Why Use Strength-Based Assessment?
* Benefits to Youth and Program Staff *

Juliette Mackin, Ph.D.

4380 SW Macadam Ave., Ste. 530

Portland, OR 97239

503.243.2436

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Objectives of this session

- Gain an understanding of the strength-based perspective and why it is appropriate for juvenile services

- Discuss benefits of adopting strength-based practices, including assessment and service planning

- Gain a tool for identifying strengths in youth (and families)

Why do youth come to us?

- Why do youth
  - commit crime,
  - violate probation,
  - use alcohol & other drugs,
  - and otherwise end up on an unhealthy path?

What can (or do) we do about it?

- How do we prevent (or intervene to reduce) drug use and criminality in youth?

Risk and Protection

Risk and Protection

- Risks: contribute to negative outcomes
- Needs: must be addressed/fulfilled to achieve optimal/avoid negative outcomes

Risk and Protection

- Protective factors: buffers impact of risks
- Strengths: promote positive outcomes

Examples of protective factors?

Examples of protective factors

- School attachment
- Friends who disapprove of unlawful behavior
- Involvement in constructive extra-curricular activities
- Effective communication with family members
- A supportive adult in the youth's life

How do we facilitate change?

Behavior change

- Adding and affirming: Replacement behaviors

- Decrease access to negative influences (time and opportunity)

- Sustainability: Resources in the natural environment

- Build a foundation for health and success

How do we facilitate change?

- Find out what strengths are present that we can build on (at all levels – youth, family, community, etc.)
- Build engagement and motivation
- Build belief that change is possible
- Build hope for the future
- Find a supportive adult

Strengths approaches are:

- Based on research
  - Assets/protective factors
  - Behavioral science
  - Adolescent development
- Ecological
- Attentive to diversity

Why focus on competencies?

- Improves service systems
    - Augments assessment
    - Increases creativity
    - Increases service integration
    - Improves staff morale
    - Improves sustainability of changes

Benefits of a strength-based approach to programming

- Builds engagement: requires active participation by youth and families
- Builds relationships
- Makes our work fun (prevents staff burn-out)
- Increases accountability
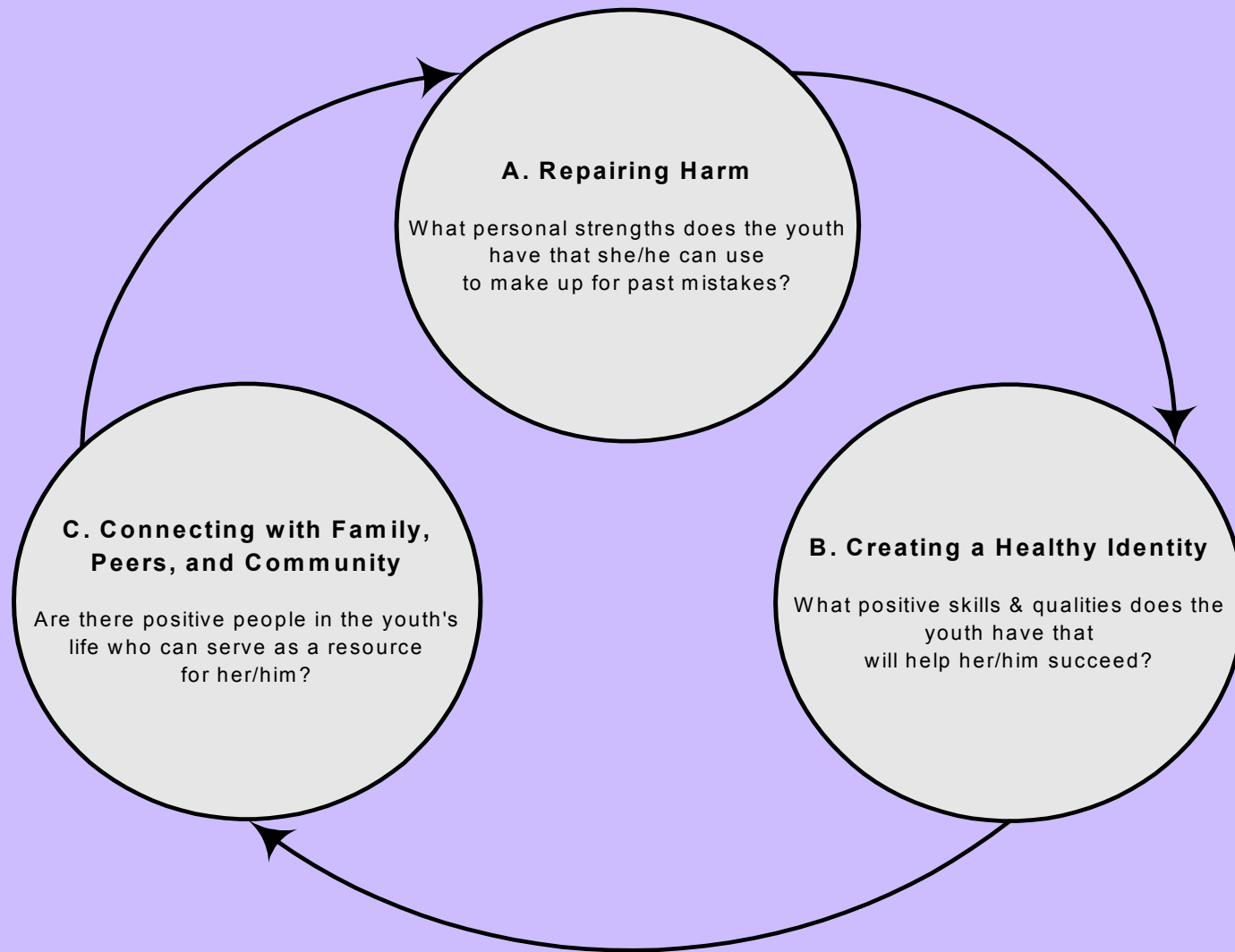- Increases optimism and builds hope

