

Chapter 5

Building Hope for Positive Youth Development: Research, Practice, and Policy

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Most teenagers hope for a future with a job they like, the ability to buy the things they need, and a happy family life (Nurmi, 2004; Schmid, Phelps, Mueller et al., 2011). As a society, we hope that young people will become productive, self-sufficient adults who contribute to a healthy democracy through active and engaged citizenship (Lerner, 2004). For researchers and practitioners who are concerned with positive youth development (PYD), a key goal is to identify strengths of young people that will help predict and explain different pathways that adolescents can take toward adulthood and to optimize these pathways such that every young person has a chance to thrive. In this chapter, we describe the importance of *hope* as an important youth strength that leads to positive development.

We define hope as a combination of three components—intentional self-regulation, positive future expectations, and connectedness—and we provide evidence from the 4-H Study of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005; see also Chap. 1) to show how these three aspects of hope work together to promote PYD. After reviewing lessons from the research, we highlight examples of programs and contexts that can be sources of hope for youth and provide guidelines for how policy-makers and practitioners can support and maintain this vital individual asset. We conclude the chapter by showing how hope is linked to contribution, a key goal of many youth

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development programs. Programs that aim to encourage youth to give back to their schools and communities, and to become productive citizens in society, must be sources of hope for youth.

Hope Is a Strength That Promotes Positive Youth Development

A young person's goals, expectations, and emotions about the future are powerful forces in shaping his or her development. Adolescents' imagined futures, or *possible selves*, motivate present-day behaviors. Many of the decisions that adolescents make, such as selecting friends, choosing extracurricular activities, and deciding what to study, are reflections of their hoped-for future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & James, 2009; Yowell, 2000). Mental activities involved in navigating the future—setting expectations, imagining possibilities, planning for one's future—comprise “a central organizing feature of perception, cognition, affect, memory, motivation, and action” (Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2013, p. 119). Hope is among the highest virtues in many religious and philosophical texts and is often associated with faith and spirituality.

Yet despite the seemingly obvious importance of hope for young people, it is not easily defined. A look at the psychological research on hope might lead us to conclude that it is a very complex phenomenon. For instance, hope has been defined as a positive *emotion* (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990); a set of *cognitions*, or perceptions, about one's goals and the means for attaining those goals (Snyder et al., 1991); and as something that elicits *action* from the individual (Breznitz, 1986). Hope is associated with resilience, and it is often viewed as a source of strength to confront adversity and as a way to find meaning in suffering (Frankl, 1959; Seginer, 2008; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Moreover, we are all familiar with pedestrian, or everyday, hopes (“I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow”) and more fanciful hopes (“I hope I win the lottery”), and these different uses of hope in our daily lives can add to the confusion about what it is and how to study it.

With so many varied definitions of hope, how can researchers and practitioners measure it among youth and promote it, respectively, and see if their efforts are working? One way to overcome the complicated issue of defining hope is to measure it indirectly, by understanding the constituent parts that, when combined, make up hope. This method is analogous to baking a cake. We know that there are some key ingredients that are necessary to start a cake, such as eggs, flour, and sugar. Then, we adjust some ingredients or add new ones to determine what kind of cake we want—strawberries, chocolate, or cream-cheese frosting. Using this metaphor to understand hope, there is no disagreement about the key ingredient. Philosophers, psychologists, and the great poets and thinkers who have written about hope for at least 2,000 years all agree that hope involves future expectations. However, for researchers and practitioners in the field of PYD, this ingredient on its own is not enough. We aim to promote among young people the kind of hope that will help

them achieve positive developmental outcomes, such as the Five Cs of PYD described in Chap. 1. Knowing what kind of hope we want to promote, we can point to key ingredients that, when combined, will yield the type of hope necessary for youth to place themselves on positive pathways to adulthood.

Three Ingredients for Hope

In this section, we present three ingredients that are necessary for a model of hope, one that will be useful to predict PYD: intentional self-regulation skills, positive future expectations, and connectedness. Each of these three ingredients can be found throughout the PYD literature separately, but when they are brought together, they create something new entirely: hope. This recipe for hope is based on research showing that these three ingredients are critical features of the kind of hope that is necessary to promote PYD.

Intentional Self-Regulation Skills

Adolescent development occurs in a rich set of contexts made up of people, institutions, communities, and society. To function successfully or effectively in the face of the myriad changes that characterize adolescence, youth must be able to identify, maintain, and enhance the resources—or “developmental assets”—that exist in these contexts (e.g., Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001; Nurmi, 1991). Young people need agency, the belief that they can act effectively to control themselves or their world in order to attain their goals.

One of the ways that young people show agency is through intentional self-regulation (e.g., Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006; Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2008). Intentional self-regulation (ISR) may involve selecting goals, optimizing one’s resources in order to achieve those goals, and compensating by adjusting when original goals are blocked or when strategies for optimization fail (Freund & Baltes, 2002; also see Chap. 2, for more information about ISR skills). Young people who have high levels of ISR skills are better able to choose positive goals. They are also good at finding resources, like mentors, who can help them achieve those goals. Finally, adolescents with strong ISR skills are not daunted by setbacks; they simply adjust their strategies for achieving a goal.

