



## THE 6 C'S OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: CHARACTER FOR THE TEAM WIN

**A**s the new assistant manager, Jasmine was supervising the cashiers when she noticed one of them was pocketing money from the cash register. She asked her to put the money back but the cashier denied taking it.

*"I can either file a report or have you fired. Either way, you have to return the money," Jasmine said.*

*The cashier laughed and said, "No teenager is firing me!"*

*"Watch me," Jasmine said as she called Angie.*

*Afterward, Angie told Jasmine, "I'm proud of you for doing the right thing. That shows you've got character".*

If you identify with Angie, this publication is for you! **This is the third installment from the Positive Youth Development (PYD) Series** and we will highlight **character**.



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.



Figure 1. Web Chart.

### MAKING YOUTH A PART OF THE GAME

The goal of PYD programs is to help develop young people into active community members, but achieving that is not as easy as it seems. Teaching youth how to build character is a major responsibility because character-building takes place socially within a community. You can achieve this through **youth social action (YSA)**, which makes them feel they're an essential part of the community. Some ways to do this include:

- Integrating young people in community decision-making processes;
- Asking for their opinion, help, and ideas to solve issues; and
- Actively involving youth in community events.

**YSA** means having youth be an active part of the game, instead of watching from the sidelines. This applies to 4-H

clubs, school, church, and sports settings. Character development occurs over time through social learning, by reacting to new stimuli and adapting to different environments. Youth can bring solutions to the table, but they need a seat at it first. You need to trust them with serious issues so they can take themselves seriously. This benefits them on an individual level, and the entire community as well.

One of the goals of PYD programs is to build favorable qualities in youth to help them succeed in life. One of these qualities is **character**, which refers to virtues and strengths. These virtues/strengths reflect an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. Recognizing them is a great way to start building character.



## STRENGTHS AND VIRTUES

Character reflects an individual's intrinsically held beliefs, the favorable qualities on which they should focus. Virtues are intrinsic to youth, but as they go through life experiences, some may fade and negative ones replace them. Despite this, youth aspire to live happy, fulfilling, and successful lives even if their current circumstances may steer them in the opposite direction. This is why PYD programs strive to:

- Prevent young people from slipping through the cracks,
- Help them stay on track, and
- Teach them how to change their mindset to lead a better life.

Character development involves moral education which is why good parenting, positive role models, and supportive communities are so essential.

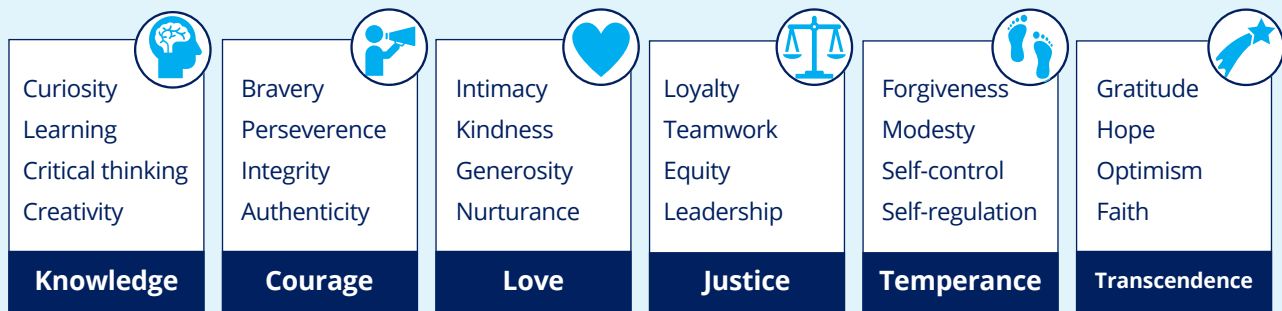


Figure 2. The Six Character Strengths and their Virtues (Adapted from Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

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.

## CHARACTER 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
It's important for me to do the right thing.					
I try to do the right thing, even when I know that no one will know if I do.					
I think it's important for me to be a role model for others.					
It's important for me to do my best.					
It's important that others count on me.					
If I promise to do something, I can be counted on to do it.					
I am able to behave appropriately in most settings.					
I'm able to stand up to peer pressure when I feel something is not right.					
I have people in my life whom I look up to and admire.					

*Adapted from Arnold et al., (2012)*

### SUMMARY

Character is a social process that needs time to develop and must be practiced. PYD programs need to expose young people to experiences and situations where they can put their character to the test as team players and leaders, not benchwarmers or spectators.

Programs such as 4-H allow youth to practice leadership skills under the guidance of a trusted volunteer or Extension Agents. Youth have the opportunity to develop their character in the local community as well as through participation in State and National events where they may come in contact with many different types of people. These are effective ways to identify their strengths and virtues of *knowledge, courage, love, justice, temperance, and transcendence*. By *incorporating young people into decision-making processes*, they will see that their opinion matters, which can significantly impact the community. *Youth social action* is key for character development and PYD programs should reflect that.

*After the incident, Angie notices that Jasmine is still tense. She wonders if it's about the incident or if something else is on her mind. More than a boss, Angie wants to be a mentor for Jasmine, someone she can rely on for guidance, and not just career-wise. She decides to make a bold move, hoping it will build a stronger **connection** with Jasmine, the **fourth C of PYD**.*

**Character** is the **3rd C of PYD**. In the next publication, Angie and Jasmine will experience **connection**.

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