

Creating a Circle of Support



Within the Belonging concept of the eight Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development, we find the element, "positive relationship with a caring adult." We've heard the phrase, "it takes a village to raise a child." This lesson will emphasize the importance placed on a community of adults working together to support youth...to help provide them with a series of protective factors that can counteract and overcome risk factors that are present in the youths' daily lives. As adults who work with youth in the 4-H Youth Development program, it is critical that we are able to create this "Circle of Support" for our youth!

On the next few slides are the objectives that we will discuss in this lesson:

Objectives

1. To understand the concept that youth interact with, react to, and have an effect upon their families, friends, schools, neighborhoods, and communities, and to apply this understanding in working with youth.



Objectives Continued

2. To understand how risk and protective factors operate to hinder or help a youth's development, and to apply this knowledge in working with youth.



Objectives Continued

3. To identify those events, situations, and factors that place a youth's development at risk and those that serve to protect a child.



Ecological Model

- The Ecological Model is a tool to help us understand the influences in a child's life that affect the process of growth and development.



Ecological Model Continued

- Ecology is defined as the relationship between living organisms and their environment.
- The ecology of youth development can be thought of as the relationship between a young person and the environment in which he/she lives.

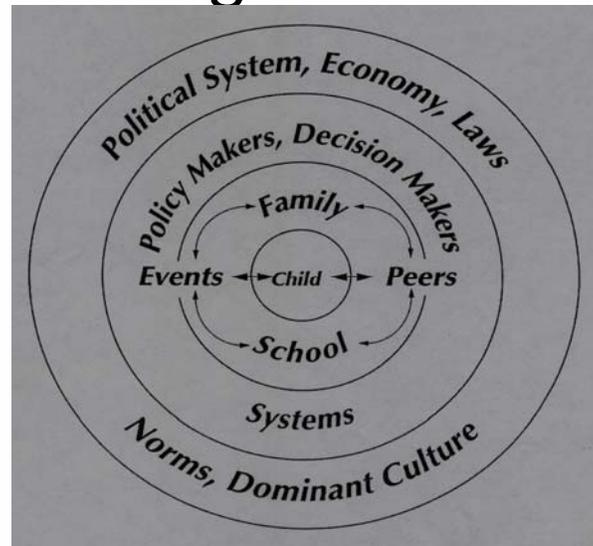


Ecological Model Continued

- In the Ecological Model, a youth's environment includes the individual youth, family, friends, school, and work and the community.
- Within each level of the environment there are protective and risk factors that can impact a youth's development.



Ecological Model



The Ecological Model is shown here (slide 8) in a pictorial format. You'll notice that the child is in the center of a series of concentric circles. Each circle has an influence on the child's life. The circle immediately around the child includes his/her family and peers. School, work, and community influences form the outer circles.

Youth, like adults, don't operate in a vacuum. What happens in the wider Ecological levels of "Policy Makers and Decision Makers" and "Political System, Economy, Laws, Norms, and Dominant Culture" impacts youth as well. For example, there are federal guidelines that restrict the numbers of hours youth are allowed to work. Consequently, this can determine how much money a youth worker can earn. The State of Indiana places restrictions on when youth drivers can operate a vehicle alone and when they can have passengers in the car. This could be an important factor in whether a youth has transportation to and from a job.

Counties whose local policy and decision makers take a conservative approach to development will likely have limited available jobs for youth. (It's important not to make judgments here. What is important is to establish how the outer levels of the Ecological Model influence a youth's life.)

Now that we have an understanding of the Ecological Model, let's take a look at some factors that are important to our youth.

Protective Factors

- **Protective Factors** are aspects of a school-age child or teen's life that can increase his/her ability to withstand negative influences and develop healthy life skills.



We'll start with a discussion of protective factors, including some examples. We will then follow with information regarding risk factors that may be present in a youth's life and include some examples of those as well.