Prior PYD research has identified ISR skills as a key individual strength that promotes youth thriving. ISR skills are important for setting and maintaining goals. When young people have high ISR skills and access to developmental assets in their families, schools, and communities, they are more likely to have high scores on the Five Cs of PYD—competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Gestsdóttir, Bowers, von Eye, Napolitano, & Lerner, 2010; Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007; Gestsdóttir, Lewin-Bizan, von Eye, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009; Urban, Lewin-Bizan, &

Lerner, 2010; Zimmerman, Phelps, & Lerner, 2007, 2008; see too Chap. 2). Without ISR skills, young people might have trouble selecting and managing their goals. For instance, they might set vague or unrealistic goals, or they will be overwhelmed by setbacks. Young people without ISR might struggle to find help and motivation for achieving their goals. ISR skills are therefore critical for realizing future expectations. To promote hope among young people, practitioners must help them learn about and practice the ISR skills that they will need to garner resources necessary to attain future goals.

Positive Future Expectations

Effective goal setting and management in adolescence is motivated by expectations about a happy, successful, and productive adulthood. As we described above, young people who are able to imagine a positive future and who feel confident in their ability to achieve their future goals are best able to select behaviors in the present that lead to a productive adulthood, one marked by contribution in their families and communities. These positive future expectations represent the motivations necessary to energize behavior in the direction of future goals.

Adolescents' positive future expectations, including emotions such as optimism, are a crucial component in the positive development of a young person (e.g., Benson, 2008; Nurmi, 2004; Yowell, 2000). The representations of one's future self may be thought of in terms of "possible selves," which encompass one's expected, hoped for, and feared future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In turn, possible selves "dynamically organize and energize behavior" (Yowell, 2000, p. 215) by helping a young person regulate his or her behaviors and make meaning out of different experiences. In other words, behavioral outcomes in later adolescence are influenced by earlier expectations about the future through self-conceptions that determine how information is processed.

For instance, a young person who expects to attend college will be more likely to filter experiences through that lens in order to select behaviors consistent with their goal (such as doing homework and getting good grades). The person will also avoid behaviors that are inconsistent with their goal (such as skipping class). In this way, ideas about future self help regulate behavior in the present. Therefore, practitioners should help young people find meaningful goals about which they feel excited that "spark" their enthusiasm (Benson, 2008; see also Chap. 4). In fact, research on youth sparks (Benson, 2008) and purpose (Damon, 2008) also points to the role of positive future expectations in PYD.

Connectedness

Butter is a special ingredient for baking, because it both helps to bind the dry ingredients together and adds flavor to mixture. Connectedness is a special ingredient in hope. As the relational element of hope, connectedness may be thought of as trust

or caring (Callina, Johnson, Buckingham, & Lerner, 2014; Tennen, Affleck, & Tennen, 2002). Connectedness is an important ingredient for hope because youth need relationships that are founded on trust in order to achieve their future goals. Such relationships help provide young people with the confidence they need to attain their goals and inspire them to imagine hopeful futures, and they help to open pathways to future aspirations (Oyserman & James, 2009). Thus, connectedness binds ISR and positive future expectations together to create hope.

Connectedness also adds a certain flavor to hope that makes it useful for predicting positive developmental outcomes for youth, especially contribution and civic engagement. In order to fully understand the role of hope in PYD, it is not enough just to know that a young person has ISR skills and positive future expectations. In fact, these two dimensions alone are significantly correlated with so-called “Machiavellian” attitudes, such as endorsing social manipulation as a strategy for achieving one’s goals (Callina, 2013).

For the kind of hope that researchers and practitioners want to promote among young people—hope associated with positive functioning across childhood and adolescence—it is necessary for researchers to identify whether young people are working toward their future goals in a prosocial way. Youth who are more hopeful are more likely to approach other individuals in a positive way, and are more likely to work toward collective goals, than youth whose futures seem bleak (Flanagan, 2003; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997).

Putting the Ingredients Together: The Recipe for Hope

In sum, we define hope as having three parts. The first part is intentional self-regulation skills, which help a young person set and manage goals. The second component of hope is positive future expectations. The third component of hope is connectedness. Connectedness is the ingredient that helps to ensure that a young person’s future-oriented thoughts and behaviors will be directed toward prosocial goals.

Although each of these constructs stands alone as an important factor in promoting PYD, they are more effective when combined. Moreover, in the same way that ingredients, when baked together, create something new, these psychosocial ingredients work together to create the kind of hope that researchers and practitioners can be confident will guide young people on developmental pathways marked by PYD. When any ingredient is weak or missing, young people may require some intervention to boost their levels of hope.

For instance, without ISR skills to set goals and overcome obstacles, an adolescent may feel that the future is vague and uncertain; however, without positive future expectations, a young person may be unmotivated to put his or her goal-setting skills to use. Finally, connectedness is the ingredient that binds ISR and positive future expectations together. In the following section, we provide evidence from research that demonstrates how these three ingredients create hope and to promote PYD.

Research on Hope and PYD

Evidence from the 4-H Study of PYD lends support to our definition of hope and to our understanding about the importance of hope for placing youth on positive developmental pathways (see Chap. 1). In addition to measuring the Five Cs of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005), researchers in the 4-H Study assessed youth contribution and civic engagement, academic achievement, healthy living, peer and parent relationships, school engagement, and the ingredients of hope we have described.

Data from the 4-H Study of PYD show how the three components of hope described above—positive future expectations, intentional self-regulation skills, and connectedness—work together to place youth on positive pathways across the adolescent period. For instance, these data showed that adolescents' positive future expectations and intentional self-regulation skills are important predictors of positive development (Schmid, Phelps, Mueller et al., 2011). Youth in the 4-H Study of PYD were grouped into different trajectories of positive and problematic outcomes across 3 years of adolescence (ages 13–15/Grades 7 through 9). Whereas many of the youth in the study had high, stable levels of PYD, some of the participants started low in PYD and declined over time. Problematic outcomes were assessed by measuring depressive symptoms and drug use. Some youth had few depressive symptoms, whereas others showed increasing levels of symptoms over the course of the 3 years. For drug use, most of the youth did not use drugs or reported very infrequent use.

