

**“THEY ALL
PLAY A ROLE”**

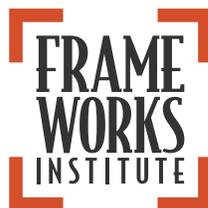
**Mapping the Gaps between Expert
and Public Understandings of
Developmental Relationships**

A FrameWorks Map the Gaps Report

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Introduction

Relationships are at the core of human life. As they grow up, children and youth interact with a wide variety of people: parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, friends, and many others. These relationships are central to how children learn new skills, develop identities, and seek out pursuits, activities, and vocations. And, because everyone has relationships, we all have ideas about their purpose, the way they function, and their benefits and drawbacks.

For this reason, communicating about developmental relationships—interactions that promote healthy growth and development—is tricky. Some of the public’s existing ways of thinking about relationships align nicely with expert views and make it easier for communicators to get their points across. First, people widely recognize that relationships are critical for children’s development. Second, members of the public understand that genuine relationships are reciprocal and often based on shared expectations and goals. Because these understandings align with a developmental perspective, they make it easier for people to understand the importance of certain aspects of relationships and, in turn, some of the factors needed to build and maintain valuable relationships.

Other public understandings of relationships make it hard for people to see experts’ points or generate active resistance to a developmental understanding of relationships. Most notably, people assume that the strength and health of family relationships determine the quality of all future relationships, which makes it difficult for people to recognize the transformative potential of relationships outside the family. In addition, members of the public largely don’t recognize how environments structure opportunities to engage in relationships. As a result, they don’t see the need for programs and policies that can *restructure* environments to ensure more equitable access to developmental relationships.

Understanding how the public thinks about relationships gives experts and advocates a strategic advantage. By leveraging productive patterns in public thinking and pushing unproductive ones into the background, communicators can deepen the public’s understanding of developmental relationships and their importance, build support for effective programs, and potentially make people more willing to engage in developmental relationships with young people.

In this report, we present findings from research sponsored by Search Institute that maps the landscape of public and expert understandings of relationships and their role in young people’s development. This is the first phase in a larger project to develop communications strategies that can support efforts by Search Institute and other youth development and education organizations to promote developmental relationships.

We begin by presenting the “untranslated story” of developmental relationships, which has been distilled from interviews and meetings with experts and advocates in the fields of youth development and education. This story provides the content to be translated in communications—the key points about developmental relationships that the field wants the public to understand and the programs and practices for which the field aims to build support. This story covers the current state of knowledge about what developmental relationships are and how they work; the factors that influence whether young people have developmental relationships; and the benefits of these relationships and how to foster them.

We then describe the cultural models—the shared but implicit understandings, assumptions, and patterns of reasoning—that structure how members of the public reason about developmental relationships. Drawing on 20 semi-structured, long-form interviews, we identify the public’s ways of thinking about developmental relationships. Some are productive and can be used to communicate key ideas. Others are unproductive, making it more difficult for people to grasp key features of developmental relationships.

Finally, we map the gaps between expert and public perspectives, examining where understandings overlap and where they diverge. The report concludes with a set of preliminary framing recommendations drawn from the implications of the cultural models and map the gaps findings.

A description of research methods and participant demographic information is in the Appendix.

The Untranslated Expert Story of Developmental Relationships

This section describes the main themes that emerged from 14 one-hour interviews and two feedback sessions with experts on developmental relationships. These themes comprise the untranslated story of developmental relationships that experts across education, mentoring, and family-based and afterschool programming networks want to communicate to practitioners and members of the public. The untranslated story is organized around four questions:

- What are developmental relationships and how do they work?
- Which factors influence whether young people have developmental relationships?
- What are the benefits of developmental relationships?
- How can we foster better developmental relationships for more young people?

1. WHAT ARE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

- **Developmental relationships are interactions between two people that promote positive cognitive, social, and emotional growth.** Strong relationships are bi-directional and thus influence each person in the relationship. For a relationship to be considered developmental, it must facilitate growth in at least one person in the relationship. Areas of growth include academic skills and knowledge, career development, social skills, communication, and the exploration and affirmation of cultural perspectives and other identities. Developmental relationships often take place between people of different ages and experience levels. That said, relationships

between peers and professionals with similar levels of expertise are also developmental if they catalyze mutual growth.

