Casey Life Skills

PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

casey life skills

Acknowledgments

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the Casey Life Skills Practitioner's Guide! This guide gives Casey Life Skills (CLS) Toolkit users a quick overview of the history and purpose of the CLS assessments, how to score them, and insights to youth life skills development from experts in the field. Our hope is that this practice guide can provide practical information on how best to use the CLS assessments to empower youth to lead productive and healthy lives.

The CLS standard, short-form and supplemental assessments are free youth-centered self-reporting instruments that give youth and their supportive adults the opportunity to assess youth's strengths and areas for growth. While it originally was designed for use with youth in foster care, these tools can be useful for youth in other settings such as juvenile justice facilities, employment centers, and homeless shelters or with other social service providers. The CLS assessments are not tests but are meant to be a conversation starter to empower young people to set their own goals, identify resources that will be helpful, and work collaboratively with supportive adults to develop and strengthen their skills.

The 2021 CLS assessment tools have been developed in true partnership with foster care alumni, resource parents, service providers, educators, and child welfare experts to ensure that the content is applicable to the needs of young people and their supportive adults. There are nine categories of skills that are assessed in the standard and short form of the 2021 CLS assessment. These include daily living, self-care, housing and money management, relationships and communication, work and study, career and education planning, civic engagement, navigating the child welfare system, and looking forward. We specifically added civic engagement and navigating the child welfare system to the 2021 CLS assessment to ensure that young people are acquiring skills that help them to be actively engaged in the community and are getting the support needed to navigate the child welfare system as they graduate toward independent living. Please note that the questions about navigating child welfare system are optional, as many youth that take this assessment might not have interacted with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

The 2021 CLS toolkit contains two assessments: (a) the *standard form*, which is a 126-item assessment measuring the nine categories mentioned above, and (b) the *short form*, which is a 20-item assessment to be used for brief screenings or when youth, staff, or caregiver's time is limited. The CLS assessment is appropriate for all youth ages 14 to 21 years old regardless of living circumstances (e.g., youth is living in foster care, with biological parents, in a group home, or other places). We have also included a supplemental assessment, *Support Systems,* that assesses young people's access to formal and informal support.

We thank you for the important work you are doing to support young people as they navigate their transition to adulthood and independent living. If you have any questions about the guide, please reach out to Research Services at Casey Family Programs (**RTeam@casey.org**).

Origins of the Casey Life Skills Assessment

The first version of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA)
The Casey Life Skills (CLS) assessment has been one of the landmark tools used to assess and build young people's skills for independent living. First built in 1998, it was called the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment because it was made possible through a partnership with Dottie Ansell, a noted independent living expert. The ACLSA was piloted initially with about 200 forms completed, and it was intended to accomplish the following:

- Produce data useful for practice.
- Produce data rigorous enough for outcomes research.
- Be as free as possible from gender, ethnic, and cultural biases.
- Have sound psychometric properties.
- Be appropriate for completion by youths between the ages of 8 and 19, and by their primary caregivers.
- Be appropriate for youths regardless of their living circumstances (e.g., with birth or adoptive families, in long- or short-term foster care, in residential treatment).
- Be user-friendly.
- Emphasize skill strengths and mastery rather than skill deficiencies.
- Be affordable.[1]

An Independent Living Committee at Casey Family Programs generated initial sets of items for the ACLSA, with feedback from self-sufficiency experts. Focus groups to discuss item selection and instrument format were held with child welfare staff, caregivers, and youths. A team of consultants helped ensure that items were developmentally appropriate and sensitive to gender, culture, and ethnicity. Pilot testing was then conducted with caregivers and youths in urban and rural locations, which helped refine the field test version of the ACLSA.

The ACLSA forms required an average of 15 minutes for youths to complete, regardless of level. People with difficulties took longer, but support in completing the form was encouraged (e.g., an adult could read the questions aloud to the youth). The short form was most appropriate for youth between 11-18 years and took approximately 5 minutes to complete. The short form provided one global score and had sound psychometric properties just like the longer forms. The longer forms, however, provided the greatest amount of useful practice-based information. Usage of the ACLSA increased to 1,500 forms in 2000 – with two states officially adopting it as their life skills assessment for child welfare.

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[1] Nollan, K. A., Pecora, P. J., Downs, A. C., Wolf, M., Horn, M., Martine, L., & Lamont, E. (1997b). Assessing life skills of adolescents in out-of-home care. *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare,* 97(2*),* 113-126. Page 117.

ACLSA 3.0[2]

The ACLSA underwent further revisions to create version 3.0, which was released in the fall of 2000. The revisions were conducted to improve its measurement qualities by retaining life skills items that had improved psychometric qualities. More specifically, the ACLSA 3.0 assessment form was developed to measure important aspects of life skill and knowledge to help social workers capture a youth's strengths and individual challenges. However, the reliability and validity of the ACLSA as an assessment tool had not yet been empirically established, so a series of new studies were launched. Data for the first major ACLSA validity study were collected using the paper and pencil version of the ACLSA 2.0 level-II forms, but the actual data analyses were conducted based on version 3.0 items and structure.

Internal consistency and test-retest reliability were found to be within acceptable ranges for the three ACLSA levels and short forms. Four approaches to establishing validity were examined: content, discriminant, criterion-related, and construct. Content validity was established through the comprehensive item-development process. Positive correlations among domains and overall scores also show the content of the ACLSA to be consistent. The short form also revealed a high positive correlation to the overall ACLSA, indicating parallel content to the full ACLSA forms.

Examination of discriminant validity suggests the ACLSA is sensitive enough to portray differences in ability. In the growth and development of youth, it is expected that life skills competency increases with age. Comparison of older and younger youth scores revealed the ACLSA captures and discriminates differences in ability with age. The criterion validity studies suggest good validity for the ACLSA. Agreement between matched Daniel Memorial and ACLSA items was high – answering a Daniel Memorial instrument item correctly meant a high probability of also having a mastery rating for a similar ACLSA item. This indicated that life skill assessment provided by the ACLSA is consistent with a criterion measurement provided by a similar life skills assessment tool.

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[2] Material from this section abstracted from the following sources:

- Nollan, K. A., Downs, A.C., Pecora, P. J., Ansell, D. A., Wolf, M., Lamont, E., Horn, M., & Martine, L. (1997a). *Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Manual. Version 2.0* Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

- Nollan, K. A., Pecora, P. J., Downs, A. C., Wolf, M., Horn, M., Martine, L., & Lamont, E. (1997b). Assessing life skills of adolescents in out-of-home care. *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare,* 97(2*),* 113-126.

- Nollan, K. A., Horn, M., Downs, A. C., & Pecora, P. J. (2000). *Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) and Life Skills Guidebook Manual.* Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

- Horn, M., Nollan, K. A., Downs, A. C., Bressani, R., Williams, J. Jeffrey, M. & Pecora, P.J. (2001). *An Internet-Based Tool for Independent Living: What we know about Validity and Reliability of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment.* Seattle: Casey Family Programs.

- Nollan, K.A., Horn, M., A., Downs, A.C. & Pecora, P.J.(Eds.) (2002). *Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) And Life Skills Guidebook Manual.* Seattle: Casey Family Programs.

Finally, construct validity was evaluated using structural equation modeling. A model was tested that operationalized the relationships among measured variables and latent constructs. Support was found for the internal consistency of the measurement tools, that is, fit index showed the measurement model was supported by the observed data. A conceptual model of relationships between Life Skills, Self-Efficacy, and Coping Competence was operationalized. Confirmation of positive relationships among the constructs provided support for the hypothesis that the ACLSA domains assess life skills, as evidenced by predictable relationships to similar, interconnected constructs. Confirmation of the model supports the validity of the ACLSA as a measure of life skills.