To test the role of the components of hope in predicting these trajectories, the relationship between group membership and ISR skills and positive future expectations was assessed. Overall, youth with strong ISR skills and high levels of positive future expectations were more likely to be in the group with the highest levels of PYD across Grades 7 through 9 as well as in the group with the lowest levels of problematic outcomes, including drug use and depressive symptoms.

This research was extended by investigating how positive future expectations and ISR skills work together to predict the Five Cs across the adolescence (Callina et al., 2014; Schmid, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011). This work was based on the idea that PYD requires both the ISR skills needed to realize future goals and the emotional and cognitive activation—in the form of positive future expectations—that give meaning to the use of ISR skills (Benson, 2008; Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003). In other words, the researchers hypothesized that a young person might not put his or her ISR skills to use without positive expectations for the future. Data from Grades 7 through 9 of the 4-H Study showed that, as expected, both positive future expectations and ISR predicted PYD scores across Grades 7 and 8 (Schmid, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011). However, earlier positive future expectations had greater influence on later ISR skills, which suggests that positive future expectations might be especially important for thriving among younger adolescents.

In regard to connectedness, an examination of whether young people have different profiles of development with respect to positive future expectations and parental trust across the middle adolescent years (Grades 7 through 10) found that, for the

most part, young people had high positive future expectations and trust across these 4 years (Callina et al., 2014). In fact, their patterns did not fluctuate very much. However, some of the 4-H Study participants showed trajectories of positive future expectations and trust that decreased over the same 4 years. Another profile showed that some youth had moderate levels of positive future expectations, but their parent trust dipped across Grades 8 and 9 and then recovered in Grade 10. This last group of youth had the lowest scores on positive outcomes such as contribution. The importance of contribution is discussed in greater detail, below.

Research on the positive effects of mentoring in the lives of young people provides further insight into how connectedness, ISR, and positive future expectations work together to comprise the type of hope that enhances positive outcomes for youth. For example, youth who had a mentor scored higher on measures of optimism and positive attitudes about the future (Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992). Data from participants in Grades 10 through 12 in the 4-H Study of PYD showed that the greater number of important nonparental adults in a young person's life, the more he or she believed it would be likely to achieve life goals such as graduating from college and having a happy family life (Bowers et al., 2012). In turn, higher expectations for future success predicted three of the Five Cs of PYD (confidence, character, and caring). It appears, then, that youth with high levels of positive future expectations may be more effective in their ability to form positive relationships with others (e.g., Bowers et al., 2012; Bowers & Johnson, 2013). This research shows how the three ingredients of hope are important on their own for PYD, but that they are especially powerful in combination.

Hope Beyond the Self: Links Between Hope and Youth Contribution

The Five Cs of PYD lead to a sixth C, contribution (see Chap. 11). The theory linking PYD and contribution is that youth who are thriving—in other words, showing high levels of the Five Cs—will have the skills, motivation, and resources to “give back” in some way to the key settings and people in their lives. Contribution may therefore take many forms, such as volunteering in one's school or community, helping neighbors or family members, or engaging in activities that are important to support and maintain a civil society (this last group of activities is often termed “civic engagement”). Components of hope are linked to contribution and civic engagement among youth. For example, ISR skills predicted prosocial behavior toward strangers, friends, and family members (Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2011). As we described earlier, trust and positive future expectations have been shown to predict contribution scores in the 4-H Study of PYD (Callina et al., 2014).

How might hope lead to contribution among young people? Hope may function to promote the well-being of one's social group, because individuals with higher hope have the capacity and the motivation to realize the shared goals of the collec-

tive (Snyder et al., 1997). Hopeful youth are more likely to engage with their context in positive ways, such as through contributions to their families, schools, communities, and society. Therefore, “The hopeful person’s resolute trust and capacity to rely on others may also explain why hopeful people are able to select pathways that facilitate others’ assistance or support” (Tennen et al., 2002, p. 312). Individuals who are hopeful are more likely to receive help and positive feedback from others, which may motivate them, in turn, to engage in contribution. As we mentioned earlier, connectedness is a special ingredient for hope. Through the development of connectedness and trust, in particular, as well as by setting positive expectations for the future of their communities and by practicing goal-setting skills, hopeful youth are more likely to engage with their communities through contribution and civic engagement.

The development of connectedness and trust involves a history of positive social interactions. Trust is one of the first psychosocial strengths humans acquire when, as infants, we learn to rely on our caregivers to be nurturing and sensitive to our needs (Erikson, 1959). As children get older, they begin to learn about trustworthiness and reciprocity in peer relationships. Ideally, the reach of these positive social interactions expands throughout later childhood and adolescence to encompass not just one’s family, friends, and community, but outward to include all of humanity and even all living things (Warren, 2011). In particular, adolescents who are exposed to diverse others in their communities are more likely to extend their trust outward from their immediate network of family, friends, and other “in-group” individuals, to include strangers (Flanagan, 2003). This extended form of trust is called *global trust*, and it is founded on a positive history with strangers and institutions of civil society. Global trust leads to the belief that, in general, people are likely to be fair and benevolent (Flanagan, 2003).

Global trust facilitates a type of hope called *civic hope*, the belief that one can realize civic engagement goals. Civic hope involves setting meaningful goals that benefit others, the belief that one can realize these goals, and establishing connections or collaborations necessary to achieve those goals. In theory, civic hope should be manifested by contributions to one’s community. However, more research is needed to better understand how civic hope develops across adolescence and how it is related to similar concepts such as civic engagement (see Chap. 11).