Protective Factors Continued

- Protective factors can be present at multiple levels in a child's life.
 - Individual
 - Family
 - Friends
 - School
 - Work & Community



Protective Factors Continued

- Out-of-school, nonformal school-age and teen programs play a major role in helping develop or strengthen protective factors at each of these levels.



A prime example of these out-of-school activities includes the 4-H program!

Examples of Individual Protective Factors

- Strong problem-solving and communication skills
- Positive self-perceptions
- Confidence in oneself and one's abilities



There are a number of protective factors that an individual youth may possess. These all help him to interact with his environment in a positive way.

Individual Protective Factors Continued

- Responsibility and self-discipline
- Social and interpersonal skills
- Religious commitment



Protective Factors -- Family

- Close relationship with at least one family member
- Parents provide guidance, support, and nurturing
- Parents provide positive examples of appropriate and healthy behavior



Family members and the community can also provide a series of important protective factors for our youth.

Protective Factors -- Community

- Opportunities to rely on supportive adults, such as teachers, youth workers, 4-H leaders, and others
- A supportive neighborhood or community
- Opportunity to make meaningful contributions to community-based projects and activities



Risk Factors

- **Risk Factors** are aspects of a school-age child or teen's life that can create barriers to the development of healthy life skills and increase susceptibility to negative influences.



Competing against the youth's protective factors is a series of risk factors that can be a barrier to their development.

Risk Factors Continued

- Risk factors can also be present at multiple levels in a youth's life. When two factors are present, risk is likely. When additional factors are involved, risk increases.



Recall that we are addressing multiple levels in this session: Individual, Family, Friends, School, and Work & Community. Risk factors can be present in each of these levels.

Examples of Individual Risk Factors

- A variety of negative attitudes towards self and others
- A tendency to engage in problem behaviors
- Social isolation



Risk Factors -- Family

- Distant, uninvolved, and inconsistent parenting
- Unclear family rules, expectations, rewards
- Severe or inconsistent punishment



Risk Factors – Community

- High levels of violence and crime
- Media influences
- Complacent or permissive community norms and standards



Discussion Questions

1. How do youth interact with, react to, or have an effect upon their families, friends, schools, neighborhoods, and communities?
2. What factors place a youth's development at risk and what protects their development?



Now that we've talked about protective and risk factors that are present in a child's life, let's review some of the main points.

(Allow time for responses to each question.)

Discussion Questions Continued

3. How do risk and protective factors hinder or help a youth's development?



“Move Ahead” Activity



Note to instructor: Refer to “Move Ahead” Activity Instructions and Supplies List included with this lesson plan.

Summary & Discussion

1. What were some of the risk factors the youth selected?
2. In real life, how could these factors impact the youth's development?
3. What were some of the protective factors the youth selected?



Allow time for responses to each question.

Summary Discussion Continued

4. In real life, how could these factors impact the youth's development?
5. What did you notice about the characteristics of the child?
6. What seemed to be some of the child's protective factors? Risk factors?



Summary Discussion Continued

7. How can the individual protective or risk factors impact the child's interactions with family, friends, school, or work & community?



Conclusion & Quiz



As we've discussed "Creating a Circle of Support," we've identified a series of influences that work together to support our youth. We've also learned about some of the protective factors that support positive youth development and some of the risk factors that threaten that positive development. From this discussion, the importance of providing a positive relationship with a caring adult cannot be overemphasized!

Distribute the quiz questions. Allow volunteers time to answer the questions. Provide the correct answers from the key provided in this packet. You may choose to collect the quizzes or allow the volunteers to keep them as a review of the lesson.

Distribute the "Creating a Circle of Support" fact sheet for volunteers to use for future reference.

Review the resource provided on Slide 28.

Thank the volunteers for their participation.

Source

- Moving Ahead: Preparing the Youth Development Professional (2000). USDA/Army School-Age & Teen Project. Session VI, Essential Elements to Support Youth and Create Opportunities for Growth.



Thank you for your
participation!