Use of the ACLSA grew in 2001 with adoption by 11 states (10,000 forms completed); usage increased to 23 states in 2002 (with 35,000 forms completed in that year). Adoption of the ACLSA steadily climbed, with about 26 states adopting the form in 2003, (70,000 forms completed.) We found the observations from one of the lead developers of the ACLSA to be as relevant today as they were in 2001:

"The parent-youth reporting balance issue is a practice, not an assessment or research issue, in my opinion. The ACLSA is a practice tool and as such helps social workers lead conversations with youths on practice and service goals for the upcoming months. When both a parent and a youth take the ACLSA, they have an opportunity to explore the differences in the ways they perceive the youth's skills and behaviors. I've had many reports from social workers *and* parents that these conversations help get kids and adults on the same page.

"The ACLSA is built on the notion that the true expert on a youth's life skills is the youth. Many, many other instruments are built on the incorrect notion that the "expert" is a foster parent, social worker, psychologist, or someone else. My team and I have always argued that that is wrong. The ACLSA uses the youth's report as a measure of how they see themselves. Frankly, if youths 'do not give an accurate baseline' of their skills and behaviors, won't that become evident when they review their answers with their parent, their social worker, or both?

"The 'truth' of the youth's reports is also enhanced by the new performance items for ACLSA Levels II, III, and IV. We heard from youths and parents that simply knowing that their actual knowledge in the ACLSA domains will be tested enhances their willingness to be absolutely truthful in their self-reports of skills and behaviors.

"There are a growing number of agencies and end-users who are using the ACLSA for short-term and adjudicated youths. In many of these instances, the ACLSA short form is the most useful. But in one case of a prominent juvenile court judge, she will be administering the ACLSA long-forms to every youth ages 8-18 who comes through her court. And while there will be no parent to give a second ACLSA in most of those cases, the youth's self-reports will still be useful as this judge works with them to shape life skills goals over the subsequent 1-, 3-, and 6-month periods."

Source: Personal communication, A. Chris Downs, October 31, 2001.

Casey Life Skills
In 2011, the ACLSA was updated to its most recent form as the Casey Life Skills (CLS) assessment. The CLS has helped youth and their caregivers and staff think about the following major types of skills:

- Maintaining healthy relationships
- Work and study habits
- Using public transportation
- Cooking and cleaning
- Budgeting and paying bills
- Computers and the internet

Up until November 2021, the standard CLS assessment form had 113 items. There also was an 18-item short version, but that tool was not widely circulated in recent years. Five special versions of the CLS were featured on the CLS website and the current project team is looking closely at each of them to see which tools should be refreshed:

1. Pregnant and parenting
2. Education
3. American Indian
4. LGBTQ and Homeless
5. Younger youth

Over the years, nine other optional supplements were developed. Note that in 2004 Casey had these forms and supplements. These are also being reviewed to see which should continue to be made available:

Youth I	Caregiver I	American Indian Supplement-Youth
Youth II	Caregiver II	Pregnancy Supplement
Youth III	Caregiver III	Parenting Infants Supplement
Youth IV	Caregiver IV	Parenting Young Children Supplement
Youth Short form	Caregiver Short Form	Youth Values Supplement

The CLS website also offered the *Resources to Inspire Guide* that helps one to use the CLS results to create a learning plan that can help youth gain the skills they need. In addition, it contained a *CLS Practice Guide* to help learn more about how to administer the assessment. Both documents have been updated in this 2021 revision to the CLS assessment toolkit.

While the CLS assessment continues to be used broadly by many jurisdictions across the nation, there is a need to ensure that it closely aligns with the current values of the field, as well as Casey Family Programs' continued commitment to permanency, upstream prevention and community support. That is why the revisions process was launched.

Revision of Casey Life Skills assessments

Originally created in 1996, the CLS assessments continue to be used by millions of young people and their service providers nationally. Over the years, Casey Family Programs has reflected on the changing landscape of skills required by young people to successfully transition into adulthood. (See Appendix A for an essay about this need.) Additionally, it has also recognized the importance of addressing systemic inequities that challenge many youths that are attempting to live independent and holistic lives. This has resulted in the revision of the CLS assessments, *Resources to Inspire Guide* and *Practitioner's Guide*. To ensure that the updated CLS assessments were developed while centering Casey Family Programs' commitment to youth and parent empowerment, the CLS refresh project team consisted of foster care alumni, resource parents, service providers, education experts, and child welfare researchers. The revision of the work was informed by several theoretical perspectives: competence-centered perspective, ecological theory, positive youth development, social learning theory, and social support theory (See Appendix B). Additionally, it was also guided by the following values:

- **Use of human-centered approach**[3] throughout the re-evaluation and refreshment of the CLS assessment to ensure that all CLS project team members were provided with a space to develop empathy, collaborate in an equitable manner, and develop a product that contributes toward informing services to empower transitioning youth.

- **Ensuring shared power** by promoting an inclusive process whereby all voices were heard equitably, particularly those that are traditionally left out.

- **Bridging the research and practice gap** to make certain the assessment tools were refined while keeping in mind the realities of the field, thus increasing the CLS reach and utilization.

- **Diversity, equity, and inclusio**n concepts and principles to guide the type of questions and language used to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of the CLS toolkit.

What is new in the 2021 CLS Toolkit?

Significant changes have been made to the CLS assessments, *Resources to Inspire Guide* and *Practitioner's Guide* in collaboration with focus group participants of young people, resource parents, and service providers. They are:

- **Addition of a demographic section to the CLS Standard and Short Assessment.** The questions have been developed to recognize the diverse youth that interact with the child welfare system and ensure inclusivity in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and religion.

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[3] Human Centered Design is a problem solving approach developed by Nobel Prize laureate Herbert Simon that focuses on building deep empathy to understand the perspective of people experiencing the problem, their needs, and whether the solutions are designed in a manner that address their reality. This framework ensures the active and equitable participation of people with lived experiences throughout the solution development process.

- **Addition of two new skill areas to the CLS Assessment, (1) Civic engagement and (2) Navigating the child welfare system**. The revised CLS assessment has nine skill areas, which include daily living; self-care; relationship and communication; housing, money management and transportation; work and study; career and education planning; civic engagement; navigating the child welfare system; and looking forward. The civic engagement skills acknowledge young people as active members of the community who should be empowered to create social change. Skills for navigating the child welfare system were added to recognize the complex systems that young people must interact with as they transition to independent living. Since many youths that are taking the CLS assessment are interacting with the child welfare system, it was important to have questions that highlight the skills required to navigate that system. However, it is important to note that this section is optional and can be skipped if the youth has not had interactions with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. The 2021 CLS assessment, therefore, has 126 questions compared to 113 questions in the previous version.

- **Revamp of the CLS short assessment.** The ACLSA had an 18-item short assessment that could be used for brief screenings. To ensure that the CLS short assessment can be widely used by youth and service providers, we revised the question to align them with the nine skill categories of CLS assessments. The new CLS short assessment has 20 questions that are representative of the essential skills from the CLS standard assessment.

- **Creation of a Supplement for Support Systems.** The new CLS assessment recognizes the importance of youth to have access to formal and informal support to successfully navigate their transition to adulthood. A supplemental assessment to gather information about social support was created to help youth and service providers examine the resources required by youth to develop their life skills.

- **Skill learning worksheet and resource checklist in the *Resources to Inspire Guide*.** The updated *Resources to Inspire Guide* includes a skill learning worksheet that can be used by the youth and supportive adult to set goals and develop skills. Additionally, resource checklists corresponding to each skill area have been developed with the hope that they can be tools to help the youth think through the essential items needed to develop certain skills.