In sum, ISR, positive future expectations, and connectedness are each important ingredients for promoting the Five Cs of PYD as well as the sixth C, contribution. These ingredients are also important in combination to create hope among youth. Future research should look more carefully at the interplay among these hope ingredients. Creative research study designs are needed to better understand how youth think about hope and its ingredients.

For instance, although there has been much work done in positive psychology (Snyder, 2002) and other fields (such as nursing psychiatry; see Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995 for a review) to measure hope, there are almost no studies in which youth are interviewed about how they define hope and its importance for their lives and for their own positive development. Research is needed about whether promoting the hope ingredients described here will enhance positive functioning across

different domains of a young person's life, such as educational and vocational aspirations, engagement in out-of-school time activities (sports, art, and other interests), and family and peer relationships.

What Can Practitioners Do to Promote Hope Among Youth?

In the previous sections, we defined three components of hope and presented research from the 4-H Study of positive youth development to show the important role that each of these hope ingredients plays in promoting PYD. As we pointed out earlier, it is difficult to measure hope directly, and so we recommend assessing hope by its three key ingredients: ISR, positive future expectations, and connectedness.

Similarly, it might be more useful for practitioners to think about promoting the three ingredients of hope, rather than trying to promote hope, itself, which might feel elusive. Many programs target one of these hope ingredients, and practitioners should consider whether their program can be tailored appropriately to target all three. Still other programs might incorporate all three hope ingredients, but do not realize it yet! In the following section, we describe evidence about the effectiveness of hope enhancement strategies for youth, and how these hope interventions can be improved to maximize positive developmental outcomes for young people. We also discuss features of youth development programs that are important for promoting ISR, positive future expectations, and connectedness. We use the example of human–animal interaction programs to show how practitioners can create interventions that will enhance hope among children and adolescents.

Finally, we recognize that although it is important for practitioners to promote hope, it is also critical that they are able to recognize hopelessness. Accordingly, we present some information about how hopelessness develops and what practitioners and researchers can do to build evidence-based practices for hope enhancement strategies.

Evidence About the Effectiveness of Hope Enhancement Strategies for Youth

Hope enhancement strategies—aimed at increasing hopefulness, life satisfaction, and at reducing hopelessness and depression—have been employed in clinical settings in the United States since at least the 1950s (Menninger, 1960; see Weis & Speridakos, 2011, for a review). More recently, hope interventions have been implemented in a range of clinical and community health settings as well as in schools and universities (Weis & Speridakos, 2011). Recall, however, that not everyone uses the same recipe for hope. The most commonly used theory and measure of hope in psychology comes from research done by Rick Snyder, a clinician and researcher who renewed interest in hope in the field of positive psychology in the 1990s.

Snyder (2002) argued that there are two ingredients that make up hope: pathways thinking and agency thinking. Because of the prevalence of Snyder's model, most hope interventions involve working with a young person to help him or her set goals, to imagine pathways to attaining goals, and to support his or her agency to work toward those goals. For instance, a school-based program, called "Making Hope Happen," uses a 5-week curriculum to help students set positive goals, think of strategies to overcome obstacles, and reflect upon and evaluate their process for goal attainment (Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). Hope scores (measured by items that assessed participants' pathways thinking and agency thinking) were higher among students who participated in the "Making Hope Happen" program compared with a control group of students who did not receive the curriculum.

At the same time that Snyder's model has been influential in positive psychology, researchers and practitioners in the fields of nursing, medicine, and health psychology have adopted a model of hope created by Karen Herth (e.g., Herth, 1992). Herth's recipe for hope includes similar ingredients to Snyder's pathways thinking (which she calls the "affective-behavioral" dimension of hope) and agency thinking (the "cognitive-temporal" dimension). Similar to the hope recipe we presented in this chapter, Herth has a third ingredient, called the "affiliative-contextual" dimension. This component of hope is measured by asking people if they feel they have social support and are comforted by faith or whether they "feel all alone." Hope enhancement strategies that are designed based on Herth's model, such as the Hope Intervention Program (Herth, 2001), target each of these dimensions by encouraging participants to set goals, identify their personal strengths that will help them achieve those goals, and to reflect on their support system. The Hope Intervention Program was designed for adults with long-term illnesses and has been adapted for adolescents.

There is very little research on the effectiveness of Herth's hope intervention for healthy adolescents, however. Because the Hope Intervention Program focuses on building hope and coping strategies during illness, it is likely that the intervention would need to be restructured for youth who have other types of strengths and challenges. Hope interventions should be tailored to meet the particular developmental and individual needs of youth with respect to developing ISR skills, positive future expectations, and connectedness that are relevant to their own experiences and that build on their existing strengths and the assets available in their contexts.

Despite these efforts to promote hope in clinical and community settings, there is mixed evidence that hope enhancement strategies work. In a comparison of 27 studies of hope enhancement interventions, undertaken to determine how effective the interventions were in promoting hope and life satisfaction and in reducing psychological distress, all of the studies measured hope as an outcome using either the Snyder measure or the Herth measure (Weis & Speridakos, 2011). Interventions were compared across various dimensions, such as whether they took place in a clinical/medical setting or in a research setting. Surprisingly, the hope enhancement strategies in applied settings (such as therapy) had weaker effects on hope than interventions that were conducted in laboratory research settings (Weis & Speridakos, 2011). Interventions were not compared by specific program practices, with the exception of whether the intervention was delivered individually or in a

group setting. There were no differences in hope scores for participants who received an intervention individually or in a group.

