Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice Priorities

Highlights from the Marriage Strengthening Research and Dissemination Center

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- June 9, 2021
Webinar Agenda

1. Introduce the Marriage Strengthening Research & Dissemination Center (MAST Center)
2. Describe adolescent and young adult relationship attitudes, expectations, and experiences
3. Learn about the role of positive youth development (PYD) in the design and implementation of youth relationship education programs
4. Identify priorities for future research and practice related to youth relationship education
What is the MAST Center?

• Established in 2018 by a five-year federal grant

• Conducts research on marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationship

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Mast Center Objectives

- Advance a Research Agenda
- Build Capacity for Research/Evaluation
- Strategic Dissemination
MAST Center: Research Aims

- Relationship Patterns and Trends
- Program Implementation and Evaluation
Poll

• What types of research would be most useful for informing and improving future relationship education for youth?
  
  o Analysis of trends in youth relationship formation
  o Analysis of youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
  o New data on youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
  o Research on HMRE program design and implementation
  o Research on HMRE program effectiveness (evaluation)
MAST Center Research: Relationship Patterns and Trends
Most first relationships occur during adolescence

Implications for Youth Relationship Education

Developmental considerations

Variability in attitudes, expectations, and experiences
Youth Relationship Attitudes and Experiences

For adolescence:
Emphasize exploratory dating, less long-term commitment or stability

For young adults:
Emphasize communicating relationship needs and expectations

For all youth:
Emphasize knowing when to end a relationship, why, and how

Source: Relationship Quality and its Measurement Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Review of the Literature
Youth Relationship Expectations and Goals

- **Marriage**
  - Want children

- **Cohabitation**
  - Intend to have children

Youth relationship expectations and goals
Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice – Working with Diverse Youth Populations

- Annotated Bibliography
- Priority youth populations

- 15 Descriptive Studies
- 7 Outcome Evaluations
- 4 Implementation Studies
MAST Center Research: HMRE Program Implementation and Evaluation
A Focus on Positive Youth Development
What is Positive Youth Development?

• An evidence-informed strengths-based developmental approach that:
  • Positively engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families
  • Provides opportunities for leadership, fosters positive relationships, and builds skills and competencies
How is PYD Different From Traditional Youth Services?

 Paradigm Shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Youth Services</th>
<th>Positive Youth Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixing Problems</td>
<td>Building on strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Pro-active</td>
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<tr>
<td>Troubled Youth</td>
<td>All youth</td>
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<td>Youth as Recipients</td>
<td>Youth as Participants/Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Professional Work</td>
<td>Everyone’s Work</td>
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Poll

• From your experience, which areas of programming might benefit the most from a PYD approach?
  o Recruitment
  o Curriculum Content
  o Curriculum Delivery
  o Youth Engagement
  o Youth Needs
# How Can PYD Inform HMRE Programming?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment</strong></td>
<td>• Message in ways that resonate with youth’s “culture”</td>
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<td><strong>Curriculum Content</strong></td>
<td>• Relevant to youth interests</td>
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<td>• Responsive to their preferences</td>
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<td><strong>Curriculum Delivery</strong></td>
<td>• Intentional skill-building approach</td>
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<td>• Build a “safe” learning environment</td>
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<td><strong>Youth Engagement</strong></td>
<td>• Invest in relationship with facilitator</td>
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<td>• Connect to their lived experience</td>
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<td><strong>Youth Needs</strong></td>
<td>• Recognize and build from strengths</td>
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<td>• Leverage family and community assets</td>
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Specific Developmental Considerations

- Heightened curiosity and interest in new experiences
- Identity development
- Sense of autonomy and agency
- Sense of belonging with peers
- Sensitivity to stress and reward
Integrating Positive Youth Development and Youth Relationship Education – an Application
Be Calm Connections

- Federal grant funded by the Office of Family Assistance
- Reflects federal priority to help youth build relationship skills, support positive development, and promote successful transitions to young adulthood

**Short-term Goals:**
Build students’ skills in managing emotions and stress, positive and effective communication strategies, and conflict resolution

**Long-term Goals:**
Improve students’ mental and emotional wellbeing and their ability to engage in compassionate and affirming relationships at home, school, and with friends

Funding for this project was provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant: 90ZD0023-01-00
Be CALM Program Background
A Mindfulness-Based Self-Regulation Program

- Developed for middle schoolers 2017-2020
  - Targeted impulse control and decision-making
- Delivered to 2,000+ students across 4 districts in NC
- Small RCT showed promising effects on health/PE teachers
  - Decreased stress, increased teaching mindfulness, observed co-regulation
- Qualitative student data suggested
  - Decreased emotional reactivity, better coping/conflict resolution, and application to interpersonal interactions
- Teacher report showed
  - Greatest improvement in the area of prosocial skills
Be CALM Connections
Adaptations

- Adaptations for 9th grade
- Explicit focus on interpersonal interactions
- Embed within AVID elective to enhance fidelity
- Greater focus on building a sense of agency and belonging
- Promoting cultural relevance of the curriculum
- Integrating expertise from local mental health specialists
Self-Regulation is Foundational for Positive Youth Development
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<tr>
<td>C is for COOL</td>
<td>Managing thoughts and strong emotions in healthy ways when dealing with stress and conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A is for ATTENTIVE</td>
<td>Being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, especially when communicating.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L is for LOGICAL</td>
<td>Considering and making sense of my own and other’s perspectives and experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>M is for MATURE</td>
<td>Working out problems with others to support healthy connections.</td>
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Mindfulness is…

Pressing the Pause, on purpose and Tuning In to the present moment, with a Curious Kind attitude.

The practice of mindfulness cultivates a kind and curious awareness that we can bring to interactions with others.
How Mindfulness Can Enhance Relationships

Mindfulness → Emotion Regulation
Perspective-taking
Acceptance
Mindful Communication
and Conflict Resolution → Healthy Relationships