- **Developmental relationships are catalysts for skill- and self-development.** Growth within a developmental relationship is often evident by the concrete improvement of a skill in athletics, academics, social-emotional ability, or another domain. Social and emotional skills include self-awareness, responsiveness, willingness to take on challenges, and the ability to follow through on plans to meet goals. Developmental relationships also often address less tangible markers of growth, such as forming a sense of self, developing the motivation to succeed, honing creativity, identifying long-term aspirations, or affirming racial, cultural, sexual, and/or gender identities.
- **Developmental relationships have five core features.** In a developmental relationship: (1) care is expressed; (2) challenges lead to growth; (3) support is provided; (4) power is shared; and (5) possibilities are expanded. Because developmental relationships are reciprocal, both people can experience these features. Participants in a developmental relationship care for and trust one another while challenging the other to grow. Participants support one another through encouragement to reach goals and expectations, reflection on failures, and learning from mistakes. They also share power through mutual respect, collaboration, and shared decision-making. Developmental relationships are also characterized by expanded possibilities as participants experience new aspirations, develop ideas, and form connections to others who can continue to support their growth.
- **Sustained contact enhances developmental relationships.** Although the duration of developmental relationships varies, relationships that are maintained over a sustained period with repeated interactions are more likely to become developmental relationships. Sustained contact is not required in developmental relationships, but it does improve the likelihood that a relationship will have a sustained impact on development.
- **Developmental relationships occur across many settings with different kinds of people.** Home and educational spaces are primary venues for developmental relationships, but they also occur and are promoted in a variety of other places and with a variety of people. They take place virtually everywhere—in out-of-school and athletics programs, clubs, juvenile justice settings, mentorship programs, places of employment, faith-based settings. They also occur in informal settings, such as social gatherings and everyday neighborhood interactions. These relationships can move across settings over time. For example, a relationship that begins in a formal school setting might transition to a more informal setting over time. In addition, developmental relationships can involve a wide variety of participants, such as with nuclear and extended family members, peers, school staff, coaches, religious leaders, youth organization volunteers, and other caring adults in the community.

- **Developmental relationships outside of the family are especially important during adolescence.** Beginning with the onset of puberty and lasting through young adulthood, adolescence is a period of dramatic development and plasticity. As the brain wires itself for adulthood, adolescents form their identities, a process that requires expanding supports and connections beyond the family. Adolescence is therefore a critical time for seeking and forming a broader set of relationships. Developmental relationships outside the family are a stabilizing presence that supports young people during this time of change and transition.
- **Youth benefit from different types of developmental relationships, as different types confer different benefits.** Different kinds of developmental relationships provide young people with different levels and types of support, growth, and challenge. Developmental relationships with peers, for example, encourage a greater sense of shared power and autonomy than those with parents. Although familial relationships tend to be the first and longest-lasting type of developmental relationship, there are other important sources of developmental relationships. Nonfamilial sources are especially important for youth who do not have strong family relationships. Relationships outside the home can complement those within the home, and having access to multiple types of developmental relationships is ideal.

2. WHICH FACTORS INFLUENCE WHETHER YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS?

- **Adults play a strong role in determining whether young people have developmental relationships.** Young people can initiate developmental relationships with adults. However, because adults often assume leadership positions within programs, they are far more likely to initiate these relationships. Therefore, adults' willingness to engage in relationships with young people, and their skill in doing so, strongly influence whether young people have developmental relationships.
- **Community organizations can create opportunities for developmental relationships.** The presence of low-cost, accessible community organizations and spaces creates opportunities for youth to engage in developmental relationships with peers and adults. Athletic clubs, arts programs, religious organizations, Scouting and afterschool programs, youth employment programs, and other organizations with youth-centered spaces can foster developmental relationships.
- **Poverty and a lack of community resources can limit access to developmental relationships.** Financial strain affects parents' and caregivers' ability to engage in developmental relationships, and the availability of these relationships in the broader community. Within households, these factors include unpredictable scheduling, the need to hold multiple jobs, and the stress of living paycheck to paycheck. Within communities, opportunities

to promote developmental relationships are often constrained by cost and transportation. Thus, youth from low-income communities tend to have fewer opportunities than those in higher-income communities to engage in developmental relationships beyond their families.

- **Racial discrimination and social marginalization can limit access to developmental relationships for communities of color.** The intergenerational effects of segregation and ongoing discriminatory policies and practices shape the distribution of resources and opportunities across neighborhoods. Discriminatory practices yield inequities in education, community life, and program funding. Over-policing of communities of color undermines trust and limits the spaces in which developmental relationships grow. Because of these disparities, developmental relationships are often less available to young people of color. In addition, programs often fail to address the specific developmental needs of young people of color. For example, programs that serve young people of color but do not address race and identity don't provide youth a fully developmental experience.
- **The structure of the education system affects educators' ability to engage in developmental relationships.** The demands and time constraints placed on education professionals create barriers to developmental relationships. This is especially true for teachers, administrators, support staff, and afterschool staff at under-resourced educational settings. The dynamics of this system mean that, despite educators' best intentions, young people's relational needs often become secondary to their academic needs. This is especially true in school systems that link academic outcomes to teacher compensation or professional advancement, which pressures educators to demonstrate their students' academic achievement and does not incentivize educators to make time for developmental relationships.

3. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS?

- **Youth with developmental relationships are more likely to succeed in school and work.** Developmental relationships promote positive outcomes throughout life. Young people who have developmental relationships are more likely to experience positive educational outcomes, such as passing a difficult class, graduating, and pursuing higher education. Developmental relationships also help youth learn and refine the skills they need to find and keep jobs, such as communication, collaboration, and accountability.
- **Youth who have developmental relationships experience better social and emotional health.** Developmental relationships promote overall social and emotional wellbeing. For example, youth who have developmental relationships are more likely to feel a sense of belonging—a feeling that they are an integral part of their communities. This is often tied to improved mental health outcomes and lower risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thinking in adolescence and early adulthood.