ZITS
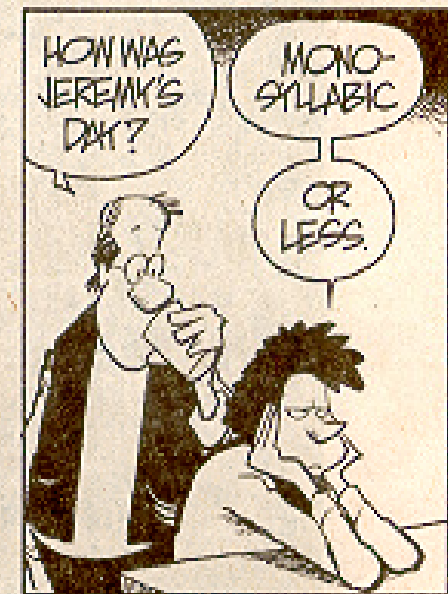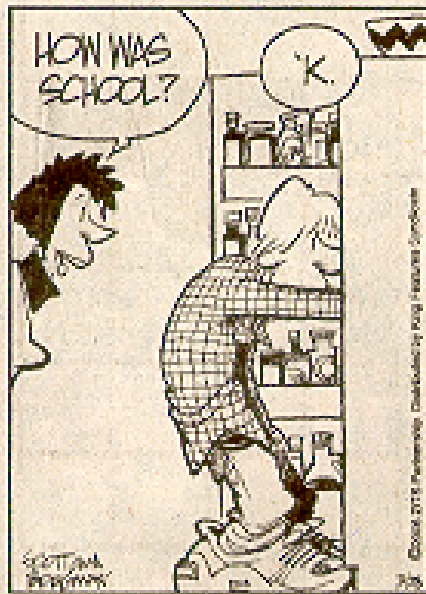
The Youth Competency Assessment (YCA)

Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) Model

Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) Model

Creating a Healthy Identity

- Identity development is a central task of adolescence
- Identification of skills, competencies, interests, and goals for the future
- Identification of resources to support this growth
- Help others in youth's environment recognize and confirm youth's positive identity

Connecting to Family, Peers, and Community

- Strong connections with families, positive peers, and community are protective:
  - Less likely to commit crimes and more respectful of others
  - Greater health
  - Increased positive social control
- There may be a need to advocate for community support for juvenile justice involved youth

Repairing Harm, Developing Pro-Social Norms and Values

- Learn important lessons from their behavior/ choices

- Facilitate moral development

- Reduce antisocial attitude: a major risk factor for juvenile justice involvement

- Increase public safety and restitution for victims

- Modify behavior

Summary of Research Findings

What are the benefits?

- Staff reported:
  - Improved rapport with and increased buy-in from youth and their parents/ guardians
  - Increased job satisfaction and staff morale
  - Cases ending more quickly
  - Decreased need for sanctions
  - Helps identify ideas and resources

What are the benefits?

