

Fact Sheet

Fostering Healthy Adolescents and Young Adults

Between the ages of 10 and 20, youth make transitions through early, middle and late stages of adolescence, and each stage brings with it a new set of physical, mental and emotional challenges. While most adolescents successfully navigate this transition, some adolescents take unhealthy or dangerous risks and initiate habits that may lead to chronic illnesses in adulthood.

Adolescents' resiliency is influenced by the settings in which they live; their connections to family and friends; and support from community institutions. National surveys of thousands of young people reveal that the more protective factors or assets a young person possesses, then the more likely he or she is to do well in school and less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors.

The philosophy and approach to policies and programs that incorporate the building of developmental assets and resiliency among youth is called the youth development approach.

The underlying philosophy of youth development is holistic, preventive and positive, focusing on the development of assets and competencies in youth as the best means for fostering health and well-being and for avoiding negative choices and outcomes. Youth who succeed in the developmental tasks of adolescence lay the foundation for health and well-being in their adult lives.

Tennessee Data

Population

- According to the Health Information Tennessee (HIT) website, in 2006 the population of adolescents, ages 10-19, was 829,776 or 3.8% of Tennessee's total population.
- In 2006, HIT indicates 23.4% of adolescents, ages 10-19, were of minority racial/ethnic descent, compared to 22% in 1994.
- The population of adolescents as a percent of the total population is projected to stay relatively stable in Tennessee through 2010.

Economic Status

The National Center for Children in Poverty writes that for 2008, the federal poverty level is \$21,200 for a family of four. Children under 18 living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level are referred to as poor. But research suggests that, on

average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty level to meet their basic needs.

- Living among Tennessee's 842,152 families are 1,412,824 children. Twenty percent (286,187) or children live in poor families compared with the national rate of 17%.
- Thirty-five percent of Tennessee's African-American children live in poor families compared to 15% of white children.
- Thirty-four percent of Tennessee's children in urban areas live in poor families compared to 24% in rural areas and 8% in suburban areas.

Education

- According to the Tennessee Department of Education's Statistical Summaries, during the 2005-2006 school year there were 144,019 adolescents enrolled in middle or junior high schools (7th and 8th grades), and 268,117 young people enrolled in high school (public, private and alternative schools).
- The Tennessee Department of Education reported a high school graduation rate of 80.7%, short of the state's goal of 90% in 2006. The highest graduation rate in 2006 was among Asian/Pacific Islander students with a rate of 89.45%. This is followed by white students with a rate of 85.43%, a rate of 75.83% for Native American/Alaskan students, Hispanic students with a rate of 71.94%, and African-American students at 70.61%.
- Kids Count Data Center relates that in 2006, 18% of Tennessee's young adults ages 18-24 were disconnected young adults, who are defined as young persons either not enrolled in school, not working or do not have a degree beyond high school. Nationally, 15% of America's youth were disconnected young adults in the same year.

Best Practices

Parents, Peers and Other Adults

- Parent-child relationships are vital to adolescent development and well-being.
- Peer influences are important and can be positive.
- Siblings, teachers and other adults and mentors can provide important support.

Programs

- Young people engaged in programs that build relationships and provide structured activities participate in fewer behaviors that place their health at risk.

- Successful programs target specifically desired outcomes, start early and maintain the effort and implement their services with fidelity to research-tested strategies.
- A positive approach is more likely to engage adolescents and help them to realize their potential and avoid negative influences.

Community Planning

Addressing the health needs of adolescents is best done within the context of community collaboration and planning. These steps assume community and youth involvement.

- Conduct a community-based assessment and planning process to be sure that the community is addressing the adolescent issues that are most appropriate and pressing.
- Decide whether the issue will be addressed directly, or whether the conditions that make it possible will be changed.
- Locate practices or interventions that have successfully addressed the issue in the way the community wants it addressed.
- Determine what elements of a promising intervention will work in the community, and which ones need to be changed.
- Implement the intervention, making on-going adjustments as needed.
- Evaluate the work and results regularly, understanding that no matter how well any intervention works, it can always be improved.

Websites

Center for Adolescent Health and Development
www.allaboutkids.umn.edu/cfahad

National Adolescent Health Information Center
<http://nahic.ucsf.edu/>

National Center for Children in Poverty
http://nccp.org/profiles/state_profile.php?state=TN&id=7

National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/NationalInitiative/index.htm>

National Youth Development Information Center

<http://www.nydic.org/nydic/>

Search Institute
www.search-institute.org

Social Development Research Group (Hawkins & Catalano)
<http://depts.washington.edu/sdrg/>

The Forum for Youth Investment
<http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/>

Tennessee Department of Education's Statistical Summaries
http://tennessee.gov/education/asr/05_06/stat_summs.shtml
Tennessee Department of Health, Health Information Tennessee (HIT)
<http://hit.state.tn.us/pop.aspx>

Youth Infusion
<http://youthinfusion.com/WhatWeDo.html>