

What Do Children Need to Flourish?

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Why Measure What Children Need to Flourish?

- What gets measured is what gets valued
- Currently, most indicators of well-being are actually negative behaviors, such as school dropout, teen pregnancy, and crime rates
- Current measures do not accurately portray children and youth: positive as well as negative indicators are needed
- The nation, states, communities and programs want to be able to monitor their children's strengths and not just their deficits
- Rigorously validated measures of positive development help define what children need to flourish

Why Measure What Children Need to Flourish?

- Children and youth respond to recognition of their assets
- Developing assets helps to protect against risk behaviors and promotes positive outcomes
- Youth are more likely to attend programs that help them to thrive rather than just prevent a problem behavior
- Programs need to know what assets lead to positive outcomes for youth
- Programs need rigorously tested measures that will work among diverse populations and are meaningful for youth

A Framework for Developing Positive Indicators

- Well-being and Well-becoming: value experiences of youth *while* youth, versus indicators that lead to positive outcomes later in life
- Subjective as well as objective measures
- Behaviors, attitudes, and relationships
- Across areas of life: health, education, economic, emotional, spiritual, and social life
- In social contexts where youth develop: families, peer groups, schools, communities

Measures in Book:

What Do Children Need to Flourish?

- 21 conference papers focused on gaps in measurement of positive development
- Available positive measures include: involvement in afterschool activities, school achievement, religious attendance, volunteering
- We commissioned papers for new research around the country on positive measures
- Most measures were found to be reliable and valid, but used small convenience samples

Measures in Book Include...

- Positive formation of self: character, attitudes, spirituality, and identity
- Healthy habits, positive behaviors, and time use
- Positive relationships with parents and siblings
- Positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning and school environments
- Enacting positive values and behaviors in communities: civic engagement, pro-social orientation, frugality, and generosity

Measures We Tested to Get the Youth Perspective

- Life satisfaction
- Hope
- Gratitude
- Money management/frugality
- Generosity
- Spirituality and purpose
- Parent-youth relationships
- Peer relationships

Interview Approach

- Used cognitive interviews, which try to understand what the respondent is thinking about the questions
- Preliminary study; cannot be generalized
- One-on-one, face-to-face interviews with teens
- Opened each section with a general probe to capture what youth thought about the construct
- Did our concepts of positive characteristics of youth match their concepts?

Interview Approach

- Was the language understood by youth?
- What terms do youth use?
- Later interviews were informed by findings from earlier interviews
- Tested existing measures from the book and other sources, and in some cases developed or adapted measures
- Cognitive probes:
 - What did ____ mean to you?
 - Can you repeat that question to me in your own words?
 - What came to mind as you were answering that question?

Respondents' Characteristics

- Studies in book had generally used middle-class white samples, so we interviewed low-income minority students
- 15 teens from 5 DC programs were interviewed (not intended to be generalizable to larger population)
- 9 African American, 5 Latino, and one mixed race
- 9 girls and 6 boys

Respondents' Characteristics

- Ages 12-18
- All in school with average grades
- From diverse family backgrounds
- Programs provided academic help, afterschool activities, advocacy, mentoring, college prep, and job skills training in low-income neighborhoods

Teens' Views on Thriving

- When you think about kids your age, what are some characteristics that kids have that help them to do well or thrive in life?
- How can you tell if a young person is thriving or doing well?
- What characteristics will help people your age do well as adults?

Teens' Views on Thriving

- Relationships: stable and supportive relationships with parents, friends, siblings, teachers, counselors
- Behaviors: staying in school; maintaining good health through nutrition and exercise; avoiding alcohol, smoking, and sex; extracurricular activities; controlling anger; speaking English correctly, contributing financially to family
- Attitudes: religion or faith; being respectful and responsible

Life Satisfaction

- Subjective global evaluation of how well life is going is a key indicator of psychological well-being
- Research finds it is related to psychological health, and is protective against adverse events