We will be working on language translations of the toolkit to ensure its accessibility to non-English speakers. We will also review the need for revisions of the five special versions and supplemental assessments in the 2011 CLS. Lastly, we will conduct tests to confirm the validity and fidelity of the new tools. The CLS refresh project team recognizes that the needs of youth are ever-changing based on the social, political, and economic environment in which we live. We are committed to keeping this tool aligned with the realities of youth and their service providers.

Description of the Casey Life Skills Assessment

2021 Casey Life Skills Assessments
The 2021 CLS Assessments are multiple-choice questionnaires that measure independent living skills in several functional areas for youth. These assessments are appropriate for all youth ages 14 to 21 years regardless of living circumstances (e.g., youth is living in foster care, with biological parents, in a group home or other places). The CLS Standard Assessment (126 items) and the short assessment (20 items) both assess nine functional areas. The standard assessment provides the greatest amount of useful practice-based information. However, the short assessment can be used for brief screenings, research purposes or when there are serious time limitations.

CLS functional areas

Life skill	Number of Items	Competencies assessed
Daily living	18	Internet safety, healthy meal planning, and home maintenance
Self-care	18	Healthy physical and emotional development such as personal hygiene, mental health, access to healthcare, and safe sex
Relationships and communication	14	Developing and sustaining healthy relationships with self and other, and cultural humility
Housing, money management and transportation	21	Banking and credit, finding safe and affordable housing, budgeting, and access to reliable transportation
Work and study	19	Basics of employment, legal issues, study skills, and time management
Career and education planning	9	Planning for career and professional development
Civic engagement	10	Engagement in the community, and social and political issues
Navigating the child welfare system	10	Permanency goals, and interaction with various child welfare and juvenile justice systems
Looking forward	7	Self-confidence and internal feelings about their current and future life

How to administer the assessment
Youth and service providers are encouraged to use the assessment as a conversation starter rather than a test. The standard assessment takes about 30-40 minutes to complete. Due to its length, youth can either complete one skill area at a time or finish the whole assessment in 30-40 minutes. The short assessment can be completed in 5-10 minutes.

How to score the Casey Life Skills Assessments

Casey Life Skills standard assessment

The CLS assessment is available in Excel and PDF format. The assessment in the Excel format can be scored automatically. We have also provided a PDF version in case you would like to print the assessment and score it by hand. The instructions provided below detail how to score the CLS standard assessments. There are nine skill and content areas of the CLS standard assessment. They are scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing the most strength. The scale is:

- Yes = 5 points
- Mostly Yes = 4 points
- Somewhat = 3 points
- Mostly No = 2 points
- No = 1 point

Individual skill area calculation

The CLS standard assessment has 126 questions divided into nine individual skill areas.

Skill area	Number of questions
Daily living	18
Self-care	18
Relationships and communication	14
Housing, money management and transportation	21
Work and study life	19
Career and education planning	9
Civic engagement	10
Navigating the child welfare system	10
Looking forward	7

Follow these steps to calculate the total score for each individual skill area:

1) Assign points to each question based on the responses by the youth. For example, if the youth has checked "Mostly yes" next to the statement, "I know how to create, save, and print documents on a computer," you will assign 4 points to the question.

2) Add all the points for each section or skill area. For example, there are 18 statements in daily living. The youth has responded to every statement, and the total score achieved after adding all the points is 54.

3) Divide the total score in the section or skill area by the total number of questions that that youth has responded to in that section. For example, if the youth responded to all 18 questions in the daily living section and achieved a total score

of 54, then divide 54 by 18 to get 3. This score is just below the midrange in knowledge, skills, and ability.

Note: If the youth does not respond to all the statements, divide the total score by the number of statements answered. For example, there are 18 statements in self-care. If the youth only answered 15 statements and their total score was 75, then their average score is 5 (75 divided by 15).

Overall score calculation

An overall average score can be calculated by adding the average scores of each skills area and dividing by 9. Below is an example of the overall average score for a youth:

Skill Area	Average Score
Daily living	3.9
Self-care	4.1
Relationships and communication	3.1
Housing, money management and transportation	2.6
Work and study life	2.9
Career and education planning	1.2
Civic engagement	3.6
Navigating the child welfare system	3.3
Looking forward	4.2
Overall average score	**3.2**

Note: If the youth has not interacted with the child welfare or juvenile justice system, the questions in "Navigating the child welfare system" do not need to be completed. To calculate the overall score without this skill area, add the average scores of each of the eight skill areas and divide by 8.

Casey Life Skills short assessment

The CLS short assessment is available in Excel and PDF format. The assessment in the Excel format can be scored automatically. We have also provided a PDF version in case you would like to print the assessment and score it by hand. The instructions provided below detail how to score the CLS short assessments. The CLS Support Systems Supplement can be scored using the same instructions. The CLS short assessment consists of 20 questions that represent the nine skills and content areas of the CLS standard assessment. They are scored on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 representing the most strength. The scale is:

- Yes = 5 points
- Mostly Yes = 4 points
- Somewhat = 3 points
- Mostly No = 2 points
- No = 1 point

Overall score calculation

To calculate the overall average score, add the total score and divide it by the total number of questions that have been answered.

How to use the CLS Assessment to develop young people's knowledge, skills, and awareness of life skills

The CLS assessments are a collaborative tool to be used by young people and supportive adults to empower youth to live independent and holistic lives. Here are some steps to guide you to develop young people's knowledge, skills and awareness of life skills. We encourage you to use the *Resources to Inspire Guide* for additional resources.

Step 1: Encourage youth to take the assessment

- First, clearly explain to the youth about the assessment and its purpose. Be enthusiastic, positive, and listen to the youth about their questions, hopes, and apprehensions about the assessment. Be aware that the youth may have already taken many assessments that were used to evaluate them negatively. Make sure that the youth knows that the CLS assessment is not a method of placing judgment on them or their value as a person. It is a step toward learning the knowledge and skills that they already have and what opportunities they further need to thrive in life.

- Consider starting with an area of life skills in which you know youth are already strong, so that they can build their confidence as they work through the CLS assessment. Let them know that you and others will work with them to use the information from the assessment to develop a plan to meet their wants and needs. Arouse their curiosity about the results. Encourage active participation — invite them to share what they hope to get out of completing the assessment. Let them know this is an opportunity for them to make decisions about their future — what they want to do tomorrow, next week, or next year.

- When possible and appropriate, give youth choices in how they take the assessment. For example, youth can work at their own pace in one skill area at a time or they can complete the entire assessment in about 30-40 minutes. Additionally, the assessments are available in Excel format or printable PDFs. Therefore, youth can either take the assessment on a computer or on a printable form. You can also use the assessment in a conversation format, where you ask the youth each question and have them elaborate on their responses.

- Engage youth's curiosity about themselves and about life skills. Before youth take the assessment, ask youth to share which life skills they feel they need. Ask youth to predict how they think they will score in each area. Compare the results with their predictions and discuss any differences.

Step 2: Review and discuss the youth assessment results

- The score for the assessment will range from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating high skill strength. After completing the assessment, practitioners can either hand score the printed form, or enter the information in the Excel format to calculate the scores. Review the scores of each skill area with the youth by discussing how they felt answering the questions and their thoughts on areas in which they scored higher and lower.

- Share a copy of the results with the youth for the conversation and let them tell you about what the results mean and how they think and feel about them. Are they surprised, pleased, disappointed, ambivalent, challenged, curious, etc.? Start with the positive. Ask the youth to start by identifying their strengths — those areas where their average scores are closer to a 5. Ask them about what helped them become strong in those areas: what were the resources, experiences, and opportunities that helped them learn and practice those skills? Then move to looking at lower average scores. Ask the youth where they felt unsure and where they think they need help. What is challenging for them right now? Ask them what resources, experiences, and opportunities would help them gain strength in those areas. Ask with whom, if anyone, they might like to work to grow in those areas. Ask if there were any surprises for them in the results and, if so, discuss why. Include questions about whether there were any areas of strengths and needs that youth felt were not addressed in the assessment.

