

Communicating About the Developmental Relationships Framework

A guide for communicators
in youth-serving organizations

A Note to Communicators

It's easy to assume that relationships are something that everyone has, that relationships mainly form in the home, and “be caring” is all it takes to form a strong relationship. This messaging strategy is designed to share a much broader message about developmental relationships. The tips in this strategy will help communicators:

- Explain the five key components of developmental relationships
- Strategically identify high-impact messengers who can share their experience with developmental relationships
- Make a case for equity and inclusion in developmental relationships
- Describe the role of developmental relationships in young people's lives.

To learn more about the research supporting this strategy, visit www.FrameWorksInstitute.org/developmental-relationships. FrameWorks Institute is a strategic communications think tank based in Washington DC, and a research partner with Search Institute.

Messaging Strategy Overview

1. Define and describe developmental relationships in terms of five key elements.
2. Relationships are critical for all young people. Appeal to the value of *Inclusive Opportunity* to make this case.
3. Use a comparison to “roots” to explain the connection between developmental relationships and young people’s growth. Developmental relationships are the “roots of young people’s success”.
4. Engage unexpected messengers—like mentors, friends, coaches or teachers—who can highlight their experiences with developmental relationships.

The Developmental Relationships Framework

Developmental relationships are the roots of young people's success and cultivate their resilience.

Search Institute research has identified five elements that, when working together, make a relationship developmental:

Express
care



Challenge
growth



Provide
support



Share
power



Expand
possibilities



When young people experience these elements in a wide range of relationships in their lives, they are more likely to be resilient in the face of challenges and grow up successfully. These relationships are the roots of young people's success.

What Is a *Developmental* Relationship?

Developmental relationships are the “roots” of success for all young people. They bring the nourishment, support, and stability youth need to grow, thrive, and withstand life’s challenges. Young people need to experience these relationships in their families, schools, programs, and communities.

Through developmental relationships young people:

- Discover who they are
- Cultivate the abilities needed for them to shape their own lives
- Learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.

An Equity Focus for Developmental Relationships

In a society with long-standing and growing inequities, developmental relationships can advance equity for young people from communities that have been marginalized due to race, income, and other differences. We can bring an equity focus to the way we nurture developmental relationships when we:

- Express care by listening to and honoring communities' own stories, struggles, and strengths.
- Share power and provide support in the face of oppressive systems.
- Expand possibilities responsively, without a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Challenge growth among those with privilege to become allies and part of the solution.

“Developmental Relationships are essential for all young people, in every community. Every young person needs to be rooted in relationships that nourish their growth.”

The Inclusive Opportunity value

**“Developmental
relationships are
the roots of young
people’s success.”**

The Roots of Success metaphor

“All young people should have what they need to create and sustain developmental relationships regardless of the color of their skin, how much money their family has, their gender identity, sexual orientation, or the language they speak at home. Developmental relationships can help young people grow and be resilient when they experience exclusion, bias or discrimination.”

“Developmental relationships are like roots that support and nourish young people’s success.”

Roots support and nourish trees as they develop and grow. Developmental relationships work the same way; they nourish young people’s development with guidance, encouragement, and new opportunities. Healthy roots keep young people grounded and growing toward their goals.

The Strategy in Action: Sample Fundraising Letter

New Message
<p>Subject: Developmental relationships are the roots of all young people’s success</p>
<p>Your ongoing support is essential in making sure that all young people, regardless of background or circumstances, have the nurturing, support, and guidance they need to learn, grow, and thrive.</p> <p>Your intentional, inclusive actions to nurture—and encourage others to nurture—developmental relationships will help to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boost student motivation and enhance their performance in school• Strengthen social and emotional skills, such as teamwork and decision making• Create equitable access to positive learning environments for young people. <p>Take action today to ensure that our young people thrive.</p> <p>When you are intentional and inclusive in building developmental relationships, you contribute to all young people having opportunities to thrive.</p>

Messaging Do's and Don'ts

Do

Use the name
“developmental relationships.”

Compare developmental relationships
to the roots of a tree or plant.

Remind audiences that we need to
nurture relationships and opportunities
for all young people, based on what they
need to be their best and to thrive.

Use messengers—mentors,
teachers, coaches or friends—who
can speak to their own experiences
of developmental relationships.

Don't

Don't call them “scaffolding,”
“bridging,” or “transforming”
relationships.

Don't compare developmental
relationships to an “active ingredient”
that might be added in or taken out
of young people's lives.

Avoid describing developmental
relationships as about *fulfillment*
or helping young people and adults
find meaning.

Don't miss an opportunity to show
how more adults can support young
people, by relying only on parents
as messengers about relationships.

Thank you.