These findings lend support to the idea that hope is indeed a malleable personal strength that can be promoted in specific contexts. However, it is clear that practitioners and researchers must work together to translate best practices in hope enhancement strategies from laboratory to applied settings (see Hamilton, [in press](#), for information about conducting translational research for youth development).

Despite the potential utility of Herth's hope model, we believe that a key ingredient is missing from most hope enhancement interventions—connectedness. Hope interventions have focused primarily on the internal strengths of young people, such as intentional self-regulation and positive future expectations, to help them imagine a more hopeful future. The “Making Hope Happen” program described above paired students into “Hope Buddy” partnerships so that high-hope students could model goal-setting behaviors for low-hope students (see Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008). However, the effects of the Making Hope Happen program were weak (see Weis & Speridakos, 2011), perhaps because the focus of this intervention was on goal-setting skills rather than on building trust and connectedness.

In contrast, one hope enhancement program for at-risk youth used a challenge ropes course, which is a type of obstacle course that challenges participants to use teamwork to accomplish goals (such as completing the course) and to promote trust-building and problem-solving. This program had strong positive effects on youth hope (Robitschek, 1996). We recommend, therefore, that in addition to designing programs for youth that promote ISR skills and positive future expectations, practitioners work to connect youth with adults and peers who can help them select positive behaviors and stay on track toward their long-term, hopeful future goals. Youth development programs that facilitate long-term, trusting relationships between adults and youth may be especially powerful to promote hope (Rhodes et al., 1992; see too Chap. 6).

Of course, connectedness is found not only through mentoring relationships, but also among peers, siblings, parents and other adult relatives (see Chaps. 6 and 7). As we will discuss later, even pets can provide the feelings of connectedness necessary for a young person to find and maintain hope. Practitioners should consider the unique strengths and interests of the youth in their program that will allow them to find opportunities for engaging young people in a way that builds trust and connectedness. More research in various applied settings will be needed to better understand the specific hope enhancement strategies that best promote ISR, positive future expectations, and connectedness.

Features of Youth Development Programs That Promote Hope

There may be as many as 15 constructs, or objectives, associated with positive developmental pathways (see Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004, for review). PYD programs may seek to achieve at least one of the 15 objectives

(Catalano et al., 2004). These objectives include promoting resilience, fostering prosocial norms, and promoting competencies across different domains (social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral). The objectives most closely related to promoting hope among youth are fostering belief in the future and self-efficacy, promoting bonding, and providing opportunities for prosocial involvement (Catalano et al., 2004).

An evaluation of youth development programs describes how programs can successfully promote positive belief in the future:

Programs which sought to influence a child's belief in his or her future potential, goals, options, choices, or long range hopes and plans were classified as promoting belief in the future. Strategies included guaranteed tuition to post-secondary institutions, school-to-work linkages, future employment opportunities, or future financial incentives to encourage continued progress on a prosocial trajectory. Belief in the future could also be fostered by programs designed to influence youth's optimism about a healthy and productive adult life (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 21–22).

There are several strategies for promoting not only positive future expectations (“youth's optimism”) but also the goal management strategies necessary to realize those goals. Practitioners may or may not have control over whether youth are guaranteed certain pathways to their future goals, such as college tuition or employment. We will return to this issue later when we discuss priorities for policy. However, practitioners who work with youth can help them be prepared to take advantage of opportunities and to feel confident in their goal attainment skills.

A framework of youth development programming known as the “Big Three” may be useful for promoting hope (Lerner, 2004). The first component of this framework is sustained, positive relationships with adults, which build trust and positive connections. Second, successful programs offer skill-building opportunities, which support the goal setting and management skills necessary for enacting pathways to positive, hoped-for future outcomes. Finally, programs that promote positive developmental outcomes provide opportunities to take leadership roles, which may enhance feelings of purpose and lead individuals to set meaningful, prosocial goals that benefit a young person's school, neighborhood, environment, or society.

Schools and community-based youth-serving organizations have much to contribute to the hopeful futures of young people by supporting their positive future expectations, helping them set and manage goals, and by providing opportunities to make meaningful contributions that foster a sense of connectedness and global trust. City Year's *Whole School Whole Child (WSWC)* is one example of a program that builds hope through program components that mirror the “Big Three” and promote adolescents' positive beliefs in the future. *WSWC* is a school-based program aimed at supporting youth who have been identified as at-risk for dropping out of school. The program components range from school-wide supports, in which City Year corps members collaborate with educators in the school to create an “overall positive learning environment” (City Year, 2014), to individual intensive interventions provided by young adult mentors. Central to the model is creating a positive atmosphere and fostering a welcoming environment for students to feel

excited about school. Components of the WSWC program comprise a multifaceted approach to promoting hope for a bright future in school.

One feature of the WSWC program is expanded learning time that helps students delve more deeply into subjects being covered in the classroom (City Year Annual Report, 2013). During this time, students work toward academic goals while experiencing connectedness with their mentors during one-on-one time and group activities. As described by City Year, the social–emotional component of these interactions helps to build an environment where students are eager to engage with adults and other students in their schools and work harder toward their academic goals. The opportunity afforded to them to become proactive learners and decision-makers in their school success allows students to practice the goal setting and management skills necessary to build intentional self-regulation and to develop positive expectations of themselves and those who are there to support their endeavors.

Unfortunately, there has been little research conducted on the City Year program, and the few evaluations that we were able to locate focused more on academic achievement, rather than on the aspects of positive development and well-being thought to promote hope. We describe later how policy-makers can help shape researchers' and practitioners' understanding of the development and outcomes of hope by prioritizing program evaluations that focus on multiple aspects of youth development. First, however, we provide a sample case of youth programming that has great potential to promote hope: human-animal interaction.