Life Satisfaction

1. On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with how your life is going these days?

Life Satisfaction Scale

Huebner, E.S., Suldo, S.M., & Valois, R.F. University of South Carolina

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

For each item, mark (✓) one response

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My life is going well.....		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I would like to change many things about my life.....		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My life is just right.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I wish I had a different kind of life..	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I have a good life.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I have what I want in life.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My life is better than most kids.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Life Satisfaction

- Satisfaction scores ranged from 5 to 10
- Youth talk about satisfaction in terms of relationships, family, the challenges of staying in school, doing well in school, making future plans, and staying off the streets.
- What we learned:
 - Relationships are very important to youths' satisfaction
 - Youth are mostly satisfied with their lives, but they do face some challenges
 - Item on different kind of life needs clarification

Life Satisfaction

- “Everything is going great for me. But you know, sometimes you always have like these points where a lot of stuff goes on in your life and you don’t know what to do. And so I said a nine. Like for me, like college choices, jobs, stuff like that.”

Hope

- Overall perception that one's goals can be met, through pathways and motivation
- Higher hope scores relate to lower depression and loneliness, higher self perception and control, and predict to better cognitive skills

Hope

The Children's Hope Scale

Snyder, C.R. University of Kansas

Please tell me whether each of the following statements is true for you none of the time, some of the time, half of the time, most of the time, or all of the time.

For each item, mark (✓) one response

	None of the time	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. I think I am doing pretty well.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Hope

- Youth say they use problem-solving, encouragement from others, and self-discipline to get what they need and want in life
- What we learned:
 - Respondents understood finding ways and motivation to meet goals, but did not call it “hope”
 - Suggests a change to title of measure, and need to develop new measure of hope

Hope/Goal attainment

- “I really don’t like doing all that type of school work, but...I always think about what happens if I don’t. So with school, if you don’t do your work in class, then you end up going to summer school. And I don’t want to be in school in the summertime.”

Gratitude

- Being thankful or appreciative, sense of goodwill, wanting to return kindness
- Not a lot of research on teens
- In general, research finds that gratitude shapes identity; predicts subjective well-being, positive emotions and actions; links to spirituality

Gratitude

Gratitude Questionnaire–6

McCullough, M.E., Emmons, R.A., Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (82)1, 112-127.

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

For each item, mark (√) one response

	None of the time	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. I have a lot to be thankful for.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. When I look at the world, I see much to be grateful for.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am grateful to many different people.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I often feel grateful.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Kids my age have very little to be thankful for..	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Gratitude

- Younger teens were more likely to talk about manners (e.g., saying “thank you”) while older teens talked about an outlook on life
- What we learned:
 - Overall, teens said gratitude is important to having a good life
 - Minor word changes are needed to be clearer

Gratitude

- “You should be grateful that you’re breathing, you’re living, and that you’re exploring, learning, and growing....I think it’s more important to just be humble and be grateful for everything, not just material things. Be grateful that it’s raining, that it’s snowing, that someone is smiling at you, just be grateful for the little things as well as the bigger things.”

Money Management/Frugality

- Economic behaviors and attitudes are formed in adolescence, and money management and saving are keys to achieving life goals
- Lower levels of frugality relate to lower self-esteem, more smoking and fighting with others, and less environmental conservation

Money Management/Frugality

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 2. Have your parents ever... | YES | NO |
| a. Taught you how to save money? | 1 | 2 |
| b. Encouraged you to save money? | 1 | 2 |
| c. Taught you how to budget? | 1 | 2 |
| d. Talked with you about setting financial goals? | 1 | 2 |
| e. Talked with you about investments? | 1 | 2 |
| f. Talk with you about paying for college? | 1 | 2 |
-
- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 3. Do you have..... | YES | NO |
| a. A savings account | 1 | 2 |
| b. A checking account | 1 | 2 |
| c. U.S. savings bonds | 1 | 2 |
| d. A credit card in your name | 1 | 2 |
| e. Investment account(s), such as stocks | 1 | 2 |
4. If you were given \$5,000 to save for your education or some other long-term savings goal, where would you put the money?
5. If you were simply given \$5,000, would you:
Save it,
Spend it, or
Give it to charity?
Some combination [DON'T READ]
6. In general, how well do you think you understand financial matters like savings, investing, credit, budgeting, and so forth? Would you say you understand financial matters:
Very well, Somewhat well, Not too well, or Not well at all?

