



**YOUTH THRIVE**

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

# Youth Thrive: A Protective Factors Approach for Older Youth

CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
OF SOCIAL POLICY'S

**strengthening families™**  
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK



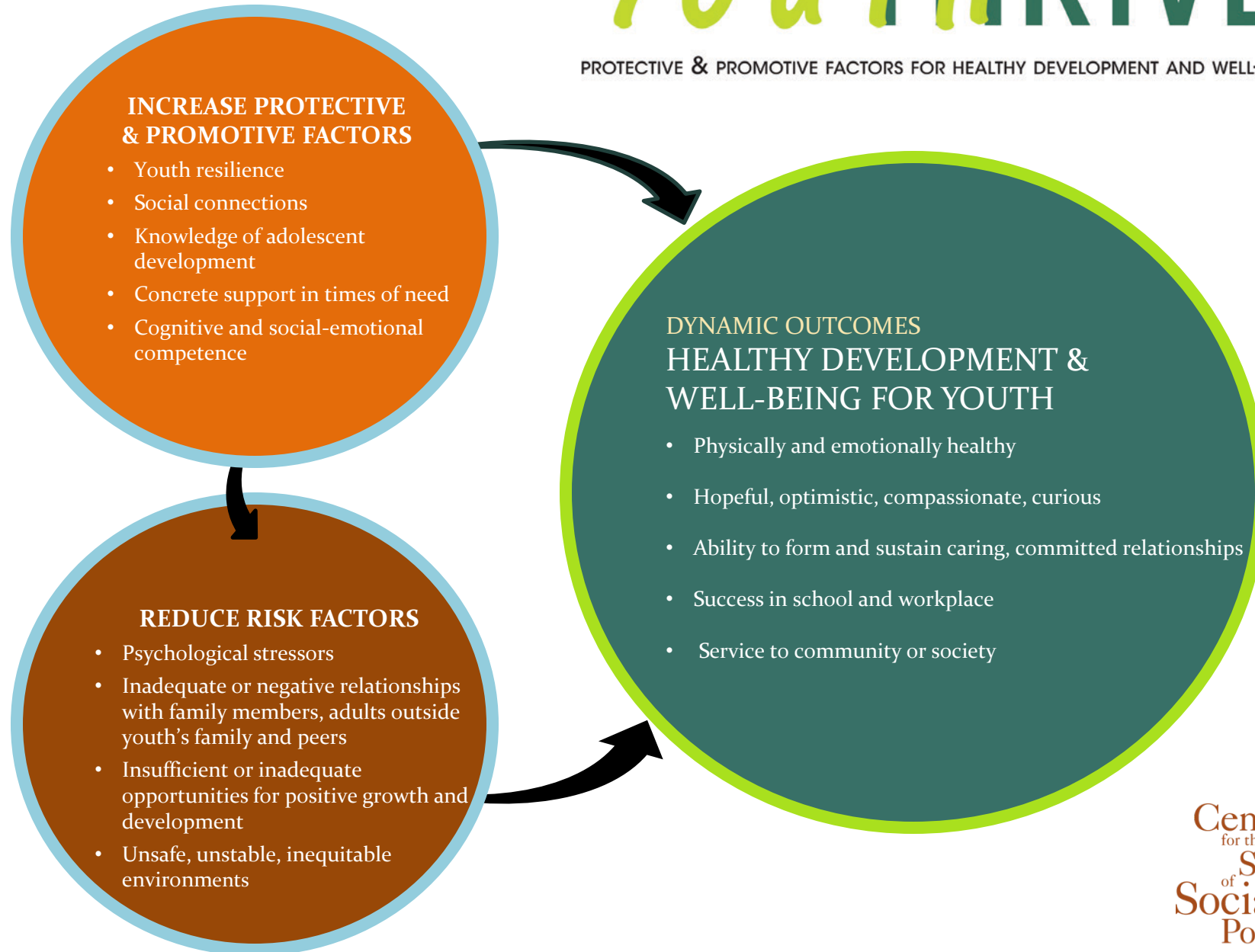
# Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module participants will be able to:

- Define and describe each of the five Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors
- Understand how they can use a protective and promotive factors approach with older children and youth in their work
- Identify ways to use both the Strengthening Families and Youth Thrive frameworks in their work

# YOUTH THRIVE™

PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING





# Youth Thrive background

- Multi-year initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)
- Examined the research from:
  - resiliency
  - positive youth development
  - neuroscience
  - impact of trauma on brain development



# Project Overview

- How all youth can be supported
  - healthy development and well-being
  - reducing the impact of negative life experiences including toxic stress and trauma
- Focus was on vulnerable youth, beginning with youth involved in the child welfare system
- Not only about limiting risk factors
  - Protective and promotive factors



