enhancing networks through the use of indigenous natural helpers, and

enhancing networks at the community level through participatory problem-solving processes (Heaney & Isreal, 1997). Through the strengthening of social support and networks, community building is initiated as students view themselves as members of a shared community that can engage together in the process of community change (Minkler & Wallerstein, 1997).

40 Developmental Assets

The Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets that provide young people with a solid foundation for life. These assets positively impact academic performance, attendance, communication skills, and sense of support from peers (Search Institute, 1999). The more assets young people experience, the greater their chances of success and the less likely they are to engage in risk-taking behaviors.

Challenge Day Programs embody a majority of the assets and increase social competence. The Search Institute highlights that the more assets incorporated into the school environment, the better the school will be able to support and encourage students (Search Institute, 1999). Of the 40 developmental assets, the Search Institute has identified 22 that schools can most directly affect. The Challenge Day Programs directly impacts 17 of these critical, school related assets and also impacts an additional 11 assets from the remaining 18.

Developmental Assets Impacted by Challenge Day Programs

School engagement	Restraint
Positive peer influence	Cultural competence
Youth programs	Personal power
Bonding to school	Self-esteem
Caring	Sense of purpose
Safety	Positive view of personal future
Integrity	Community values youth
Honesty	Service to others
Responsibility	Peaceful conflict resolution
Other adult relationships	Interpersonal competence
High expectations	Resistance skills
Parent involvement in schooling	Youth as resources
Planning and decision-making	
Adult role models	
Caring school climate	

HeartMath

The Institute of HeartMath, established in 1991, has done extensive research on the affect of positive emotions on physiology, quality of life, and performance (IHM, 2001). They have demonstrated that emotional balance can significantly increase cognitive performance in school. Maximum cognitive performance can be achieved through proficiency in emotional management, conflict resolution, communication and interpersonal skills. As emotional turmoil is managed, the physiological impact actually increases mental clarity and expands the mind's capacity.

The Challenge Day Program profoundly impacts participants' experiences and skills with emotional management and interpersonal skills and many components of our program build skills in conflict resolution and communication skills. Through the experiential learning process of Challenge Day, participants experience the mental clarity achieved through emotional release and management.