- Remember that the best expert on a youth's knowledge and behavior is the youth themselves. There will be exceptions where young people need support in being self-reflective or in gaining self-perception because of psychological, physical, or developmental challenges. Getting to know youth to find out what kinds of additional support they need to grow in the areas of self-reflection and self-perception will be helpful.

- It will be helpful to keep in mind that the cognitive development and life experiences of youth ages 14 to17 years will be, most times, different than those of their 18- to21-year-old peers. Practitioners can prepare younger youth to expect some items in career and education planning, work skills, and housing and money management to be out of their range of knowledge and experience. Before reviewing the scores for these areas that are more relevant to those who are 18 and older, remind younger youth that they simply haven't had opportunities to gain experience in these areas yet. Use the opportunity to have them think about their future when work, housing, and money management will play a substantive role in their lives for their safety and well-being. For example, draw connections between their favorite school subjects or activities and how they can begin thinking about related professional or vocational training and education that will prepare them for careers that interest them.

- If the youth has taken the assessment before, compare results to previous assessment results. Again, start with the positive and first look for the areas of most improvement and ask what helped youth to grow in those areas. It is important to note that sometimes a youth's scores may be lower than their first assessment. They may have been overly confident in a particular skill, given answers because they thought they were the expected answers, or simply guessed. Discuss why the scores are the same or different. Ask the youth if they feel more or less confident in particular areas.

Step 3: Support youth in developing learning plan goals and activities

- Once the youth has completed the assessment or sections of the assessment, collaborate with them to develop a learning plan. It is important to let the youth drive the conversation and determine which behaviors, knowledge, or skills are most important to them and choose what learning goals they want to look at first. You are encouraged to use the *Skill Learning Worksheet* in the *Resources to Inspire Guide* to develop these goals.

- Include supportive adults in the planning process and encourage them to support the youth in the goals that they have chosen. Make sure to remind the adult to play a supportive role in the process rather than lead the planning.

- When considering which activities to include in the youth's plan, engage them in a conversation about what and how they would like to learn. Then, with the help of their service provider and additional supportive adults, let the youth identify the steps to learn or achieve something. Remember to ask the youth how they will know they have achieved success or acquired the knowledge/particular skill and include that measure in their plan.

- Use the *Resources to Inspire Guide* to map out skills, corresponding goals, and resources that will be helpful for the youth. Almost all the resources that are listed are free or very low cost. The resources can be used in group, individual or self-instruction formats. For group learning, try an icebreaker activity that will assist youth with learning about goals, practice setting simple goals, and inspire them to identify areas of interest. Note that the resources offered are suggestions. We encourage practitioners to use reliable online resources to identify organizations and other tools in their geographic area or use resources specific to their child welfare agency.

Step 4: Support youth to implement, monitor, and update their learning plan

- Ask youth to use and refer to their learning plan in your interactions and communications with them. Ask about progress. Celebrate successes! If a youth does not meet a planned goal, encourage them to reflect on obstacles and challenges, and encourage them to identify ways to overcome them and try

again. Encourage and model a growth mindset for youth. Ask what is working and what is not, encourage honest and kind reflection, modify the plan and activities, and support accordingly. It is critical that young people practice new skills in real contexts on an ongoing basis; help provide these opportunities and encourage youth's other supporters to do the same.

- Use the CLS Assessment to chart progress and set new goals. Review the learning plan at regular intervals and update it with new goals and activities. Sections of the CLS Assessment can be used alone as a post-assessment if the youth has focused on increasing skills in a particular area, or the entire assessment can be retaken to assess total progress over a longer time interval. Intervals between pre/post assessments can vary from monthly to quarterly to annually. It depends on the youth's needs, the service provider's Individual Learning program requirements, and a jurisdiction's compliance requirement.

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Appendix A

Young people as navigators of their safety, permanency, and well-being
By Connie K. Chung, Ed.D. (Foster America Fellow, San Mateo County Human Services Agency)

Recently, I asked a young person to co-design a life skills workshop with me. When I showed Teresa, my young co-facilitator, an online whiteboard and collaboration tool that was new to her, she was excited and enthusiastic. "Can we share this website with the others who come to the workshop?" she asked. "It's such a great resource; there are so many ways to use it and I bet the young people who come would like to know about it!"

As we brainstormed a few ideas for the workshop, whose content about envisioning and planning for one's future aligns with the "Looking Forward" subcategory within the CLS assessment, I showed her the basic features of the collaboration tool. I pointed to the opportunities for learning more about how to use the tool, explained that the ability to use the tool is one that is valued by employers as more of our work has shifted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and asked Teresa to plan and lead the part of the workshop that would use the resource. I have full confidence she will do a better job than I would.

In working together to create the workshop, Teresa and I were practicing non-routine interpersonal, analytical, and manual tasks. These required problem-solving, intuition, persuasion, situational adaptability, visual and language recognition, in-person (though in our case, during COVID-19 times, online) interaction, and creativity.[4] As an educator, it was a deliberate choice on my part to engage my younger co-designer in meaningful, consequential activities that build skills that have become more and more in demand in workplaces and beyond. For example, researchers David Autor and Brendan Price analyzed the changing task composition of the U.S. labor market from 1960 to 2010 and found that while non-routine analytical and interpersonal tasks steadily rose in use, the routine manual, cognitive, and non-routine manual tasks — those that can more easily be automated by machines and/or computers — declined.[5] (See Figure 1)

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[4] Autor, David H. & Price, Brendan (2013). *The changing task composition of the US labor market: An update of Autor, Levy, and Murnane (2003).* MIT Mimeograph, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. https://economics.mit.edu/files/9758
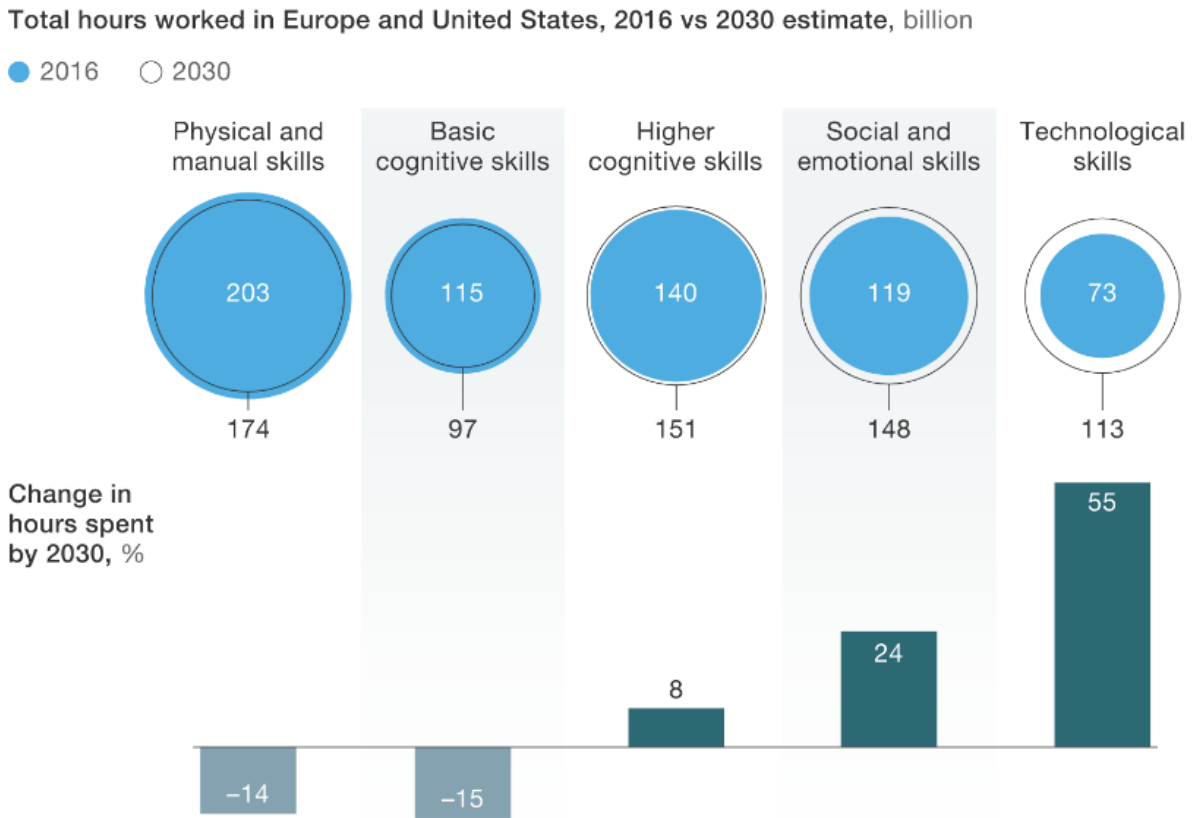
[5] ibid.