# Two Goals of Youth Thrive

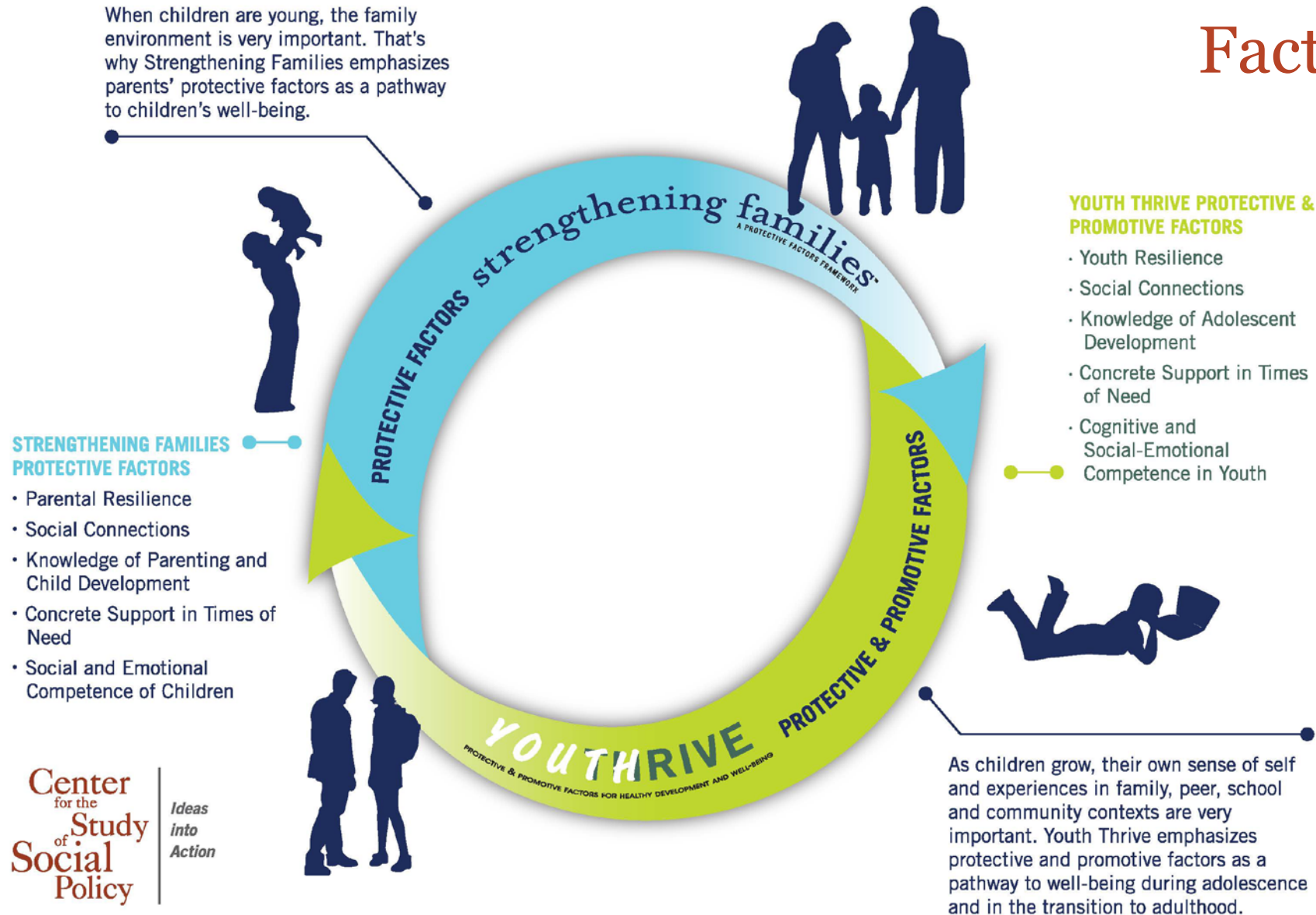
- To provide a way for child welfare agencies to translate the federal mandate for child well-being into actions
- To disseminate information about how we can support and promote healthy development for young people



# Looking back to the “big ideas”

1. A focus on protective and promotive factors
2. An approach, not a model
3. A changed relationship with youth
4. Alignment with developmental science

# A Protective/Promotive Factors Frame Across Development







# Youth Thrive

## Protective and Promotive Factors Framework

- Knowledge of adolescent development
- Social connections
- Cognitive and social-emotional competencies
- Concrete support in times of need
- Promoting youth resilience

<http://www.cssp.org/media-center/video/youth-thrive>



# Adolescent development: A few key points

- Adolescence starts with biological changes of puberty
- Emotional, cognitive, social development as well
- Our knowledge and understanding has changed over time
  - Development of brain cortex and frontal lobe
  - “Templates” based on past experience used to interpret future experiences
  - “Pruning” of neural connections
  - Impact of trauma



