

## A Research Update from Search Institute: Developmental Relationships

Both researchers and practitioners have long embraced the idea that interaction with caring adults is central to young people's development. New research being conducted at Search Institute confirms that conviction, but we are also finding that both *caring* and *adults* are necessary but not sufficient strands in the broader web of relationships that kids need to succeed. In addition to expressing care, young people also need people in their lives who challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities. And while relationships with adults can do all of those things in powerful and positive ways, so can close connections with friends, siblings, and other peers.

Search Institute has adopted the term *developmental relationships* to describe the broader conception of relationships that is the focus of our new research and development agenda. Through our work to date, we have identified 20 actions that make a relationship developmental, and we have organized those actions into a framework that is being examined empirically through a national study that will be released in fall 2014. In the most transformative developmental relationships, all of these actions are bidirectional, with each person contributing to and benefitting from them. For the purpose of clarity, however, the framework is expressed below from the perspective of one young person in a developmental relationship.

### The Developmental Relationships Framework

#### **Express CARE**

Show that you like me and want the best for me.

- Be Present—Pay attention when you are with me.
- Be Warm—Let me know that you like being with me and express positive feelings toward me.
- Invest—Commit time and energy to doing things for and with me.
- Show Interest—Make it a priority to understand who I am and what I care about.
- Be Dependable—Be someone I can count on and trust.

#### **CHALLENGE Growth**

Insist that I try to continuously improve.

- Inspire—Help me see future possibilities for myself.
- Expect—Make it clear that you want me to live up to my potential.
- Stretch—Recognize my thoughts and abilities while also pushing me to strengthen them.
- Limit—Hold me accountable for appropriate boundaries and rules.

#### **Provide SUPPORT**

Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.

- Encourage—Praise my efforts and achievements.
- Guide—Provide practical assistance and feedback to help me learn.
- Model—Be an example I can learn from and admire.
- Advocate—Stand up for me when I need it.

#### **Share POWER**

Hear my voice and let me share in making decisions.

- Respect—Take me seriously and treat me fairly.
- Give Voice—Ask for and listen to my opinions and consider them when you make decisions.
- Respond—Understand and adjust to my needs, interests, and abilities.
- Collaborate—Work with me to accomplish goals and solve problems.

#### **Expand POSSIBILITIES**

Expand my horizons and connect me to opportunities.

- Explore—Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places.
- Connect—Introduce me to people who can help me grow.
- Navigate—Help me work through barriers that could stop me from achieving my goals.