- **Developmental relationships may mitigate the negative impacts of adverse experiences.** Developmental relationships can act as a buffer against negative outcomes associated with early adverse experiences, including increased likelihood of chronic illness, poor mental health, substance use, and difficulty maintaining relationships. By providing young people with stability, identity affirmation, and resources, developmental relationships help insulate young people from the negative outcomes that can result from adverse experiences.
- **Adults benefit from developmental relationships too.** The reciprocal nature of developmental relationships creates opportunities for adults to learn from young people and benefit from interacting with them. This area is not as well studied, but early research finds that adults with developmental relationships tend to experience greater feelings of self-worth and empowerment, a sense of belonging and connection to their communities, and increased job satisfaction. In addition, adults can learn specific skills or knowledge from youth, such as new approaches to problems, creative thinking, insights into complex issues, and technical or athletic skills.
- **Developmental relationships have economic, social, and civic benefits.** Youth who have developmental relationships are more likely to participate in the workforce and have positive employment outcomes; as such, ensuring that youth have developmental relationships carries economic benefits for society as whole. Youth with developmental relationships also tend to have better health throughout life and are less likely to become involved with the criminal justice system, which decreases health care and criminal justice spending. Developmental relationships at schools and community organizations boost job satisfaction and employee retention and prevent staff turnover. Developmental relationships also foster a sense of community and improve civic participation, which is associated with community organizing, activism, participation in local democratic processes, and other types of civic engagement.

4. HOW CAN WE FOSTER BETTER DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS FOR MORE YOUNG PEOPLE?

- **Incorporate “relationship first” policies across systems.** Relationships between young people and the adults and peers in their lives should be prioritized across child welfare, immigration, health care, education, and other social systems and institutions. Policies should be designed to promote mentorship with adults and peers in children’s lives. This includes removing structural barriers to relationships, such as policies that impede peer relationships for children in foster care by requiring state permission for common interactions or that prevent information-sharing with mentors and out-of-school-time providers.
- **Take a strengths-based approach that builds on young people’s interests and abilities.** Tapping into young people’s interests and abilities fosters

developmental relationships. Deficit models, on the other hand, present youth as having problems that need fixing. Strengths-based approaches build reciprocity, trust, and identity affirmation into developmental relationships.

- **Increase staff capacity for building and maintaining developmental relationships among groups and organizations that work with youth.** The ability to form strong connections with young people is not fixed and can increase through reflection, training, and practice. While adults' relational competencies should not be assumed, many people who work with youth already have a desire for, and a history of, building positive relationships with young people. Youth-serving organizations should build on this history by helping staff learn from one another and develop their relational skills. Adults can learn intentional, relationship-forming skills through concrete, action-oriented examples. These small but intentional interactions are important first steps in forming developmental relationships. For example, learning a secret handshake or an inside joke might build a meaningful developmental relationship with a young person. By prioritizing relationships, organizations can encourage staff to be as intentional with relational skill development as they are with other professional development activities.
- **Ensure that programs that foster developmental relationships are culturally responsive and inclusive.** Valuing youth culture is a key component of developmental relationships, so cultural responsiveness—identifying and nurturing cultural strengths to promote achievement and a sense of belonging—should be prioritized. This often requires additional staff support in fostering inclusive environments and engaging in dialogue across identities. While shared cultures and identities—especially those regarding race or ethnicity—can be foundational in forming developmental relationships, cultural dissimilarities are not disqualifying factors for engagement. Programs that promote developmental relationships should support and encourage staff and volunteers to form relationships with all young people—not just those with similar experiences—by providing opportunities for intentional interaction in supportive settings.
- **Reorganize learning environments and curricula so they prioritize and promote developmental relationships.** Because schools are primary settings for developmental relationships, learning environments and core educational requirements must be reformed to promote deeper connections between students and staff. This might include restructuring educators' schedules to allow for more opportunities to interact with students, reconfiguring homerooms or other cohort assignments to support multi-year relationships between teachers and students, or implementing professional development opportunities that give teachers, staff, and volunteers concrete strategies to engage with youth.
- **Provide families with supports that promote developmental relationships in the home.** Reducing stress on adult caregivers and giving them skills to build developmental relationships will promote developmental relationships within the home. Alleviating stress by providing financial

assistance or health insurance can increase adults' capacity to engage in developmental relationships. As with teachers, parents' and caregivers' ability to connect with youth is not fixed. They can acquire new skills to form developmental relationships through learning opportunities and concrete, action-oriented examples.

THE UNTRANSLATED EXPERT STORY OF DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

What are developmental relationships and how do they work?

- Developmental relationships are interactions between two people that promote positive cognitive, social, and emotional growth.
- Developmental relationships are catalysts for skill-development and self-development.
- Developmental relationships have five core features.
- Sustained contact enhances developmental relationships.
- Developmental relationships occur across many settings with a diversity of people.
- Developmental relationships outside of the family are especially important during adolescence.
- Access to multiple types of developmental relationships is important because different types confer different benefits.