# In the child welfare system...

Young people who have lived in high-stress environments for long periods may:

- Not be able to easily return to the calm & connected state
- Respond with rejection, suspicion, aggression, or withdrawal
- Present greater development in lower brain areas than in higher functions
- Need repetitive positive experiences & opportunities to create new brain pathways



# Knowledge of adolescent development

- Youth understanding of:
  - The changes they are experiencing
  - The risks and opportunities of this phase of life
  - Reasons for their conflicting urges, mood swings, etc.
  - Strategies to improve their own well-being
- Adult (parent, caregiver, worker) understanding of:
  - Reasons for behaviors that can be challenging
  - The need for continued adult support and guidance
  - The need for opportunities to advance development



# Knowledge of adolescent development: In the child welfare system...

- Majority of youth in the system have experienced trauma and will display the behaviors described earlier
- Out-of-home placements often restrict youth from having “normal” experiences of adolescence
- Youth may not receive support once they turn 18 – though we know their development is still in progress and their peers continue to have support of parents



# Knowledge of adolescent development: Implications

- Environments need to be emotionally & physically safe
- We need to be caring and nurturing:
  - Understand the meaning of behavior
  - Be aware of developmental needs – renegotiate roles
  - Value young people
  - Provide opportunities to explore, make choices, make mistakes & grow
  - Listen & seek to understand who the young person is
  - Opportunities for self-expression & voice
  - Affirm assets, skills, and competence



# Social Connections

- Emotional support
  - Informational support
  - Instrumental support
  - Spiritual support
- 
- Peer connections are especially important in adolescence
    - Identity – self-concept and sense of self
    - Independence – emotional, cognitive and behavioral autonomy



# Social Connections: In the child welfare system...

Young people may:

- Avoid getting close as a protective measure
  - Avoiding contact, fading into the background
  - Anger, threats, insults, property destruction
- Have negative expectations of relationships
  - Abandonment, harsh judgment, uncaring, unable to understand
- Have had limited opportunity to engage with caring adults





# Social Connections: Implications

- We can support the development and strengthening of social connections
- Pay special attention to:
  - “Testing” behavior
  - “Too quick” relationship development
  - Transitions



# Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth

- Essential developmental tasks in adolescence
- Lay the foundation for forming independent identity
- Promote productive, responsible, and satisfying adulthood
  
- Many experiences we provide for young people focus on either cognitive or social-emotional development – we need to focus on the “whole person”



# Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth: In the child welfare system...

Young people may not have had opportunities to:

- Explore their own interests
- Explore personal, gender, and cultural identity
- Seek more independence and responsibility
- Think about values and morals
- Try new experiences
- Strive to reach full potential



# Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence in Youth: Implications

- Need for safe environments to reduce brain activation and expand brain resources
- Change takes time
- Access to experiences that support competence building
- Adults acknowledge competence and successes
- Validate the experience of failure and its feelings
- Reframing success



# Concrete Support in Times of Need

- ...those things that we can count on when we are in need of extra help or resources
- ...can make it easier to get through a hard time or to address a specific issue



# Concrete Support in Times of Need: In the child welfare system...

Young people may:

- Have few natural supports to call on
- Have difficulty asking for help
- Think they should be able to figure this out on their own
- Have had limited access to competent caring adults
- Have missed opportunities to learn and practice important skills



# Concrete Support in Times of Need: Implications

- Promote help seeking
- Provide/refer to services that are individually focused, culturally responsive, grounded in respect and trust
- Provide a different experience to build trust
- Engage youth as helpers in mutual support networks
- Be flexible and available to respond to youth needs



# Youth Resilience

- The process of managing stress and functioning well even when faced with adversity or trauma
- Resilient young people:
  - Have close, supportive connections with trusted adults
  - View themselves in a positive light
  - Are aware of their emotional responses, can modulate their arousal and manage impulses
  - Possess strong communication skills
  - Have confidence in their ability to solve their own problems – but can ask for help when needed





# Youth Resilience: In the child welfare system...

Young people who have lived in high-stress environments for long periods:

- May not have had practice and support to develop their resilience
- Need trusting, supportive relationships with caring adults:
  - guidance
  - encouragement
  - high expectations



# Youth Resilience: Implications

- Youth need adults who will help them to:
  - face challenges competently
  - make productive decisions, including when and how to seek help
  - think about results of their actions and take responsibility for them
  - positively influence their development and well-being



# Applying Youth Thrive and Strengthening Families together

- Working across age ranges of children and youth in your caseload
- Supporting young parents who need support for their adolescent development at the same time as they need support in their parenting role
- Other thoughts?