

POINT SOURCE YOUTH ON
BEHALF OF OCFS PRESENTS:

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Jonathan Castro, MSW, Director of *Jericho Project's Walton House*

Janikqua Cutno, LMSW, *CHRIS 180*, Program Manager of *Cure Violence and Behavioral Health Initiatives*

Sarah Bess Lee Hudson, MSW, Youth Engagement Administrator, *Multi-Agency Alliance for Children, Inc. (MAAC)*

Family strengthening is an intervention used to help bridge support between a youth and their familiar support systems such as mediation, family and individual counseling to resolve disputes between youth and their families, extended family members, including chosen family, who may be able to provide care support and accommodation. Family strengthening repairs family relational bonds that continue to exist even when youth are no longer in the home. This training helps providers build a toolbox for communities to use family strengthening techniques to support youth and families to thrive.



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Family strengthening is about centering youth clients, identifying what they want and need from their family systems, and doing your best as a provider to leverage positive relationships in their lives.
2. When supporting young adults through difficult and emotional journeys ensure that your processes enable them to lead their own experiences and decide their goals and outcomes.
3. Utilize an affirming, trauma-informed framework when working with youth and their families. Having an understanding of the outcomes of generational trauma helps us identify underlying explanations for behavioral and/or emotional issues.

For example: A case manager investigating a report of medical neglect of a youth by utilizing a trauma-informed lens might focus on understanding what may have occurred to prevent the parent/guardian from taking the youth to the doctors instead of blaming the guardian for not taking them. By asking what happened, we can ensure our services are person-centered and grounded in empathy. In this scenario, a trauma-informed framework can create opportunities to connect clients with services like transportation, food or help with time management depending on what the needs are to ensure that the young person is able to go to a doctor the next time.



Q & A

What is family strengthening for youth clients?

When we serve young people we serve them in their entirety, including their family systems, and all the various supports they have in their lives. It's important to identify what youth clients both want and need to determine how to use engagement and support systems to offer resources that help the family reconnect, heal and/or create healthy pathways forward. Our role as providers is not to determine and define family supports for youth or project our own ideas of what family is onto the people we're seeking to support. Our role is to support families based on who the youth client has identified. Family is anyone who makes our youth clients feel supported, and can include friendships, partnerships, and/or blood-related family. Tools like a genogram can be used to help determine who the youth client considers family, and support mapping connections. The work of the provider is to center the young person, what they want and need from their family systems and do their best leveraging positive relationships and supports in their clients' lives. Helpful questions providers should ask as part of this intervention are:

- Who has the young person identified as part of their family system?
- What role should we as providers play to help reconnect or maintain these connections — especially when the family is not willing or able to provide housing to the youth?
- How are we affirming young people to lead the way in family and kinship strengthening?
- How are we ensuring their safety, buy-in, and feelings of empowerment as the experts of their own needs?

When serving youth clients, an authentic integration and centering of the youth's assets, experiences, and wisdom of young adults and families should be brought to the table every day. Supporting and strengthening authentic youth engagement in aspects of service delivery should always include this motto, "nothing about us without us." Those whose lives are impacted should be leading this work with us, always.

How do you work with youth who identify a gang as their family?

We should all aim to recognize that gangs are groups and organizations. If it's a space youth clients feel protected and cared for then it's a family support and we have to understand and respect that. The role of the provider is to find the strengths of what it is that the gang/group/organization has provided to the young person and what made them feel



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safe, then the work is determining how to replicate it in more positive relationships. That's our job. We can't remove something without replacing it with something equal. The work here is locating wrap-around services and positive relationships to support youth.

What are ways we can support youth under 18?

When working with youth who are living at home or transitioning out of care to return to families it's important to still connect them with available supports they need and want. Even in these situations our hands are not tied. Familiarize yourself with readily accessible community programs that offer wrap-around supportive services in the homes of youth and children. Community organizations and mentorship programs like Big Brothers, Big Sisters also work to create opportunities for young people to develop more positive, supportive relationships. These resources all exist in addition to creative and innovative ways to engage families such as via therapy supports (family or individual), psycho-educational groups, and educational resources. Young people value authenticity and consistency, so those should be your guide when working with youth under or over the age of 18.



Actions to Take Now

1. Check your privilege and bias when working with youth and families and learn to support from a **trauma-informed lens**, particularly with BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. Remember that our own privilege and how we use it can lend itself to the matrix of oppression.
2. It's important for providers to remember that they are not the only support or relationship in a young person's life. Every young person seeking services arrives with their own support systems, whether biological or chosen. The responsibility of providers is to ask and encourage young folks to share who they do include in their circles of care (friends, partners, mentors, teachers), and **leverage positive relationships** to make sure that needs are being met for the client.
3. **Always** aim to support, affirm, and allow youth create a narrative of what they want for themselves.
4. Familiarize yourself with the various **resources** that help young people strengthen their relationships with family and supports. Tools like genograms, psychosocials, intake documents, community resources and intentional dialogue help us paint a better picture together with our youth clients.
5. In family strengthening work, services are not provided with a single focus on the youth. Family strengthening services operate with a broader scope to include **family needs**.



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RESOURCES



List of resources (with links sourced online) mentioned during webinar

- [CCCP: Promotive and Protective Factors](#)
- [CSSP: Strengthen Family Curriculum](#)
- [Anu Family Services Well-Being Indicator: Well-being Indicator Tool for Youth | Anu Family Services](#)
- [Family Partnership Skill Tools](#)
- [Solution-Based Casework: Solution Based Casework - Child Welfare Practice Model](#)
- [Sanctuary Institute: Thinking Globally About Kids](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [Human Rights Center](#)
- [Lambda Legal Youth Resources](#)
- [PFLAG](#)
- [The Annie Casey Foundation: Discovering SELF](#)
- [Frontiers in Psychology: Adolescent Brain Research: Brain Development](#)
- [It's Pronounced Metrosexual](#)
- [Green Chimneys](#)
- [Community Mediation Services](#)

Access the full 60-minute training [here](#).

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