Positive youth development is a comprehensive framework outlining the supports young people need in order to be successful. Youth empowerment is a subset of positive youth development and gives youth skills they need to have the confidence and power to achieve their goals.

The goal of youth empowerment is to develop the 6 Cs: confidence, character, connection, competence, contribution and caring.

Youth empowerment also focuses on youth gaining a personal sense of control and self-efficacy, developing positive skills and assets and applying those skills to become agents of positive change.

Youth empowerment theory contains three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral which can also be referred to as “feeling”, “thinking” and “doing”.

One frequent barrier to youth empowerment is adulthood or adults’ belief that youth are less capable. It is important to move towards a feeling of shared control and shared responsibility.

Key Takeaways

✅ Positive youth development is a comprehensive framework outlining the supports young people need in order to be successful. Youth empowerment is a subset of positive youth development and gives youth skills they need to have the confidence and power to achieve their goals.

✅ The goal of youth empowerment is to develop the 6 Cs: confidence, character, connection, competence, contribution and caring.

✅ Youth empowerment also focuses on youth gaining a personal sense of control and self-efficacy, developing positive skills and assets and applying those skills to become agents of positive change.

✅ Youth empowerment theory contains three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral which can also be referred to as “feeling”, “thinking” and “doing”.

✅ One frequent barrier to youth empowerment is adulthood or adults’ belief that youth are less capable. It is important to move towards a feeling of shared control and shared responsibility.

✅ Important characteristics of a youth empowerment program include:

   - Self-determination: creating group agreements and expectations together.
   - Intergenerational Partnerships: open discussions about dealing with adultism can help youth learn about how to deal with prejudices and how to maintain mutual respect in relationships.
   - Decision Power: allow youth to select the adult volunteers they want to work with, draft project plans and address challenges to reach their desired outcomes.

✅ When it comes to project planning in a way that empowers youth, it helps to encourage the development of a project proposal including: project description, project goals, project needs and project timeline to ensure the team has reached a mutual understanding.

Additional Resources

- Why Is Youth Empowerment Important? - A collection of youth empowerment recommendations developed by the Boys and Girls Club of America.

- Making the Shift from Student Engagement to Student Empowerment - A collection of videos and readings suggesting small shifts that can make a big difference in creating an environment that encourages student empowerment.

- How to Empower Students Beyond the Classroom - A discussion on ways to empower students in extracurriculars and activities outside the classroom.

Questions for Discussion

» What does youth empowerment mean to you?

» How could your school safety project incorporate the intrapersonal component? the interactional component? the behavioral component?

» What are some barriers to youth empowerment that are present in your school environment or in your community?

» How could your school safety project share control between youth and adults?