What are the benefits of developmental relationships?

- Youth who have developmental relationships are more likely to succeed in school and work.
- Youth who have developmental relationships experience better social and emotional health.
- Developmental relationships may mitigate the negative impacts of adverse experiences.
- Adults benefit from engaging in developmental relationships with youth.
- Developmental relationships have economic, social, and civic benefits for society.

Which factors influence whether young people have developmental relationships?

- Adults play a strong role in determining whether young people have developmental relationships.
- Community organizations can create opportunities for developmental relationships.
- Poverty and a lack of community resources can limit access to developmental relationships.

- Racial discrimination and social marginalization can limit access to developmental relationships in communities of color.
- The structure of the education system shapes educators' ability to engage in developmental relationships.

How can we foster better developmental relationships for more young people?

- Incorporate “relationship first” policies across systems.
- Take a strengths-based approach that builds on young people’s existing interests and abilities.
- Increase staff competency for developmental relationships by providing training opportunities in groups and organizations that work with youth.
- Ensure that programs that foster developmental relationships are culturally responsive and inclusive.
- Reorganize learning environments and curricula so they prioritize developmental relationships and promote connections in educational settings.
- Provide families with supports that create opportunities for developmental relationships at home.

Public Understandings of Relationships

This section presents the **cultural models**—the shared but implicit understandings, assumptions, and patterns of reasoning—that shape how members of the public think about relationships and their role in children’s and youth’s development. These ways of thinking are available to *all* members of the American public, although different models may be activated at different times, or be more salient among different groups of people.

It is important to emphasize at the outset that people are able to think about relationships in multiple ways. People toggle between models, reasoning with different ones at different times, depending on context and conversational cues. Some models are dominant, in that they more consistently and predictably shape people’s thinking, while others are recessive and play a less prominent role.

In addition, some cultural models are productive and facilitate a fuller understanding of relationships and their role in development, while others are unproductive, making it difficult for people to recognize the importance of developmental relationships, how they work, and how to promote them. Understanding this complex landscape of public thinking is critical for effective communications; it enables communicators to avoid triggering unproductive ways of thinking, and to frame messages in ways that allow them to better get their points across.

We begin by describing the *foundational* cultural models of relationships—the public’s different ways of thinking about what relationships are and their role in life that, in turn, organize their thinking about developmental relationships. We explore public thinking about what shapes young people’s relationships, and then turn to a related set of models of how relationships work. These models relate to how relationships proceed and how they affect participants. We conclude with a brief discussion of people’s thinking—or, more accurately, their lack of thinking—about how to promote developmental relationships.

WHAT ARE RELATIONSHIPS?

Members of the public have three different ways of thinking about what relationships are that are particularly relevant to their understandings about developmental relationships: (1) the *Unconditional Commitment* model; (2) the *Reciprocal Exchange* model; and (3) the *Shared Goals* model. Please note that particular cultural models and kinds of relationships are linked; for example, people tend to think about parent-child relationships using the *Unconditional Commitment* model and coach-player relationships using the *Shared Goals* model. Nevertheless, these links are not ironclad. People use all three models to think about the range of different relationships.

After presenting these three foundational models of relationships, we discuss two different ways that the public categorizes or differentiates between types of relationships. These models provide different ways of thinking about a young person's set of relationships taken together. These definitional models have profound implications for those working to build programs that foster developmental relationships. The different assumptions behind them lead to different thinking about whether and how relationships can be intentionally fostered.

THREE FOUNDATIONAL MODELS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The *Unconditional Commitment* Cultural Model

According to this model, the central tenet of all close relationships is unconditional commitment and concern. True relationships, in this way of thinking, are not instrumental; they are not grounded in what participants get from one another. Commitment to and concern for the other person is not conditional on their actions; it is attached to the person themselves.

This commitment is usually grounded in and expressed through love. Love is, people assume, the key to a healthy relationship between parents and children, siblings, and partners in romantic relationships. Similarly, when using this model to think about friendship, participants stressed the feelings of mutual affection that undergird friendship.

Researcher: *What are some of the expectations in a parent-child relationship?*

Participant: ***There has to be love.*** *There definitely has to be love.*

Researcher: *What kind of relationships should [people] encounter as children?*

Participant: ***Loving relationships.*** *Supportive relationships. Accepting relationships. Nonjudgmental relationships.*

Researcher: *Can you elaborate a little more on what's going on in really positive [relationships]?*

Participant: *Anything positive is **connected to love** in some way. And then love is broke up into acceptance and some kind of growth, but it all has a positive impact on the person that's giving or sharing that and the person that's receiving.*

These feelings of love and affection generate a commitment to care for the other person that is not contingent on convenience or mutual benefit. In other words, deep concern for the other produces a sense of responsibility to help in times of need. In family relationships, this entails parents' responsibility to meet children's physical and emotional needs. In romantic relationships or among friends, this means an obligation to remain loyal and provide assistance whenever needed.

