THE 6 C'S OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:
DEVELOPING COMPETENCE IN YOUTH

After school, Jasmine has been working as a cashier in her local grocery store and she's one of the best employees. Despite the age gap, she gets along great with her co-workers and superiors. Angie, the manager, wants Jasmine to apply for the assistant manager position. Jasmine has considered applying but feels that she doesn't have what it takes because she's just a teenager. Angie doesn't know how to convince Jasmine that she's fully competent for the role and fears someone else will get the job.

If you identify with Angie, this publication is for you! **It's the first of six from the Positive Youth Development (PYD)** Series and focuses on building youth **COMPETENCE**.

Mississippi 4-H is a youth organization made up of Extension Agents, volunteers, and caring adults who utilize the 6 C's of Positive Youth Development to help young people develop the competencies for life-long success. While this publication is intended for adults working with young people in the 4-H youth development program, it applies to adults who work with youth across a variety of programs.

The idea that young people can achieve success through experiencing supportive and nurturing environments and community involvement is called a Positive Youth Development approach. It emphasizes positive life experiences that promote youth's success through the 6 C's: **1) COMPETENCE**, **2) CONFIDENCE**, **3) CHARACTER**, **4) CONNECTION**, **5) CARING**, and **6) CONTRIBUTION**.
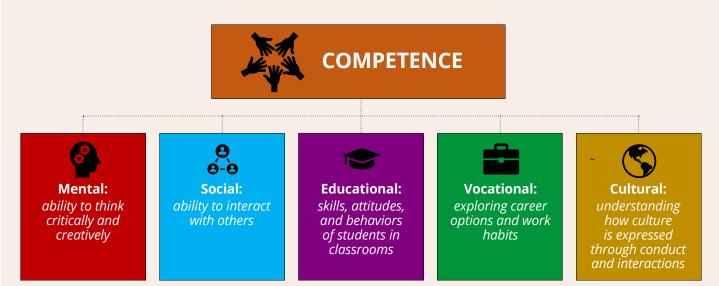
A fundamental part of PYD is to have youth recognize their potential and positive qualities. Once these qualities are identified, young people can develop them further by contributing to their communities. Effective PYD programs reinforce strengths while helping develop the **FIRST C**, **COMPETENCE**, in many areas.

Before diving deeper, it's important to define two main things:

- PYD youth – a youth that engages in a PYD program whose potential is prioritized over their issues and develops the positive qualities that they already possess. When appropriate, youth can actively participate in the planning and implementation of the program.

- PYD adults – an adult who is willing to commit to the PYD framework. This includes: paying attention to youth; acting consistently; encouraging youth to develop; implement and evaluate programming; offering different forms of praise and recognition; providing opportunities for youth to demonstrate what they have learned; encouraging youth to volunteer in their communities; and providing a supportive, safe space where youth can work through their issues and take on challenges.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMPETENCIES *- Let's explore them!*

COMPETENCE

Mental:	**Social:**	**Educational:**	**Vocational:**	**Cultural:**
ability to think critically and creatively	*ability to interact with others*	*skills, attitudes, and behaviors of students in classrooms*	*exploring career options and work habits*	*understanding how culture is expressed through conduct and interactions*

■ **Mental competence** grows as critical and creative thinking develops. PYD program adults can design activities that encourage youth to analyze and evaluate information. These should also allow youth to use their imagination and creativity to come up with innovative ideas and solutions to community issues.

■ **Social competence** involves conflict, emotion, and behavior management. PYD program adults can comfort youth through tough situations and feelings by being present in their time of need. A hug or a conversation can go a long way.

■ **Educational competence** isn't limited to grades, test scores, and class attendance. It also includes motivation, engagement, study habits, and interpersonal skills. PYD program adults can coordinate tutoring and group study sessions to help young people excel in school.

■ **Vocational competence** relies on knowing the industry of interest, gaining experience in it, and then having the capacity to perform successfully in the workplace. PYD program adults can coordinate workshops and job fairs to prepare youth for the workplace.

■ **Cultural competence** requires reflection and engagement over time to challenge personal beliefs, behaviors, and assumptions. PYD program adults should represent the culture, not just know about it.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS PROMOTE COMPETENCE

Competence is associated with measured knowledge, and it enhances a young person's ability to develop into productive and active members of their community. It's the feeling that they're making a difference, that their actions matter, and that they can accomplish their goals. Mentoring relationships are the base for competence development because a young person's sense of self can develop as they interact with PYD adults. To achieve this, PYD adults should offer these main things:

Physical and psychological safety: *provide a nonjudgmental and secure space that allows youth to express themselves freely*	**Stable structure:** *have clear rules, objectives, and expectations for youth*	**Supportive relationships:** *practice effective communication and care for youth*	**Social engagement:** *provide meaningful strategies for youth to interact with staff and peers*	**Opportunities for building skills:** *offer tactics and activities that challenge youth to overcome obstacles*

If you would like to know what youth have gained through participation in a program, you can use the Positive Youth Development Instrument to find out. It's a series of questions that you can ask before the program starts and again after it ends to evaluate what participants learned. You can use the following table as a guide.

COMPETENCE EVALUATION FOR PYD PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am a good student.					
I take part in activities at my school.					
I like to learn about new things.					
I am a creative person.					
I make good decisions.					
I make friends easily.					
I feel comfortable in social situations.					
I can handle problems that come up in my life.					
I can manage my emotions.					
I can handle being disappointed.					
I am aware of other people's needs in social situations.					
I have goals for my life.					
I know what I want to do for a career.					
I am interested in learning about careers I could have.					

Adapted from Arnold et al., (2012)

SUMMARY

Building competence is essential for effective PYD programs and the programs should offer youth:

- physical and psychological safety,
- stable structure,
- supportive relationships,
- social engagement,
- and opportunities for building skills

By encouraging competence in multiple areas (mental, social, educational, vocational, and cultural), PYD programs can foster youths' awareness and understanding of themselves and their community.

*To help Jasmine decide, Angie should encourage Jasmine to trust her abilities, and recognize her strengths. She can do this by giving Jasmine a preview of the assistant manager position. Perhaps, by assuming the role for a day, Angie can give Jasmine the **CONFIDENCE** boost that she needs, which is the **2nd C of PYD**.*

COMPETENCE is the **1st C of PYD** and in the next publication, Angie will work with the **2nd C of PYD**, **CONFIDENCE**.

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