Contexts for Promoting Hope: Human–Animal Interaction as a Sample Case

Beyond structured youth development programs, many diverse contexts have the potential to promote hope in youth. One opportunity for promoting hope that is available to many young people is interacting with animals. Recently, increased attention is being paid to the role of pets as a source of strength in the family context, a source that can promote health and positive development.

As family sizes are decreasing, children are more likely to grow up with a pet in the home than a younger sibling or a grandparent (Melson, 2001). Animals frequently reside in the household, and youth often identify them as an important member of the family (Kosonen, 1996).

Programs that use human–animal interaction as a context for youth development are increasingly prevalent (Mueller, 2014) and may include animal training and husbandry programs (such as those found in 4-H clubs), sports such as horseback riding, and animal-assisted therapies. Programs are even capitalizing on youth interest in animals by involving them in seemingly unrelated interventions, such as literacy programs in which children read to dogs.

Interacting with animals promotes hope by providing youth with opportunities to practice ISR skills, to think positively about their futures, and to develop a sense of connectedness. First, animals seem to feature prominently in the types of future

goals that young people select. Findings from a sample of youth from the 4-H Study of PYD indicated that a small but substantial proportion of adolescents from diverse backgrounds point to nurturing, caring for, and interacting with animals as a key purpose in their lives (Mueller, Geldhof, & Lerner, 2013). In other words, youth view animals as an important component of how they see themselves in the future, whether those future expectations involve a career choice (such as becoming a veterinarian or dog trainer) or a goal for maintaining a connection with animals over time through pet ownership or animal-related activities such as horseback riding.

In addition, developing a meaningful relationship with an animal requires intentional self-regulation skills. Animals, by nature, are relatively unpredictable, and any long-term relationship with an animal will certainly involve both challenges and setbacks. ISR skills, such as adjusting goal management strategies in the face of obstacles, are particularly important for youth who work with animals in different settings. In fact, among participants in the 4-H Study of PYD, youth who reported a meaningful relationship with animals demonstrated a more highly developed repertoire of ISR skills compared to those who did not report such a relationship (Mueller et al., 2013). Practitioners should consider whether animals can be involved appropriately in youth development programs, to spark the interests of young people and to promote ISR.

Finally, human–animal interaction provides young people with feelings of connectedness that are important for hope. For instance, interacting with animals helps youth develop nurturing behaviors that foster trust and connectedness. The type of physical and verbal dialogue that humans use when interacting with animals closely resembles the characteristics of nurturing behavior that exists between parents and young infants (Katcher & Beck, 1987). Caring for others is a fundamental aspect of human functioning, and caring for animals is an important component of maintaining this nurturing behavior (Katcher & Beck, 1987). There is even some evidence that young children develop knowledge about nurturing from care of domestic animals (Melson & Fogel, 1989).

The social nature of the relationships youth have with animals serves as a pathway to reciprocity and caring behaviors that are important components of moral development (Turiel, 1998). Socialization involving reciprocity is important as youth develop perspective-taking. In addition to interacting with peers, family, or other humans, engaging in social behavior with animals is a means by which youth can develop reciprocity skills, a key component of connectedness. Human–animal interaction therefore supports connectedness both through the positive emotions and caring behaviors that are associated with animals and by providing a conduit through which connectedness and trust translate to interactions with other people in the young person’s life.

In sum, there are many pathways that youth can take to developing the three components of hope. Therefore, it is important to think creatively about how to help youth access the contexts that will be the most meaningful for them, to best optimize hope, positive development, and contribution. The example of human–animal interaction as a context for promoting hope illustrates how youth development programs can capitalize on the interests—or “sparks” (Benson, 2008)—of

young people and create opportunities within the program to foster positive future expectations, ISR, and connectedness.

As we discussed earlier, many programs may already have features that are designed to promote each of these hope ingredients, and these programs should consider evaluations that are designed to assess hope in order to contribute to the evidence about best practices for hope enhancement strategies and interventions. Other programs might contain features that promote one or two of the hope ingredients. Practitioners in these programs should consider how they could incorporate all three components, in order to support hope and promote PYD and contribution among the youth they serve.

Such practitioner recommendations also create priorities for policy, and we will discuss these in greater detail below. First, however, we point practitioners to research on hopelessness in the lives of youth, including how hopelessness develops and what can be done to intervene.

Recognizing Hope and Hopelessness

Given the importance of hope for working toward future goals, including the emotions, cognitions, and behaviors of navigating the future—as well as the interpersonal connections that are established through hopefulness—the absence of hope is a crucial problem. Thus, it is important for practitioners to know how to recognize hopelessness and its origins.

Psychologists have defined hopelessness as apathy and “inaction in the face of threat” (Lazarus, 1966, p. 263), and hopelessness is thought to be the result of feeling *helpless* to control a difficult situation. Hopelessness, like hope, is tightly linked to a person’s goals. In Martin Seligman’s famous experiments on *learned helplessness*, when dogs received electric shocks that they could not control or escape, they were later not able to learn how to avoid the shocks, even when escape was made possible (Seligman & Maier, 1967). Therefore, helplessness occurs when people (or animals) learn that their goal success is not related to their behaviors. They learn that their actions are not effective in attaining what they seek, whether achieving a goal or avoiding punishment. Over time, they may give up trying to set and achieve goals altogether. Simply, helplessness is created by a lack of control over one’s environment and leads to negative effects on motivation, cognition, and emotion (Maier & Seligman, 1976).