Researcher: *Why are parents obligated to children?*

Participant: *You're responsible for the child. And my view is, the child didn't ask to be born, so if you have a child, it's almost like you are telling yourself, "Okay, I'm going to have a child. I'm responsible for this child. **I'm obligated to take care of them** and make sure their needs are being met, and this is what I have to do."*

Researcher: *What are the necessary features for a friendship to go well, for it to be a positive thing?*

Participant: *At least a partial desire to want to help that person in some way. I mean, when the chips are down, you don't want to be like, "Not my circus, not my monkeys." I love to say that. Because, shit, once I say they're my monkey, they're my monkey. Can't kick them out of the circus then.*

While love is one source of unconditional commitment and concern, the model can extend to other forms of caring as well. Participants sometimes used the model to explain special relationships between teachers or coaches and children. When thinking in this way, participants characterized these relationships as enduring connections that go beyond adults' professional obligations. The assumption is that teachers or coaches and children can develop relationships in which they truly and deeply care for the other's wellbeing, and, when this happens, the relationship becomes one of unconditional commitment.

Researcher: *What would it mean for the relationship between children and their teachers or coaches to be a good relationship?*

Participant: *For children and teachers, is that they have a relationship that lasts well beyond their school years. That you can always come back to this professor. That you feel like, "I can always come back to this professor because they cared about me, and if I have a question, I can refer back to them." Coach is the same thing. Kids need to be able to revert back to their coach, come back and get more help. You know, it's martial arts, that's what it is. Your sensei is always your sensei until he dies.*

The Reciprocal Exchange Cultural Model

The *Reciprocal Exchange* cultural model assumes that relationships are based on give and take rather than unconditional commitment. The model is typically applied to nonfamilial relationships, including friendships and romantic relationships. The model is premised on the idea that relationships involve and depend on the reciprocal exchange of assistance, favors, respect, or love. This is a transactional model in which a relationship is conditional on some form of exchange: If someone is not participating fully in the exchange, it is not a “good” relationship and therefore likely to break down. What keeps the relationship going is a kind of tit-for-tat in which the people in the relationship take turns helping each other.

Participant: *I think there’s a lot of reasons why people might have a relationship with other people. But I think, at a base level, they’re very selfish, believe it or not. And the only reason why I say that is, if we’re joining a group for a project or something at work, we’re doing that because, at the end, we want the recognition or the monetary success that comes with achieving that project. If we enter a romantic relationship, although we care about the other person, at the same time, it is self-serving—because that person gives me warmth, comfort, security, monetary security, or a lot of other things.*

Participant: *And there’s all kind of red flags that can go off before [a romantic] relationship. If you find out you’re paying all the time, this person never even offers to pay. And you know, money is the big aspect in a relationship. And if you’re not both in it to win it.*

Participants drew on this model to think about relationships between children and adults, although it was more recessive than when people were thinking about relationships between people of similar ages. Participants suggested that the primary benefit that adults derive from relationships with children is a sense of fulfillment. When reasoning in this way, participants suggested that adults engage in relationships with children—particularly nonfamilial relationships—*because* they are personally rewarding or fulfilling. While this benefit is solely emotional, the logic of exchange undergirds this kind of thinking.

Researcher: *Do adults get any benefit from their relationships with children?*

Participant: *They might get an emotional connection. Like, they have a care-taking personality, and they really want to mentor kids in their lives, and they really want to develop people just because it gives them so much **emotional reward** for doing that.*

Researcher: *What do you think are the benefits for the teachers or the coaches?*

Participant: *I think there is a sense of fulfillment that they have done their job well. So professionally, there is a feeling that I did my job and I did it well, and you are helping to develop a kid’s matriculation as they go forward in life. And aside from **professional fulfillment**, it is personal fulfillment too.*

The Shared Goals Cultural Model

The third way that people think about relationships is as partnerships grounded in shared goals. Like the *Reciprocal Exchange* model, this model is an instrumental one (in that relationships are understood as a means of achieving a desirable end). In the *Shared Goals* model, though, the commitment to, and pursuit of, the shared end binds the relationship. As with the *Unconditional Commitment* and *Reciprocal Exchange* models, participants used *Shared Goals* to think about a range of different types of relationships.

Participant: *A relationship is two people who get together and decide goals and do what they can to reach those goals. That's what I believe a relationship is.*

Participant: *We're going towards a common goal, whether it be a business relationship where we're taking a coffee shop and we're moving it from one centralized location in a small city, and we're trying to expand to maybe two or three different ones. We have that—"Okay, this is our goal. Let's sit down. Let's write these goals out." They're business goals. [...] Versus where you have a relationship goal, maybe boyfriend-girlfriend type, normally you wouldn't sit down and write the expectations out. You know, for some individuals, that might work. But I think that is key: the respect and understanding and making sure, when you form those relationships, you have to have those in common. Because, although opposites do attract, if you're not **working towards the same goal**, most likely you're going to fail in any type of relationship—family, business, work—anything.*

The *Shared Goals* model is a dominant model used to think about relationships between young people and adults who aren't their parents. Teachers, coaches, and mentors work with children and young people to achieve a shared aim—usually cultivation of a new skill or achievement of a life goal—and develop a relationship in the course of this partnership.