Money Management/Frugality

Frugality Scale (modified)

Kasser, T. Knox College

Please tell me whether each of the following statements is true for you none of the time, some of the time, half of the time, most of the time, or all of the time.

For each item, mark (✓) one response

	None of the time	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. I'm careful how I spend my money.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I control myself to make sure that I get the most from my money.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I'm willing to wait until I've saved enough money before I buy something....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I here are things I hold off on buying today so I can save money for tomorrow..	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. If I see something, I just ask for the money so that I can buy it right away.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Money Management/Frugality

- Respondents think that responsible use and knowledge of money are important for youth, especially older youth
- Most teens say they understand finances somewhat well. Others said not too well or not well at all.
- Finances are a salient issue for disadvantaged teens: Some teens mentioned avoiding having to get money from the streets
- What we learned:
 - Disadvantaged teens regard contributing to their families to be an indicator of thriving
 - Teens were engaging in fiscally responsible behavior and understood this concept well

Money Management/Frugality

- “Sometimes when [my mom’s] short on money, when she needs to pay for something, she’ll ask me, „Do you have such and such money” and I’ll go, „Yes, it’s in my drawer, I’ll go get it.””

Generosity

- Willing to give things, money, or time to others; indicates caring about others
- Relates to less materialism, giving to charity, environmental conservation, happiness and higher self-esteem, fewer risky behaviors (smoking, alcohol, fighting, trouble in school)

Generosity

Generosity Scale

Kasser, T. Knox College

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

For each item, mark (✓) one response

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I enjoy sharing my things with friends.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I enjoy donating my time, money, or things to charity.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. So long as the job I will have helps people, it doesn't matter how much it pays.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. It is really important to me that I work to make the world a better place.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Generosity

- Youth enjoy being generous with friends and family, but recognize their own needs are important
- What we learned:
 - Revise this item: “So long as the job I will have helps people, it doesn’t matter how much it pays.” Teens found this confusing, and it may not be realistic for youth from low-income homes to endorse.

Generosity

- “It’s like, even though I would help the other people, if I had a family or my own wife, kids, it would also be a biggie for me to have enough money to get them stuff so, like, we wouldn’t be poor also.”

Spirituality and Purpose

- In a new survey –NSYR– 51% of youth report that religion is extremely or very important in their lives, and 84% believe in God.
- Spirituality and religiosity protect against risk behaviors: substance use, violence, sexual activity, school problems, gambling; and promote positive outcomes: school success, helping others, good health, valuing diversity, leadership, overcoming adversity, impulse control
- Purpose may be related to positive identity, self-esteem, goal orientation, spirituality

Spirituality and Purpose

From the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

1. How important is religion in shaping how you live your daily life?
Is it: Extremely important; Very important; Somewhat important; Not very important; or Not important at all?
2. How important is religion in shaping your major life decisions?
Is it: Extremely important; Very important; Somewhat important; Not very important; or Not important at all?
3. Do you believe in God, or are you not sure?
4. Overall, how distant or close do you feel to God? Would you say extremely distant, very distant, somewhat distant, somewhat close, very close, or extremely close?

Spirituality and Purpose

5. Some teenagers say that they “are spiritual but not religious.” How true or not true would you say that is of you? Is it: Very true; Somewhat true; or Not true at all?

6. Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. There is purpose to my life...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. In the big picture, my life matters.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Spirituality and Purpose

- Most teens reported that religion is important to their daily lives and major decisions.
- Almost all respondents agreed that they believe in God, many felt close to God, and believe that there is purpose to their lives.
- What we learned:
 - Youth were not necessarily familiar with the term “spirituality”. For some, it was too abstract and some thought it was related to dead spirits.
 - Respondents were mostly religious, even many of those that did not regularly attend services
 - “In the big picture” did not work for non-native English speakers

Spirituality and Purpose

- “I know I wasn’t put on this earth for nothing, I know that God put me here for a special reason, I just don’t know what the reason is yet, but I know I will find out soon.”