Figure 1. Worker Tasks in the US. Economy: 1960-2009
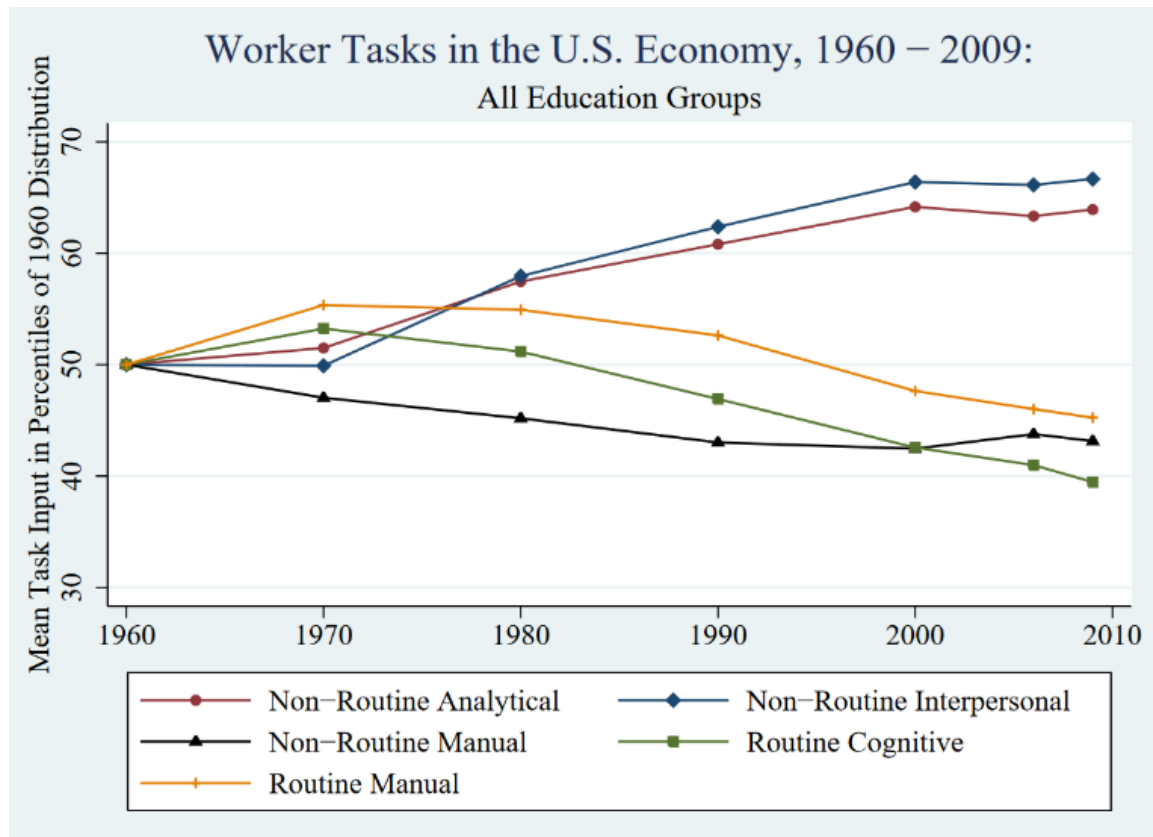
Source: Autor, Price (2013). "The changing task composition of the US labor market: an Update of Autor, Levy and Murnane (2003)". MIT Mimeograph, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. https://economics.mit.edu/files/9758

Similarly, McKinsey, the global consulting company, modeled skill shifts going forward to 2030 in the United States and Europe and predicted that while the hours spent exercising physical, manual, and basic cognitive skills will decrease, the hours spent using higher cognitive skills, social and emotional skills, and technological skills will accelerate.[6] (See Figure 2.)

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[6] Bughin, J., Hazan, E., Lund, S., Dahlstrom, P., Wiesinger, A. & Subramaniam, A. (2018, May 23). *Skill shift: Automation and the future of the workforce*. Discussion Paper. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce

Figure 2. Total Hours Worked in Europe and the United States - 2016 versus 2030 estimate (in billions)

Total hours worked in Europe and United States, 2016 vs 2030 estimate, billion

● 2016   ○ 2030

Physical and manual skills	Basic cognitive skills	Higher cognitive skills	Social and emotional skills	Technological skills
203	115	140	119	73
174	97	151	148	113

Change in hours spent by 2030, %

| −14 | −15 | 8 | 24 | 55 |

Source: McKinsey Global Institute Workforce Skills Model; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

Source: Bughin, J., Hazan, E., Lund, S., Dahlstrom, P., Wiesinger, A. & Subramaniam, A. (2018, May 23). *Skill shift: Automation and the future of the workforce*. Discussion Paper. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce

The report goes on to note: "The overall need for physical and manual skills in the sector is decreasing at more than twice the rate of that for the whole economy. The need for basic cognitive skills is also declining as office support functions are automated. ... A key to companies' future success will be in providing continuous learning options and instilling a culture of lifelong learning throughout the organization."[7]

As an educator and researcher, I have been working with practice, policy, and research colleagues from all over the world to shift learning experiences to better align with the practicalities and realities of a rapidly changing world. I often share this quote from New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman: In 2004, "Facebook didn't even exist yet, Twitter was still a sound, the cloud was still in the sky, 4G was a parking space,

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[7] ibid.

'applications' were what you sent to college, LinkedIn was barely known and most people thought it was a prison, Big Data was a good name for a rap star, and Skype, for most people, was a typographical error."[8] To further underscore the speed of change, I note that in 2021, several references in Friedman's statement from 2016 are already outdated.

Indeed, while changes have been taking place even before people began keeping records, the speed and scale of the changes we are experiencing now are unprecedented. Even before a global, life-changing pandemic that upended our lives in a matter of 24 hours in 2020, other changes that have demanded our attention and that of our young people ─ the rapid development, spread, and dominance of technology; deepening inequality; ethnic, class, race, political, and other tensions; environmental challenges such as wildfires; and other local and global issues ─ have been causing major shifts in thinking about how we can best prepare young people for such a volatile and complex world.

