

## Areas Critical to Positive Youth Development

1. **Sense of Industry and Competence** – The experience of children in child welfare generally focuses on the problems of young people. It is important for youth to have a realistic sense of their skills and abilities. They need to have opportunities to learn from their mistakes and reflect on those experiences. We need to “flip the script” and ask “What is right with you?” It is important not to make assumptions about youth’s skill development. Youth in foster care have experienced many different placements and may have gaps in their skill ability. We must create practice opportunities for youth to succeed.
2. **Sense of Control over One’s Fate in Life** – Youth in foster care rarely feel in control of their fate. Youth should be actively involved in their case plans and not passive bystanders. Youth should participate in activities that ask for their input for improving the foster care system (e.g., via youth councils, youth advisory boards, being integrated into agency practice, etc.) Helping youth gain control over their future will further empower them.
3. **Connectedness to Others** – Youth involved in child welfare have a basic mistrust of adults. They have been disappointed by parental figures that have not provided protection and support. They transfer these feelings and experiences to all adults. Developing relationships over time that provide consistency, continuity, and sameness will help dissolve barriers. It is important to develop a pattern of relating to youth; visiting at the same time, calling regularly to check in, returning phone calls, remembering birthdays, etc.
4. **Sense of Identity** – Youth may re-experience the stresses of earlier loss as they age developmentally. It is important to create a safe environment for young people to “make peace with their past” and understand their history. One way is to create life books, loss history charts, eco-grams and genograms. It is important to work with the birth family to help youth create connections to their past and develop future plans.