Parent-Youth Relationships

- 70% of 12-14 year olds report a positive relationship with their parents (NLSY)
- Most important relationship for youth
- Related to less delinquency, sexual activity, suspension, and better grades

Parent-Youth Relationships

Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale used in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997.

Moore, K., Gunnoe, M.

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about your (MOTHER/FATHER).

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I think highly of him/her.				
2.	He/She is a person I want to be like.				
3.	I really enjoy spending time with him/her.				

Parent-Youth Relationships

How often does your (MOTHER/FATHER)...		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1.	praise you for doing well?					
2.	criticize you for your ideas?					
3.	make plans with you and cancel for no good reason?					

Parent-Youth Relationships

- Some respondents had very low ratings for non-resident parents.
- Respondents' relationships with their parents are diverse, and family types are diverse
- What we learned:
 - Items should be sensitive to different family types and parent-adolescent relationships

Parent-Youth Relationships

- “I can talk to [my stepfather] about anything, whatever subject. But, I don’t really, I mean, I don’t like to. Not because I don’t feel comfortable with it, it’s just I don’t feel that it’s his responsibility. I would think that it’s more of my mother’s responsibility to talk to me about anything that I needed to talk about, you know?”

Peer Relationships

- Peer relations are extremely important to youth, and positive peer relationships can influence youth positively and give them needed emotional support
- Youth with friends whom they can trust and who care about them are more likely to feel supported, emotionally resilient, and less likely to feel depressed and troubled

Peer Relationships

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. I have a friend who I can completely trust to keep my secrets.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. I have friends who will give me good advice.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I have someone who I can call my best friend.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. I have a friend I can talk to when I need to.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. I have a friend that cares about me.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all happy” and 10 is “extremely happy”, how happy are you with the friendships you have?

On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all satisfied” and 10 is “extremely satisfied”, how satisfied are you with the emotional support your get from your friends?

Peer Relationships

- Several respondents differentiated between “cool” friends and friends who encourage them to do the right thing.
- Teens seek friends who are honest, loyal, genuine, trustworthy, nice, and supportive
- What we learned:
 - Initial responses were positive, but probing revealed peer relationship problems for some teens
 - Item in which youth rated emotional support worked better than happiness with friends

Peer Relationships

- “Friends are really hard to trust, I mean if you really know the person, you can tell that person. Otherwise, you shouldn’t tell nobody no secrets.”

Concluding Remarks

- Youth and researchers mainly agree on what youth need to flourish
- Youth suggested additional areas of thriving related to positive formation of the self: positive identity, role models, emotional well-being, speaking English correctly
- Youth suggested qualities of thriving relationships: helping their families, acting respectfully, controlling anger, and sibling relationships
- Youth are doing and valuing positive things in their lives

Concluding Remarks

- Younger teens had difficulty with abstract concepts like spirituality and purpose
- Some had difficulty with large words, like motivation
- Some measures need to be simplified, clarified, and retested among diverse samples, such as hope, gratitude, and peer relationships
- Some measures worked well among disadvantaged teens: parent-youth relationships, life satisfaction, and money management
- New measures need to be developed to address areas identified by teens, such as making financial contributions to their family

Future Plans

- Expand cognitive interviews to include more diverse samples of youth and more measures
- A pilot survey with positive and negative indicators to present a picture on how youth are flourishing
- Item bank of positive measures on the web that could be used by programs and other survey researchers
- Develop a theoretical framework that incorporates findings from positive indicator research to date and which can generate further indicator development
- Develop measures for additional areas of flourishing identified by youth

Web sites

- <http://www.childtrends.org/positiveindicators>
- <http://www.childtrendsdatatabank.org>
- Book: *What Do Children Need to Flourish?*
 - <http://www.springeronline.com>