

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Intentional Self-Regulation and Positive Youth Development in Early Adolescence: Findings From the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

Gestsdóttir, S., & Lerner, R. M. (2007). Intentional self-regulation and positive youth development in early adolescence: Findings from the 4-H study of positive youth development. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(2), 508-521.  
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**SUMMARY:** Fifth graders participated in a study designed to examine the development of intentional self-regulation which is defined as selecting and enacting behaviors that attain goals that are pertinent to oneself. A global nine-item measure was found to be a valid index of intentional self-regulation in early adolescence. Scores on this measure were related to indicators of positive and negative development.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Scores on the measure were related to indicators of positive youth development and risk/problem behaviors.
- Positive relationships emerged between intentional self-regulation and feelings of competence, character, confidence and connection.
- Negative relationships emerged between intentional self-regulation and risk/problem behaviors.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with other professionals in the field about ways to facilitate activities that encourage the most engagement and build positive relationships
- Examine ways to create positive and personalized relationships with children to build confidence and character in after-school programs

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer supportive classes for adolescents to promote feelings of competence, character, confidence, connection, and peer support
- Collaborate with schools to identify students who are having difficulty and to provide appropriate interventions

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage additional training of public school educators about stressors faced by adolescents and strategies to promote feelings of competence, character, confidence, and connection
- Recommend offering professional development to family service workers to develop unique ways to engage military youth in adolescent enrichment programs

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## METHODS

- Students from 57 schools in 18 states were recruited during their 5th grade year through two different waves of data collection via letters sent to parents.
- Students completed measures at home of internal self-regulation, functioning and global self-worth, feelings of competence, character, confidence, connection, peer support, sympathy for others, depression, and problem behaviors.
- Statistical analyses were used to investigate the global structure of the model of selection, optimization, and compensation.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Two thousand nine hundred fifty-eight fifth graders participated (52% girls).
- The average age of the participants was 10.85 years (SD = 1.05 years).
- Forty percent of the sample had a household income of \$65,000 or more, while 40% had a household income of \$25,000-\$64,999.
- Racial/ethnic composition of youth was as follows: 57% White, 20% Latino/Latina, and 8% Black.

## LIMITATIONS

- Descriptions of the recruitment and retention of participants were unclear, making conclusions based on the findings difficult to interpret.
- It is unknown how these findings would generalize to other youth from different backgrounds.
- This study was cross-sectional and causation among the variables cannot be determined based on the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Gather data on older adolescents to explore whether this measure works with youth in later adolescence
- Assess if feelings of competence, character, confidence, connection, and peer support can develop independently of one another in adolescents
- Explore the extent to which cultural and personality factors impact these outcomes in youth

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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