Participant: *Ideally, we would like all teachers to have a positive impact on our kids. And I think that they help them aspire to goals, to college. Maybe they're having those conversations with the kids that are not happening at home: "You're doing well. You could be the first one to go to college. You could graduate from an honors college." And really push those kids to succeed academically, which will, in turn, help them later on in life.*

Researcher: *What would it look like for a child and his or her teacher to have a good relationship?*

Participant: *I think one where the teacher's encouraging them to succeed. They're setting a goal [...] and it's like [...] here's how you do it.*

TWO MODELS FOR DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN RELATIONSHIPS

The Concentric Circles Cultural Model

Participants sometimes treated relationships as similar and, when talking about their differences, focused on varying degrees of intimacy and influence on a child's life. People described familial relationships as at the center of children's lives, and other relationships as concentric outer circles with less influence and intimacy.

Researcher: *Can you talk a little bit about the impact of the relationships on children?*

Participant: *It depends on how close the connection is. [First] is the family, and then you've got the school and the friends, and peers, and then you've got the mentors, the things that don't really get as close to them. And then you've got life. I mean, it's **like the different levels of the sun**.*

Participant: *Parents give you your basic foundation of morals, right and wrong, what to do, how to treat people. Your coach or minister gives you a **secondary** set of values that mesh with the first set of values that they teach you.*

When people are thinking with this model, they tend to see nonfamilial relationships as reinforcing or buttressing the family—not as providing different benefits or serving different purposes. Instead, relationships outside the family are seen as complementary, supplementing the lessons and resources that children attain primarily at home.

The Different Boxes Cultural Model

At other times, participants treated relationships as fundamentally different. According to the *Different Boxes* model, relationships are differentiated based on their different function or purpose. Families give children unconditional love and have the primary responsibility for children's wellbeing. Teachers, coaches, and mentors help children achieve academic and other goals. Friends help children develop their personal identities. In short, because relationships with different people serve different roles, children need a variety of relationship types as they develop.

Researcher: *Are relationships with particular people especially important?*

Participant: *All of them, in a **different way**. They all play a role. My mom and dad could have given me love, but the confidence I have with certain things I do, the way I carry myself in a social environment, is not from my parents; it's influenced by my friends. And then your teachers [...] They all play a significant role, and they all make you who you are.*

Participant: *Different people are responsible for **different dimensions** of a child [...] The roles of those relationships can be different.*

Although this model creates room for a variety of developmental relationships, it also implicitly assumes that relationships are unexchangeable. Different relationships, in other words, fit in different boxes. Familial relationships, for example, can't fill the box for teacher-student relationships, and vice versa.

Communications Implications of Models of Relationships

1. **The Unconditional Commitment model puts a high bar on meaningful relationships.** This model provides people with a way to understand the power and impact of important relationships. But, by locating power in unconditional commitment, it limits an understanding of how common these relationships can be, and who they can be with. If meaningful relationships require unconditional love or concern, then they will primarily be found only among family, romantic partners, or one's closest friends. Finding unconditional commitment in relationships between children and other adults—for example, with teachers or coaches—is the exception to the rule. This model constrains thinking about the possibility of intentionally promoting developmental relationships, and leads people to see developmental relationships with multiple adults outside the family as unrealistic. Communicators need strategies to explain that relationships do not require unlimited, never-ending commitment and investment to be transformative and expressions of love, mutual trust, and abiding concern.
2. **The Reciprocal Exchange model helps people see the mutual benefits of developmental relationships but may undermine thinking about their transformative potential.** When using this model, people view relationships as bidirectional. This is productive because it implies that young people and adults alike benefit from developmental relationships. Communicators can leverage this model to help people recognize that developmental relationships are and must be mutual, and that they go beyond adult-to-child, one-directional support. At the same time, this model instrumentalizes relationships; in so doing, it may undercut recognition of the transformative power of developmental relationships. If relationships are merely a means to a self-interested end, it is hard to see how they can transform children's and adolescents' identities or expectations in deep ways. To avoid this downside, communicators should stress the reciprocity of developmental relationships, but be careful not to characterize them in overly instrumental terms.
3. **The Shared Goals model helps people see the benefits of developmental relationships without instrumentalizing the relationship itself.** This model helps people understand why relationships are instrumentally useful (because they help people achieve goals) while positioning the people in the relationship as *partners* rather than as opposed parties extracting benefits

from each other (as does the *Reciprocal Exchange* model). It also conceptually aligns with many of the developmental relationships that experts emphasize, such as relationships that grow out of sports, religion, the arts, Scouting, work, and vocational activities. To cue this model, communicators should emphasize the shared quality of goals and facilitate non-instrumental thinking about relationships themselves.