In working with colleagues around the world, who collectively serve and work with millions of young people, spanning the full gamut of backgrounds ─ from young people first to go to school in their families and growing up with multiple adverse childhood experiences to young people whose economies invest heavily in their education systems ─ I noted and summarized some of the shifts we are making in learning and teaching in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Shifts in Learning

Source: Adapted from the author's original presentation, Chung, Connie K. (2018, June 20). *Learning across differences: Lessons in learning to build a better world together.* 2nd Annual Oxford University Symposium for Comparative and International Education, Oxford, U.K.

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[8] Friedman, Thomas L. (2016). *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Acceleration.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

My colleagues are making these shifts in learning and teaching because they are needed. The world has collectively experienced in the past 20 months, for example, how important it is to know how to care for one's mental and physical health, and how critical it is to be creative, collaborative, empathetic, and adaptable as we responded to a global pandemic. Many of us learned about the importance of continually learning ─ about epidemiology, about supply chains, about our interdependence on each other for our health and well-being, and a host of other topics we probably had little prior knowledge about before COVID-19. Many of us likely also realized that we learned these kinds of life skills from a variety of venues and people, over the course of our lives, not just in our formal schooling.

What are the implications for learning life skills in such a world?
In other words, we learned or re-learned that we are the navigators of our safety, permanency, and well-being, with help from our broader community of friends, families, scientists, artists, health care workers, and other community members. As we co-labor with young people to learn life skills (particularly youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system) we should also consider part of our work to be about encouraging and empowering young people to be navigators of their own safety, permanency, and well-being. This work should be about helping them build the kind of trustworthy and supportive networks of relationships that enable all of us to have and make good decisions.

The following are a few questions for beginning discussions in our respective communities about how we might do this, using the CLS assessment as one of many tools[9]. The suggestions are framed deliberately as questions so that recommendations and answers that are more appropriate to particular local contexts can be generated and co-created in dialogue with young people and other stakeholders.

1. How can we use the CLS assessment to inform an explicitly strengths-based approach to working with young people about learning life skills, and to connect the presentation of new information to what young people already know about life skills?[10]

Very few young people are as familiar with complexity and volatility as our system-involved young people, unfortunately. Yet for many, the challenges of having to navigate a child welfare and/or juvenile justice system result in resilience, creativity, and adaptability. Many of our young people are already well-versed in life skills. "I learned how to self-advocate for my needs," one young person told me. Another observed,

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[9] Many thanks to the Foster America community and staff of San Mateo County Human Services Agency Children & Families Services who influenced some of my thinking about these points.

[10] *How People Learn*, a summary of the science behind learning put together by the National Research Council, stresses the importance of connecting new knowledge with what young people already know. National Research Council, Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning & Committee on Learning Research and Educational Practice (2000). How people learn. National Academy Press. https://www.nap.edu/read/9853/chapter/1

"Well, I guess I learned how to be resourceful and persistent." A social worker said to me, "Many of the young people I work with are really good at finding resources."

One of the ways that the CLS assessment can be used is to help systematically determine the breadth of strengths our young people already possess about life skills and connect what they want to know with what they already know. Young people and their supporters, for example, can look at the CLS assessment topics prior to use of the tool to note areas of strengths before delving into examining areas in need of further growth. Because the CLS assessment concretely names several skills in a particular subcategory, it can also help young people and their supporters identify what they already know even in areas identified as being in general need of further growth.

If we can begin with the mindset that every young person can thrive in life with proper resources and support, regardless of background, and if we can encourage young people to do the same, then we can reinforce that assessments — particularly self-assessments — do not evaluate the potential or value of a person. Rather, they become guides in helping us know where we are strong and where we need to focus our energies to grow, instead of scattering our limited time and resources in all directions.[11]

2. How can we use the CLS assessment to offer young people opportunities to learn from each other and to equip them with the resources they need? How can we use the CLS assessment to build on young people's curiosity and desire to continue to learn life skills over the course of their lives, through different venues and with different communities?

Young people are eager to learn life skills. Young people can also be each other's best, if not the most credible, sources of information. Especially with knowledge growing at an exponential rate, and with so many online and other venues to learn, young people might already know resources that they find appealing and helpful that supporters may not. In addition to offering concrete resources and opportunities, we might do well to also guide young people about how to discern trustworthy sources of information among many offered to them, whether the sources are peers, adults, organizations, or online resources.

Supporters can use the results of the CLS assessment to organize pairs or groups of young people to learn life skills together and from each other; some young people might be stronger in some areas of life skills than others, and they can offer their strengths to each other and receive from each other in their areas of need.[12]

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[11] For more on how development is an inherently relational process, where scaffolding and connecting to the zone of proximal development are key, see Chapter 1 in Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis' book, *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators* (2006). Harvard Education Press.

[12] Developmental psychologists Nicole Jarrett and Richard M. Lerner, for example, include "connection" as one of the "5 Cs" of positive youth development (the others are competence, confidence, character, and caring/compassion) that lead to the 6th C, contribution (to self, family, community, civil society). For

No single workshop or workbook or group activity will be enough for young people to learn all that they need to learn about life skills. Instead, these activities could help underscore why it is important to learn a life skill like financial literacy, for example. Hearing from peers about the varieties of resources and the supportive people who are available to help may build on young people's innate curiosity and desire to learn.[13] Asking young people what financial literacy skills they need to learn and following through by connecting them with resources would be another important step. Supporters can share their own journeys of learning life skills and invite young people to do the same. With knowledge and resources continually evolving, an important place to begin may be to underscore that learning life skills is a lifelong endeavor, and to help young people understand how and why life skills are important to gain and build on throughout their lives.

3. How can we integrate the CLS assessment into our overall strategy around equipping and empowering young people to set their own goals and plan for their long-term safety, permanency, and well-being?

It is likely that young people already are asked to make plans for their transitions and in other areas of their lives. Having a tool with which to assess areas of strengths and areas for growth in concrete ways gives young people agency.

It may be helpful to consider the CLS assessment as part of an ongoing discussion with young people, to be integrated with other tools to help youth set goals and plan for their own safety, permanency, and well-being. The CLS assessment, used together with the CLS resource guide, can help young people not just during their skills development but also in meaningful and tangible planning and goal setting.

One way to use the CLS assessment in setting goals and planning for long-term safety, permanency, and well-being is to focus on the subcategories of the assessment and outline an overall picture of young peoples' areas of strengths and areas for further growth. Then, as planning occurs every month, every three months, and/or every six months, there could be a particular focus on a specific subcategory for a period, so that achievable goals can be set within those subcategories and young people can feel a sense of accomplishment. Using the goals and the CLS resource guide, young people can make a plan, including identifying the supportive people and relationships and the opportunities and resources they would like to have to reach their self-identified goals.

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concrete suggestions on how to develop the 5 Cs, start with this handout from Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families' Youth Services Bureau: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fysb/whatispyd20120829.pdf

[13] For more discussion about the benefits of connecting to the intrinsic motivation of young people, particularly those with adverse childhood experiences, see Paul Tough's book, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why* (2016). Houghton Mifflin Company.

4. How can we use the CLS assessment in ways that are sensitive to the range of experiences that young people bring? How can we use the CLS assessment to listen to young people and change our practice accordingly?

As many youth workers and educators already know, young people span a range of needs and strengths and sensitivity to and recovery from trauma.[14] Some may be hypersensitive and hypervigilant toward being "assessed," even if the assessment is a self-assessment. Others may readily welcome the CLS assessment as an opportunity to learn what kinds of life skills would benefit them. Others may see the CLS assessment as another reminder of what they lack.

Discussing with young people the purpose and content of the CLS assessment will be helpful; so, too, will be discussions with young people and the supporters who know them well about how best to use the assessment in ways that would best benefit young people and not further harm them. Self-awareness, meta-cognition, and reflective practice are a few of the skills that educators often build in young people to be aware of how they learn. Co-creating safe spaces in which young people can share what enables them to learn well and adapting the administration of the CLS assessment accordingly might be something to consider.

