



An Evidence Based Program

Peer Helpers PLUS and the Positive Youth Development Model

Peer Helpers PLUS is a comprehensive, prevention and support program that partners with schools to promote the mental health of youth, and teach them to advocate for one another. The theoretical background for the program is grounded in the work of Barbara B. Varenhorst, PhD, leading pioneer in peer helping, who began her work as a school counselor in the 1960's. Her work is focused on the 40 Developmental Assets®, the essential building blocks of healthy development that young people need to succeed.

The Peer Helpers PLUS program is modeled on the evidence-based **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** framework. **Positive Youth Development** refers to intentional efforts of other youth, adults, communities, government agencies and schools to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities. Based on the literature, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, a collaboration of 20 federal departments and agencies that support youth, has created the following definition of positive youth development (PYD):

PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

PYD has its origins in the field of prevention. In the past, prevention efforts typically focused on single problems before they surfaced in youth, such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency. Researchers and practitioners began to report that young people who possess a diverse set of protective factors can, in fact, experience more positive outcomes. These findings encouraged the development of interventions and programs that reduce risks and strengthen protective factors. The programs and interventions are strengthened when they involve and engage youth as equal partners, ultimately providing benefits for both for the program and the involved youth. The PYD was researched by Tufts University between 2003 and 2009, and has been designated an evidence based program (EBP) by SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

How does the Peer Helpers PLUS program fit the PYD Model?



PYD Features and Characteristics	Definitions	Peer Helpers PLUS
Social Domains		
Representation of the School Setting in Positive Youth Development Programs		✓
Positive Youth Development Constructs		
Competence	Competence was defined as a child's capacity for acquiring developmentally appropriate skills across social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral dimensions.	✓
Self-Efficacy	Self-efficacy was defined as youth's perception that one can achieve desired goals through one's own action.	✓
Prosocial Norms	Prosocial norms are defined as healthy standards and clear beliefs. Programs typically addressed these through delivering messages about healthy expectations from peers or adults, or by stressing the importance of knowing how to respond appropriately to negative peer influences.	✓
Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement	Opportunities for prosocial involvement were defined as events or activities in the intervention that encourage youth in prosocial actions. These programs created, or linked children to, opportunities for positive involvement.	✓
Recognition for Positive Behavior	This construct was defined as reinforcement or acknowledgement for positive behavior. It tied with opportunities for prosocial involvement.	✓
Bonding	Bonding was defined as a youth's social attachment and commitment to others, including family, peers, school, community, and the culture(s).	✓
PYD Domains	PYD Program Features	Key Activities
Assets & Agency	Skill building	Develop soft and life skills through skill building activities within individual, peer and community settings.
Contribution	Youth engagement and contribution	Allow youth engagement to take different shapes. This can include youth expression, community service, opportunities for youth decision-making, and youth leadership.
Enabling Environments	Healthy relationships and bonding	Identify and link youth to positive role models, both adult and peer.
	Belonging and membership	Foster activities where youth feel included regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities or other factors.
	Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions	Clear and consistent norms and expectations about health, relationships, and forms of engagement that allow youth increasing amount of responsibility and independence.
	Safe space	Creates safe spaces that are tailored to the needs of youth.
	Access to age appropriate and youth-friendly services.	Make information available to youth and families, connecting and integrating health and social services to provide a continuum of care.

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Other PYD Characteristics	Peer Helpers PLUS
Activities that build important life skills.	✓
Opportunities for youth to use these life skills as both participants in and as leaders of valued community activities.	✓
PYD is an intentional process. It is about being proactive to promote protective factors in young people.	✓
PYD complements efforts to prevent risky behaviors and attitudes in youth and supports efforts that work to address negative behaviors.	✓
PYD acknowledges and further develops (or strengthens) youth assets. All youth have the capacity for positive growth and development.	✓
PYD enables youth to thrive and flourish and prepares them for a healthy, happy, and safe adulthood.	✓
PYD involves youth as active agents. Youth are valued and encouraged to participate in design, delivery, and evaluation of the services. Adults and youth work in partnership.	✓
PYD instills leadership qualities in youth, but youth are not required to lead. Youth can attend, actively participate, contribute, and/or lead through PYD activities.	✓
PYD involves civic involvement and civic engagement; youth contribute to their schools and broader communities through service.	✓
PYD involves and engages every element of the community — schools, homes, community members, and others. Young people, family members, and community partners are valued through this process. PYD is an investment that the community makes in young people. Youth and adults work together to frame the solutions.	✓