4. **The *Concentric Circles* model prioritizes familial relationships in ways that may undercut the importance of relationships in other domains.** While this model recognizes the vital, sustained role of family relationships, and allows room for important relationships outside of the family, it characterizes nonfamilial relationships as optional, secondary, and supplementary to familial ones. To help people understand the necessity of nonfamilial adult-child relationships, communicators should stress the ways in which they serve critical functions for children that go beyond what can and should happen within families.
5. **The *Different Boxes* model helps people see the importance of relationships outside of the family.** This model enables people to recognize that children need a variety of strong relationships that emphasize different aspects of development. Communicators can leverage this model by stressing the complementary nature of different relationships; doing so will help people see the value of a range of nonfamilial relationships. This model does have a potential downside: It leads people to conclude that relationships outside the family cannot replace weak or dysfunctional family relationships. Further research is needed to determine how best to frame nonfamilial relationships that serve as substitutes for familial ones.

HOW RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORK

Members of the public have different ways of thinking about how relationships between adults and children work. Each model provides a specific way of understanding the dynamics of the relationship—what happens, or should happen, between the adult and the child.

The *Molding Cultural* Model

The *Molding* model assumes that adults mold children into proper shape in adult-child relationships. The model is grounded in an understanding of children as passive and malleable objects.¹ Children are “impressionable,” and an adult’s role is to form their characters into good shape.

Participant: *Because they’re little, you can mold them into the way you think they should be.*

Participant: *And [childhood] encompasses a time that we’re learning everything and we’re being shaped and **molded**.*

Participant: *I think, just in general, [children have] very impressionable mindsets—somebody who hasn't gained the worldly experience that comes with being exposed to a lot of things. And I think that what comes along with that is a sense of naiveness. So, I think [they're] in need of protection, in need of guidance, needing character and moral development.*

In this model, only adults have agency. Relationships are understood as an intentional and one-directional shaping of the child by the adult. The model does not give children a role as active participants in their own growth and education. And they are understood to be passive recipients of relationships, rather than as having an active role in building and sustaining relationships.

The Empowerment Cultural Model

In sharp contrast to the *Molding* model, the *Empowerment* model locates agency in both adults and young people, though adults are assumed to have greater agency. This model, which is most commonly applied to adolescents, is premised on an active understanding of development: that growing up involves learning by doing, from trial and error, and making—and learning from—mistakes.² According to this model, adults' role in relationships with young people is to guide their development and personal growth by giving them opportunities to try new things, and by processing their experiences with them.

Participant: *There's going to be times in a kid's life that they may witness or they may be involved in something that is bigger than their cognitive understanding at that point. And then **getting an adult person to help them or guide them through** is really important.*

Researcher: *What makes for a good relationship with a teenager?*

Participant: *That's when I think the hands-off approach is even more important because your child is beginning to enter adulthood and they're learning a lot and **becoming more adept** and more of their own person. So, I think it's just, a good relationship should be one where there's **awareness and engagement** of what's going on. There's concern and a willingness to be curious about what's happening with that person's life, but also I think you need to **allow people to make mistakes**. You need to **allow teenagers to learn** what a healthy decision is.*

While the *Empowerment* model gives young people agency, it positions relationships between adults and youth as asymmetrical. Adults give young people opportunities to learn, and then youth reflect on their experiences while adults help them make sense of them and guide their decision-making process. Adults have a clear lead role—their greater experience and knowledge allows them to guide young people. But the ultimate goal of the relationship

is to help the child develop autonomy, good judgment, and self-identity, and this can only happen through active doing and learning. The model was sometimes applied, in moderated form, to younger children. People assumed that younger children need more guidance and stronger direction. However, people *are* capable of recognizing that even relationships with younger kids need not be purely one-sided and that children play active roles through dialogue and some measure of autonomy.

The Cycle of Self-Esteem Cultural Model

When thinking about the role of relationships in development, people frequently described a cyclical relationship between self-esteem and trust. In this way of thinking, strong, trusting relationships cultivate self-esteem in children. When adults demonstrate, through reliability and support, that they value a child, the child learns to value themselves. Self-esteem, in turn, enables children to build relationships with others. The assumption is that, when people value themselves, they're able to believe that others will value them too; they are then better able to trust others, which is vital for the development of meaningful relationships. Because people assume that family relationships are foundational and of primary importance in children's lives, this dynamic is most frequently applied to parent-child relationships. However, this model does not exclusively apply to the family. Participants in interviews occasionally applied it to relationships outside the family. They saw nonfamilial relationships as capable of either fostering self-esteem and initiating a virtuous cycle of relationship-building, or as undermining self-esteem and initiating a vicious cycle, ultimately making successful relationships impossible.

Participant: *The parent can be an addict, the parent just doesn't care, the parent is not doing what they are supposed to do. I guess the kid is saying, "Well, if my mom and dad can't do that, what is Ms. Smith going to do for me? What is the teacher going to do for me?" They are just going to think we are trash or whatever. It might be harder for them to gain trust in an adult because of what they see in their home life.*

Participant: *When you're secure in a relationship and you're secure in that attachment, when you trust it—meaning you trust that that person loves you and is there for you no matter what, and that you love them and you're there for them no matter what—I believe that results in more independent, self-sufficient people.*

Researcher: *Why is [trust in parents] important at that age [adolescence]?*

Participant: *Because it's the mentality of the kid. Because as the kid grows, the trust and the respect and everything has to be in place.*

Although participants occasionally applied this model to older children, they typically assumed that trusting relationships must be established in early childhood; otherwise, children's ability to establish healthy relationships would be permanently undermined. The *Cycle of Self-Esteem* model thus helps to explain a model we have consistently found in our work on early child development—that *Damage Done is Damage Done*.³ According to this model, once children have been “damaged” by abuse, neglect, or emotionally dysfunctional relationships, they are beyond repair.

