



AGES 11–23

Supporting staff to:

CHALLENGE GROWTH

Challenge Growth is a young person's experience with an adult who encourages them to take risks and perform beyond their own expectations.

Challenging growth involves four actions: 1) Staff expect young people to do their best and to live up to their potential; 2) They stretch and encourage young people to go further than they imagine; 3) Staff support young people to reflect on failures and to learn from mistakes; and, 4) They hold young people accountable by supporting them to take responsibility for their actions.

WHAT

DOES CHALLENGING GROWTH LOOK LIKE AS A PART OF OUR PROGRAM?

Challenging a young person’s growth requires that adults: 1) Expect them to do their best and to live up to their potential; 2) Encourage them to go further than they imagine; 3) Support them to reflect on failures and to learn from mistakes; 4) Hold them accountable by supporting them to take responsibility for their actions (Search Institute 2018).

Challenging a young person’s growth promotes SEL development across age, race, and gender identity. It works especially well in combination with efforts to engage authentically and expend young people’s interests.

RESEARCH-BASED EXPERIENCES

- * **[ONE]**

Express often to young people that you expect them to try hard and do their best.
 Be sure to verbally acknowledge young people when they’re working hard. Give them a “shout out” for their effort, and provide detailed feedback to help them improve their work.
- * **[TWO]**

Frequently remind young people that you believe in them and their ability to succeed.
 Relate to young people as capable and competent. Let them know you recognize that they have something to offer and are capable of accomplishing their goals.
- * **[THREE]**

Encourage young people to work through difficult problems. Let them know that they can always ask for help when they get stuck. Be there to suggest new strategies and approaches along the way.
- * **[FOUR]**

Support young people to reflect on their progress toward goals. Take time to step back and reflect on individual and/or group progress. Highlight “bright spots” (things that are going really well), encourage young people to explore challenges, and examine new strategies to help them address these roadblocks.

WHY IS CHALLENGING GROWTH IMPORTANT?

Challenging growth can influence many parts of a young person’s life and development. It promotes resilience (Zhang, Y., et al., 2011), strengthens their ability to stay focused on achieving their long-term goals (Steele, C.M. 2011), enhances their academic performance (Bowen, G., et al., 2012), increases civic participation (Mesurado, B., et al., 2014), enhances athletic and sports achievement (Bremer, K., 2012), improves nutrition and healthy habits (Gable, S., & Lutz, S., 2012), and reduces alcohol or tobacco use (Nash, S. G., et al., 2005).

Social and cultural psychologies portray development as a participatory and relational activity that occurs when young people creatively imitate others who are more advanced and when they are seen as who they are becoming (Sabo Flores, K., 2012; Vygotsky, L. 1978). In other words, young people develop when they are challenged and stretched. This is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD), emphasizing that human beings are not merely who we are at any given moment, but simultaneously who we are and who we are becoming through our interactions with others and the environment.

DISCOVERIES FROM HELLO INSIGHT

Young people are dynamic and full of promise, with many different pathways to success. Every year Hello Insight mines our growing dataset of more than 125,000 young people, participating in more than 1,500 programs nation-wide, so that we can continue to learn what works for each and every young person.

- * Challenging a young person’s growth is a highly predictive experience of the development of SEL across age, gender, and ethnicity. It is especially important for young people ages 16 and older. Challenge Growth works best when combined with authentic engagement and promoting peer bonds. Together, these experiences amplify SEL growth.

HOW

HAVE OTHER PROGRAMS INCORPORATED CHALLENGING GROWTH?

PYD, including challenging growth, is not a curriculum, it is a way of working with young people that has been proven to promote SEL. You can incorporate challenging growth in a wide variety of interventions and programs. Here is how some Hello Insight members have integrated this practice into their programs.

PROGRAM EXAMPLES

At EVC’s Documentary Workshop, program staff relate to young people as professionals film makers and their work is taken very seriously.



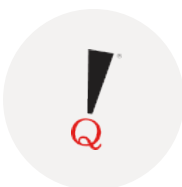
They are provided business cards bearing the title of “Youth Producer.” A staff member explains: *“Once they enter the space, they are no longer students; they are producers.”* EVC works hard to create a professional atmosphere, creating a space that looks and feels like a professional media production company.

Food for Thought engages young people in real life experiences related to farming and sustainable business practices.



Adult facilitators are trained to support and encourage young people to reflect on their experiences throughout the day. Once young people have identified and understood their experiences, they are asked to think about what they might do better next time, planning and brainstorming strategies for success.

At Queens Community House’s Access for Young Women program, the girls are expected to build and hone their skills with the final goal of teaching community workshops.



The staff relate to the girls as active leaders and have high expectations that they will succeed. One program director observes: *“The girls are aware that everyone is pulling for them.”*

HOW CAN OUR PROGRAM BEST SUPPORT STAFF TO CHALLENGE GROWTH?

Use this reflection guide with your staff to explore “bright spots” – practices that you already do, highlight potential “accelerators” – practices that you could easily incorporate into your work, and “challenges” – things that might make this practice difficult.

PRACTICES Ways to support young people	BRIGHT SPOTS Examples of what the program already does	ACCELERATORS Ways you could easily incorporate this practice	CHALLENGES What might make this practices difficult to do
Express to young people often that you expect them to try hard and do their best.			
Express to young people often that you believe in them and their ability to succeed.			
Encourage young people to work through difficult problems.			
Support young people to work toward goals and encourage them to reflect on progress along the way.			



This guide is part of a set meant to help youth-serving programs incorporate PYD. Visit www.ins.gt/pyd-exp to learn more.

■ View a full list of citations at www.ins.gt/citations



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