Helplessness can turn into *hopelessness* when people experience negative events that were outside of their control and when they perceived the events are the result of their own failures (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Practitioners may recognize hopelessness in a young person who says things like “I might as well give up because I can’t make things better for myself,” “Things just won’t work out the way I want them to,” or “There’s no use in really trying to get something I want because I probably won’t get it” (Kazdin, Rodgers, & Colbus, 1986). Such statements show that young people believe that they are not able to achieve their goals,

and, because of their own shortcomings, there is no point in trying. These youth may have vague, negative, or unrealistic goals for the future.

A sense of hopelessness about the future may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors in the present (Taylor, 1990, 1993). Hopelessness among youth is associated with depression, violent behavior, substance use, suicidal ideation, teenage pregnancy, and other risk behaviors (Bolland, 2003; Spirito, Williams, Stark, & Hart, 1988; Stoddard, Henly, Sieving, & Bolland, 2011). In a study of almost 2,500 inner-city youth, about half of the boys and a quarter of the girls felt hopeless about their futures (Bolland, 2003). Youth who were hopeless endorsed survey questions such as “All I see ahead of me are bad things, not good things” and “I don’t expect to live a very long life.” Such statements can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Without intervention, it is possible that these youth might find themselves on pathways toward a bleak future.

Interventions to ameliorate hopelessness would therefore involve a two-pronged approach. First, practitioners should try to help youth to feel a sense of control over their environments, such as by practicing ISR skills. Practitioners may provide young people with opportunities for decision-making and leadership in school and out-of-school time activities. Second, practitioners can help youth understand that setbacks are sometimes challenges that they can use their personal strengths to overcome, but sometimes they are the result of outside influences.

Promoting a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) is one way that practitioners can help youth recognize their agency in attaining positive future goals. Growth mindset refers to the beliefs that intellectual abilities are not fixed but rather can be nurtured through practice. Practitioners also can work with youth to help them find meaning in failures and even tragedies. Such interventions are thought to promote posttraumatic *growth* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth is a process by which a person reframes a tragic event by highlighting the wisdom that can be gleaned from it, such as a greater awareness of one’s personal strengths and new possibilities for one’s life. Ideally, this process happens in the context of supportive relationships, such as between a young person and his or her parents and peers and also the teachers, mentors, and other practitioners who can provide a trusting foundation for growth (see Chaps. 6 and 7).

There is no agreement in psychology research about whether hopelessness is the opposite of hope. In part, this uncertainty exists because hope and hopelessness are almost never measured in the same research study. Clearly, ISR skills, positive future expectations, and connectedness can all play important roles in alleviating hopelessness. However, researchers and practitioners should be aware that hope in one domain may not spill over into other domains. They can test this question by contributing to the evidence base about strategies for enhancing hope and reducing hopelessness.

For instance, practitioners and researchers can include measures of both hope and hopelessness in program evaluation assessments. Program evaluation concerns are just one realm in which policy-makers can set priorities for funding and legislation that can impact the hope enhancement strategies of practitioners and researchers. We turn to this issue in the following section.

Priorities for Policy

Policies can shape the funding priorities for youth programming that aims to promote hope among diverse youth. Funding may not only impact program design but also program evaluation, which is the tool that gives researchers and practitioners insight into evidence-based practices (Hamilton, *in press*).

Masten (2014) points to the need for multiple systems—for example, families, schools, community institutions, the media, and even the natural environment—to be aligned to promote positive outcomes for youth. Given the potentially diverse pathways to hope as well as the many predicted outcomes of hope (including, at least, PYD and contribution), it is important that researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers take a multidimensional, multisystem approach to program design and ultimately to program evaluation.

One implication for policy, therefore, is that funders and policy-makers must meet the needs of programs to support evaluation and implementation of multisystem youth programming. Policies should boost resources through collaboration across different points of intervention and promotion (Masten, 2014). Such support should include promoting rigorous measurement of program processes and outcomes that account for the complexities of promoting each of the different components of hope.

In addition to being multisystemic, evaluations of programs that seek to promote hope for youth must also be *developmental*. A developmental approach to youth program evaluation creates several priorities for funders and policy-makers. First, evaluations must be longitudinal, in order to understand the cascading or cumulative effects of program practices. For instance, hopeful youth are likely to show positive outcomes in the present, such as by selecting positive mentors who can help them achieve their future goals. However, hope is inherently future oriented, and so some outcomes of hope may not be immediately evident. It is therefore important that evaluations assess youth at multiple time points, and ideally across several years, to understand how a hope enhancement strategy works.

Second, evaluations are needed that help practitioners understand which individual or developmental assets are appropriate to promote among youth at different ages. For instance, one study we described above found that earlier positive future expectations (in 7th Grade) promoted later ISR skills (in 8th Grade), which in turn promoted PYD (in 9th Grade). Therefore, researchers and practitioners must consider whether their program design and evaluation design are developmentally appropriate for enhancing hope and measuring the effects of a hope intervention. Policies must provide resources to support such developmentally sensitive interventions.