Discussing with young people areas and topics that they consider critical life skills that the CLS assessment does not yet address – such as working on issues that they care about, in racial or environmental justice, for example – might be a way to use the CLS assessment. Another idea would be to let them know that the civic engagement and navigating the child welfare system sections are new to the CLS assessment this year, and asking what they think about gaining leadership skills that allow them to be part of making positive differences in their communities. We might ask them what other additional sections they might add under the umbrella of "life skills."

As an example of changing practice to reflect the experiences and reflections of young people, this redesign of the CLS assessment was created with critical and helpful input from young people, who saw it as a useful tool to help them become navigators of their own lives. It was also revised with input from social workers, CASAs, resource parents, community partners, and education liaisons — some of the many people who spend time and effort to support our young people. It may be helpful to consider the CLS assessment as a dynamic, living tool to be refined over time in ways that best help young people and those who support them.

5. How can we use the CLS assessment to create a sense of shared purpose and align shared efforts among young people and their supporters?

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[14] See Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey's book, *What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience and Healing* (2021). Flatiron Books, for example.

Life skills in a fast-changing world cover a breadth of topics that no one young person can learn by his/her/themselves from any single source; learning life skills is an iterative, community-embedded, life-long process. All of us, young or old, are still learning life skills and are doing so with support from our friends, families, community members, and a variety of opportunities such as volunteering, work, school, community or online classes, books, podcasts, apps, or social media.

Teresa, the young person who is co-designing the life skills workshop with me, was supported by many others even before she began to work with me:

- The social worker who did a warm handoff to a community partner, who introduced her to a range of resources so that Teresa could choose how she wanted to grow;

- The education and employment specialist who encouraged her to apply to the innovative human services agency internship program for system-involved young people so Teresa could have a broader menu of options to choose for work;

- The manager, a former system-involved young person, who invited Teresa to co-create an app for foster youth as part of that internship so Teresa could further discover her talents and strengths;

- The former resource parents who noticed Teresa's love of the arts and hired her to paint a mural on their property so she would have another opportunity to showcase her work and grow in her skills.

These supporters did what research says is critical in making relationships powerful in young peoples' lives: they expressed care, provided support, shared power, challenged growth, and expanded Teresa's possibilities.[15] The web of warm and encouraging relationships that surrounded her, and Teresa's willingness to accept their support, were critical for her to learn a breadth of life skills that are now helping her to create opportunities for other young people to learn life skills.

Conclusions
Whether young or old, we need an intentional, supportive community to learn life skills. The CLS assessment may be one of the most effective tools our community partners can use to support our young people in being the navigators of their own safety, permanency, and well-being.

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[15] The Search Institute (n.d.). The developmental relationships framework. **https://www.search-institute.org/developmental-relationships/developmental-relationships-framework/**

Additional resources

Books:

National Research Council, Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning & Committee on Learning Research and Educational Practice (2000). *How people learn*. National Academy Press. https://www.nap.edu/read/9853/chapter/1

Nakkula, Michael J. & Toshalis, Eric (2006). *Understanding youth: Adolescent development for educators*. Harvard Education Press.

Perry, Bruce D. & Winfrey, O. (2021). *What happened to you? Conversations on trauma, resilience, and healing.* Flatiron Books.

Tough, Paul (2016). *Helping children succeed: What works and why*. Houghton Mifflin and Company.

Websites and frameworks:

Annie E. Casey Foundation's Framework for Authentically Partnering with Young People: https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-framework-for-effectively-partnering-with-young-people

Family and Youth Services Bureau Guide on What is Positive Youth Development? https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fysb/whatispyd20120829.pdf

The Search Institute's The Developmental Relationships Framework. **https://www.search-institute.org/developmental-relationships/developmental-relationships-framework/**

Youth.gov's Positive Youth Development: https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development

Appendix B

Theoretical perspectives that guided some of the Casey Life Skills refinement

The CLS revisions work has been informed by several theoretical perspectives: competence-centered perspective, ecological theory, positive youth development, social learning theory and social support theory. These are described briefly below.[16]

Competence-centered perspective
There is a growing consensus in the human services field, namely, a competence-centered or strength-oriented approach to practice, that contrasts with the more traditional pathology or deficit model (Fontes, 2005; Maluccio, 1999; Rapp, 1998; Social Care Institute for Excellence et al., 2018). While the metaphor of ecology provides a way of perceiving and understanding human beings and their functioning within the context of their environment, knowledge about competence development offers specific guidelines for professional practice and service delivery.

The competence perspective draws from ego psychology; psychodynamic psychology; and learning, developmental, and family systems theories. In social work as in other fields, competence is generally defined as the repertoire of skills that enable the person to function effectively. However, a distinction should be made between the notion of discrete competencies or skills and the broader, ecological, or transactional concept of competence. The latter may be defined as the outcome of the interplay among:

- a person's capacities, skills, potentialities, limitations, and other characteristics;

- a person's motivation — that is, their interests, hopes, beliefs, and aspirations; and

- the qualities of the person's impinging environment — such as social networks, environmental demands, and opportunities (Maluccio & Sinanoglu 1981).

The ecological concept of competence leads to competence-centered social work practice, a perspective that explicitly holds that the promotion of competence in human beings is a central function of social work intervention (Maluccio, Pine & Tracy, 2002). Competence-centered practice, as it is applied to youth life skills development, embodies a set of attitudes, principles, and strategies designed to promote effective functioning in human beings by focusing on their unique coping and adaptive patterns, mobilizing their actual or potential strengths, emphasizing the role of natural helping networks, building on their life experiences in a planned way, and using environmental resources as major instruments of help.

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[16] This section is adapted and updated from Pecora, P.J., Whittaker, J.K., Maluccio, A.N.; Barth, R.P. & DePanfilis, D. (2009). *The child welfare challenge.* (Third Edition.) Piscataway, NJ: Aldine-Transaction Books, Chapter 3.

Developmental perspective

By the developmental perspective, we mean a certain frame of reference for understanding the growth and functioning of human beings in the context of their families and their families' transactions with their environments. The developmental perspective is akin to the ecological perspective in that it views human behavior and social functioning within an environmental context. It goes beyond ecology, however, by bringing in other aspects such as the stages and tasks of the family's life cycle; the bio-psycho-social principles of individual growth and development; the goals and needs that are common to all human beings and families; and the particular aspirations, needs, and qualities of each person and each family in light of diversity in such areas as culture, ethnicity, race, class, and sexual orientation.

This highlighting of developmental theory should not be construed as minimizing the importance of attachment, trauma, social control, strain, and social learning theories. This includes such prominent aspects as:

- the tasks and challenges associated with different individual and family developmental cycles;
- the repetition of the family life cycle in blended families;
- the role of family routines and rituals;
- the significance of cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender relativity; and
- the ways in which family functioning (cohesion, adaptability, communication, and role fulfillment) is in part dependent upon the developmental levels of individual family members.

In applying a developmental perspective to assessing life skills, we are mindful that children are moving their way through multiple developmental stages, and that they may be at 15 years in chronological age but operating at an 8- or 10-year-old level developmentally in certain areas. In addition, while some developmental tasks and skills are not dependent on a previous stage being accomplished, other aspects of human development may occur best when certain foundational developmental stages or functioning has been achieved (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; National Research Council, 2015 chapter 3). This has profound implications for assessing youth life skills in terms of tailoring and staging skills development.