- Youth and families reported:
  - Meetings were more positive
  - Counselor cared about their point of view
  - Counselor more likely to ask about strengths & less likely to talk about what they did wrong
  - Felt counselor was helpful and fair

What are the benefits?

- Based on ratings of videotaped interviews:
  - Increased use of strength-based practice *(compared to non-YCA interviews)*
  - Improved use of positive non-verbal cues and more positive interview atmosphere *(compared to non-YCA interviews)*

What are the benefits?

- Pilot site assessments (83% = "a lot") included more information about "Creating a Healthy Identity" than the comparison site (52% = "a lot")

- None of the pilot sites lacked information in this area, though 10% of the comparison assessments did

What are the benefits?

- 77% of pilot assessments included "a lot" of information about "Connecting with family, peers, and community," but none (0%) of the comparison assessments did

- 61% of comparison assessments had no information about this domain, but none of the pilot counties lacked this information

What are the benefits?

- 49% of pilot assessments included "a lot" of information about "Repairing Harm" and none (0%) of the comparison counties did

- 23% of comparison assessments included no information about this domain compared to 10% of pilot assessments

What are the benefits?

- Creating a Healthy Identity: 76% of pilot and 32% of comparison plans included this domain

- Connecting with Family, Peers, & Community: 65% of pilot and 42% of comparison plans included this domain

- Repairing Harm: 38% of pilot and 67% of comparison plans included this domain

Social Climate Pre and Post YCA: Residents

CIES Dimension	Pre-YCA (9/06) N=17		Post-YCA (9/07) N=13		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev	t
Involvement	2.88	1.87	4.46	2.10	**2.097***
Support	4.12	2.19	6.69	2.27	**3.031****
Expressiveness	2.82	1.89	4.00	1.88	1.636
Autonomy	3.82	1.72	4.38	1.82	0.827
Practical Orientation	5.82	2.12	7.15	1.46	**1.867***
Personal Problem Orientation	2.82	1.76	4.62	1.15	**3.087****
Order and Organization	5.00	2.06	7.23	1.80	**2.996****
Clarity	4.35	2.08	6.31	1.73	**2.650****
Staff Control	5.94	1.47	7.54	1.01	**3.247****

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; $df = 28$, one-tailed

Social Climate Pre and Post YCA: All Staff

CIES Dimension	Pre-YCA (9/06) N=9		Post-YCA (9/07) N=8		t
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev	
Involvement	4.22	2.66	6.88	2.66	**1.930***
Support	7.00	2.21	9.13	0.93	**2.376***
Expressiveness	3.00	1.83	4.75	1.32	**2.099***
Autonomy	4.11	1.73	6.75	0.94	**3.610****
Practical Orientation	7.33	2.21	9.25	0.85	**2.166***
Personal Problem Orientation	5.00	2.54	5.75	1.83	0.649
Order and Organization	5.56	2.45	7.75	1.09	**2.194***
Clarity	5.44	1.83	8.00	1.88	**2.662****
Staff Control	5.44	1.42	4.62	1.20	-1.200

* p < .05; ** p < .01; one-tailed

Type of incident	Pre-YCA 1/1/06-9/19/06	Post-YCA 9/20/06-3/31/07
Critical Incidents at the JYCTU Pre- and Post-YCA training		
Resident on resident assault	4	1
Resident verbal outburst directed towards staff	12	3
Resident verbal threats against staff	5	0
Resident physical restraint	3	1
Resident self-harm behaviors	4	1
Resident AOD use while on pass from the facility	2	1
Resident escape planning	1	0
Contraband on unit	9	1
Telephonic complaints from residents' families	14	0
Written complaints to the DJJ state offices	2	0
Resident escapes from pass	1	2
Total	**57**	**10**
Number of months in period	**9.5**	**6.5**
Incidents per month	**6.7**	**1.5**

How the tool is used

- Integrate with risk and needs assessment
- Create case/service plans
- Write court reports
- Establish documentation
- Share information with other service providers working with the youth/family

Illustration

Casework

- Write an assessment summary
- Create strength-based goals
- Keep coming back to strengths
- Plan for the end of service from the beginning

Supplemental materials and resources

- Training manual
- Trainer's guide
- Technical assistance and consultation

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Questions?

How can I get more information or assistance?

Juliette Mackin

503-243-2436 x114

Mackin@npcresearch.com

To learn more about NPC, our approach to strength-based assessment, or our evaluation or training services, please visit our booth, or:

www.npcresearch.com