Moreover, a developmental approach to program evaluation takes into consideration the particular contexts of diverse youth. Despite a growing interest in the role of hope in the positive development of youth, researchers know very little about the development of hope and PYD among youth from diverse cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Spencer & Spencer, 2014). Although hope is comprised of positive future expectations, intentional self-regulation skills, and

connectedness, the specific ways in which we assess these components among different youth may vary. For instance, family, culture, and society are all important for shaping a young person's positive future expectations (Nurmi, 1991). Spencer and Spencer (2014) note that racial and/or ethnic background can affect the development of trust between young people and the adults or institutions in their communities, and this mistrust may be particularly salient for minority youth. It is important, therefore, to understand how youth experience their world by understanding their perceptions of a particular program or institution. Evaluations of youth programs must pay attention to what is known as *ecological validity* (see Lerner & Callina, 2014)—that is, whether the practices of a hope intervention are appropriate for a given population of youth or whether assessments of those practices accurately reflect the perceptions and lived experiences of youth. Again, policies must provide resources to make such evaluations possible for diverse youth and communities.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we described how hope can direct youth toward positive developmental outcomes and also how hopelessness can lead to depression and problem behaviors. Fortunately, there is evidence that hope is malleable. Through a better understanding of the three ingredients of hope—intentional self-regulation skills, positive future expectations, and connectedness—practitioners can promote hope through their work with youth in community, school, and clinical programs. Because of the important role of hope in positive developmental pathways, including PYD and contribution, we believe that these hope ingredients should be a cornerstone of youth development programming.

Practitioners can promote hope by emphasizing program features such as the “Big Three”: sustained mentoring relationships, opportunities for building skills, and engaging youth in leadership roles that promote civic hope. In particular, a focus on connectedness is a key ingredient for hope enhancement strategies. As we discussed, connectedness may come in the form of relationships with parents, peers, and mentors (including educators, coaches, and other practitioners). Even pets and other human–animal interactions provide a context for supporting hope among youth.

Hopeful youth are more likely to identify meaningful goals, or purposes, which actively engage and contribute to their families, schools, and communities. Civic hope is realized when diverse people align their actions and expectations to achieve end goals with mutual benefit. Practitioners can share the idea of civic hope with young people, helping them understand the ways in which their own futures may be shaped by the futures of everyone in their community. In this chapter, we described the importance of trust, in particular, for promoting contribution and civic hope among youth.

Future research should focus on the links between hope and youth outcomes in the context of youth development programs. Such programs can reduce hopelessness and promote hope among youth who are low on one or all of the components described here. On the other hand, programs can capitalize on hope, as hopeful youth may be more likely to form positive relationships with adults and peers and to be successful in a program focused on goal attainment.

Therefore, hope can be thought of as both a positive outcome of a youth program and also as a strength that a young person brings to the program. The three components of hope should be included in assessments before, during, and after program participation to help identify areas where a young person might need support and to capitalize on his or her hope strengths. Such assessments require that policy-makers allocate funding for programs and program evaluations that take a multisystemic, developmental, and ecologically valid approach to youth development programming. Only through rigorous evaluation can we identify which evidence-based practices are best able to enhance and maintain hope among diverse adolescents.

Acknowledgments This article was supported in part by grants from the National 4-H Council, the Altria Corporation, the Thrive Foundation for Youth, and the John Templeton Foundation.

Recommended Additional Resources

Benson, P. L. (2008). *Sparks: How parents can ignite the hidden strengths of teenagers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Peter Benson describes a plan for awakening the spark that lives inside each and every young person, the feeling or idea that motivates them to engage their world—their families, peers, schools, and communities—in positive and productive ways. Sparks—when illuminated and nurtured—give young people joy, energy, and direction. They have the power to change a young person’s life from one of “surviving” to “thriving.” The book provides a step-by-step approach to helping teenagers discover their unique gifts and is applicable to *all* families, no matter their economic status, parenting situation, or ethnic background.

Damon, W. (2008). *The path to purpose: Helping our children find their calling in life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Drawing on the results of his innovative and important research, William Damon discusses one of the most pressing issues in the lives of youth today: why so many young people are “failing to launch,” that is, living at home longer, lacking career motivation, struggling to make a timely transition into adulthood, and not yet finding a life pursuit that inspires them. The book provides creative ideas for parents and practitioners to use to promote purpose among youth and to engage them positively with their peers, schools, and communities.

Lopez, S. J. (2013). *Making hope happen: Create the future you want for yourself and others*. New York: Atria Books.

Lopez discusses how to measure, create, and share hope and the impact of hope on various aspects of life, including relationships and career. This book is recommended for people who want to understand hope as a choice and learn how to use it as a life tool.

Schmid, K. L. & Lopez, S. J. (2011). Positive pathways to adulthood: The role of hope in adolescents' constructions of their futures. In R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner, & J. B. Benson (Eds.), *Positive youth development: Advances in child development and behavior* (Vol. 41, pp. 72–89). New York: Academic Press.

Schmid and Lopez explore hope within a developmental systems framework and in relation to positive future expectations and thriving in adolescence. This journal article is recommended for people seeking a more in-depth explanation of the role of hope in positive youth development.

Seginer, R. (2009). *Future orientation: Developmental and ecological perspectives*. New York: Springer.

Seginer explores the concept of future orientation, specifically for adolescents. She takes a psychological perspective and relates future orientation to other constructs, such as identity and self-esteem. Future orientation is recommended for people who want to gain a deeper understanding of the psychology of future-oriented thinking and how it develops across childhood and adolescence.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1991). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Random House.

Seligman discusses the positive impacts of optimism and offers techniques to help enhance it. He also offers advice on how to inspire optimism at school and at work. This book is a resource for those interested in developing skills of optimism in themselves or others.

Snyder, C. R. (1994). *The psychology of hope: You can get there from here*. New York: Free Press.

Snyder explores what makes hopeful individuals hopeful and provides information on how to help foster hope in children and adults. This book is a resource for anyone who wants to understand the psychology behind hope and how to cultivate aspects of hope.

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