Ecological developmental models

Within the child welfare context, child characteristics interact with the experience of maltreatment (risk factor) and families or foster care families (protective factor) to produce outcomes. These characteristics include genetic factors, risk factors such as poverty, racism, and dangerous living environments, and family of origin characteristics and functioning (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993; Fraser et al., 2004; Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000; Jenson & Fraser, 2016). In addition, family characteristics and functioning, child/family supports, the quality and nature of services provided by various community agencies, and other sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors interact with the experiences of child maltreatment to produce certain outcomes.

According to an ecological perspective delineated by Cicchetti & Lynch (1993, pp. 102-103), families (and foster families) can act as a powerful micro-system intervention that can have important protective and ameliorative functions for the youth. In terms of outcome areas, it is important to assess a range of domains, including mental and physical health, adaptive functioning, cognitive functioning, and social functioning. The ecological model espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2004) posits that individual development occurs and can only be understood within a larger family and social-environmental ecological context. In this model, the interplay of factors at the level of the individual, the family and the environment are all necessary to understand what appear to be individual behavior and individual outcomes.

The ecological perspective draws from such fields as ecology, systems theory, anthropology, and organizational theory. In particular, it builds on ecology as a metaphor and thus on the study of the interactions between living organisms and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Garbarino et al., 1992; Moen, Elder, & Luscher, 1995). This perspective requires identifying and analyzing risk and protective factors at the level of the child, the level of his or her family, and at the broader societal level. Children's development arises from the complex interplay of these interwoven elements, and life skills development needs to strategically draw opportunities and supports from multiple ecological levels to truly be successful.

Positive youth development
The positive youth development (PYD) framework is based on a body of research that suggests that if youth are to reach their full potential, there is a need for certain protective factors or positive influences to support young people as they overcome challenges and barriers to achieve their optimal potential and well-being (Dion, 2013; Lerner et al., 2009). The PYD framework is a prevention-based framework that focuses on the role of family support and monitoring, caring adults, positive peer groups, strong sense of self, and engagement in school and community to influence youth's ability to overcome adversity (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al, 2009).

Studies have been conducted to examine the PYD approach. For example, an evaluation over time of local 4-H participation was carried out to link PYD to youth contributions and participation in the community. Youth consistently engaged in 4-H were found to be at much lower risk of having personal, social, and behavioral problems than other youth. They were also less likely to smoke and drink than their peers, had better grades and were more likely to expect to attend college (Lerner, et al., 2005). The practical application of PYD is illustrated by Dion (2013) in her report for OPRE in Figure B.1 below. Note the strategies devoted to developing youth resilience, human capital and protective factors.

Figure B.1 Conceptual Framework for Advancing the Self-Sufficiency and Well-Being of At-Risk Youth
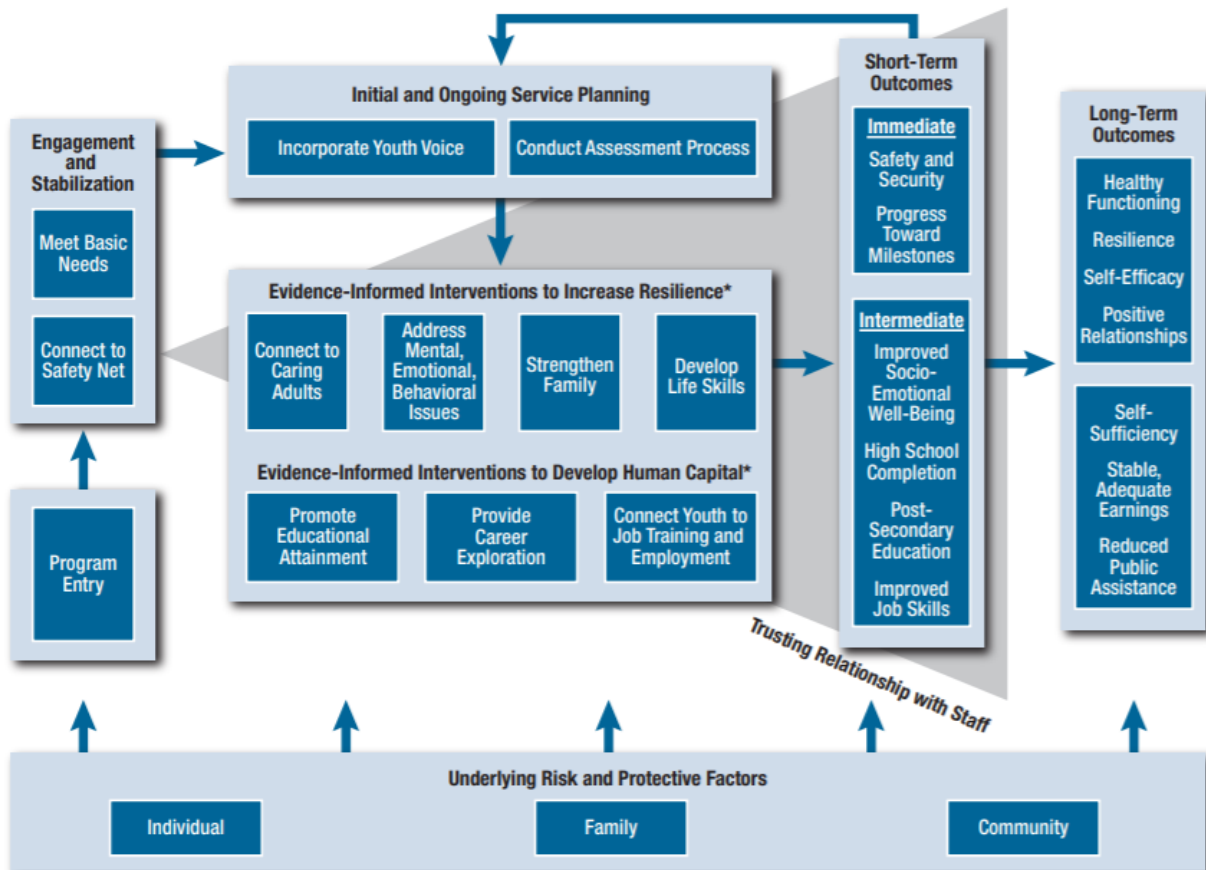
*Interventions are selected based on each youth's assessment results.

Source: Dion, M. Robin (2013). *A framework for advancing the self-sufficiency and well-being of at-risk youth* (OPRE Report # 2012-14). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from **https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/ydd_framework_brief_final_03_27_13.pdf**, p. 2.

Social learning theory

Social learning theory emphasizes the complex nature of social situations and holds that human behavior occurs within an interactive social context (Bandura, 1977). While the theory has evolved over a period, it helps contextualize the active role of youth in their development process. Bandura (1977) suggested that youth are able to think about processes in learning, and they actively interact with their surroundings, which results in learning.

Fisher and colleagues (2005) have also shown that changing the social environment can change physiological functioning. An evaluation of the Early Intervention Treatment Foster Care Program (EIFC) for pre-K children showed marked improvements in the regulation of stress and attentiveness, as indicated by marked normalization of cortisol levels compared to children in a comparison group of children in conventional foster care (see http://www.mtfc.com). Similarly, life skills development can be more successful when we pay attention to how to model and best teach key life skills and recognize that learning some life skills often takes place in everyday interactions.

Social support theory

Social support theory has been recognized as an important framework to emphasize the value of friends and relationships with others, and the buffering effects of a positive social support system (Maluccio, Pine, & Tracy, 2002). Such a perspective stresses the importance of providing consistent supports to children, birth parents, and foster families. Life skills development can be both accelerated and/or sustained by positive social support networks (Hodge et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2021). That is why the new version of the Casey Life Skills Assessment has a special supplemental assessment scale with 17 items focused on supportive relationships.

casey family programs

casey life skills

FUTURE

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