Participant: *If you don't have people showing you love and kindness and teaching you, how do you learn? And I think there's a certain amount of emotional—I don't want to say emotional retardation, because it's not the word that I'm looking for. The lack of somebody that loves you, someone to show you kindness, someone to care for you. [...] If you don't have any ties to people, how can you sympathize and empathize and grow up to be a good person?*

Participant: *If [a child] comes from a broken home and a dysfunctional home, you are probably going to have a bad kid. Someone that's acting up and trouble, not good for anybody.*

The Normalization Cultural Model

As we have identified in other work on child development,⁴ members of the American public frequently discuss relationships between adults and children in terms of norms and expectation-setting. In this way of thinking, adults intentionally or unintentionally teach children what is “normal” through example—by modeling behavior. In this way of thinking, children are passive but keen observers who learn by seeing and mimicking adults around them. The relationship dynamic is one-directional—from adult to child—and often unintentional, as adults set expectations and norms whether they mean to or not.

Researcher: *Are there other things a child needs in order to do well?*

Participant: ***Being around** positive individuals. There's a lot of time where you see kids that act out because of what's going on at home. There's issues at home. There's screaming and yelling. And so, they're thinking that screaming and yelling is normal. "Because at my house, **everybody does it**. My parents are always arguing."*

Researcher: *What are the things children get from their parents?*

Participant: ***I would say they develop habits, opinions, including political beliefs, and the sort. I think there is a shadowing. I think a kid logically would shadow a parent's behavior as to how they conduct themselves.***

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL MODELS OF HOW RELATIONSHIPS WORK

- 1. The *Molding* model obscures the mutual benefits of relationships between children and adults.** This model is productive because it leads people to think that adults are integral to children's development. Yet it leaves no room for children's agency or for any reciprocity or mutuality in these relationships. It makes it difficult for people to understand that adults must foster developmental relationships by getting to know kids and taking steps that enable *them* to act and grow, rather than by imposing desirable characteristics on them. Communicators should avoid the familiar language of "molding" or "shaping" children, because this will cue this model and make it harder for people to understand key aspects of developmental relationships.
- 2. The *Empowerment* model facilitates understanding of developmental relationships.** Unlike other models of adult-child relationships, where power lies solely in the hands of the adult, this model assumes that young people *do* have agency and *can* make their own choices under adult guidance, not direction. This way of thinking helps people understand expert views of how developmental relationships function and are cultivated. It can help people recognize that, to foster developmental relationships, programs need to promote reciprocal relationships in which adults scaffold young people's growth and learning by providing them with opportunities to learn by doing. Communicators can take advantage of this model with linguistic cues such as the words "guiding" or "scaffolding" young people's learning and growth by helping kids process their experiences as they "learn by doing," "learn through trial and error," and "make mistakes and learn from them."
- 3. The *Cycle of Self-Esteem* model helps people recognize the value of trusting relationships—but can induce fatalism about "damaged" kids.** On one hand, this model captures, in a relatively accurate way, the importance of trusting relationships and their role in children's outcomes. Communicators may be able to leverage this understanding to argue for the importance of prioritizing programs to build developmental relationships and ensure that all children have trusting relationships, which will help them succeed in life. On the other hand, this model is largely applied to parental relationships; for example, people assume that children must have a secure attachment to their parents to establish self-confidence. This leads people to think that parental relationships are the ones that *really* matter; if they don't go well, then young people are permanently damaged and relationships with adults outside the family won't help much. Communicators can avoid cueing this kind of fatalism by emphasizing the transformative power of relationships outside the family and the plasticity of brain development during childhood and into early adulthood. Further research is needed to determine whether communicators can use this model without cueing fatalism.

4. **The Normalization model helps people see the value of role models but limits understanding of what developmental relationships involve.** This model helps people see the value of having positive adult role models in children's lives. But, like the *Molding* model, it makes it hard for people to recognize the value of mutuality and reciprocity in relationships. It also makes it difficult for the public to see how adults and young people can establish relationships across lines of difference, such as race/ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation. Communicators should be careful about talking too much about role models. While doing so may prompt support for prioritizing relationships, it will likely obscure key aspects of what happens *between* adults and children in developmental relationships. When mentioning role models, communicators should quickly pivot and use the language discussed above around the *Empowerment* model to describe the relationship itself, and then emphasize that these relationships can and should cross lines of difference.

WHAT SHAPES CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH'S RELATIONSHIPS?

The public has many ways of thinking about what shapes or influences the relationships that children and youth have. These models are connected to thinking about what relationships are and how they work, but they are nonetheless distinct models, providing ways to think about *who* and *what* shapes children's relationships, and how this influence works.

The *Family Foundation* Cultural Model

According to the *Family Foundation* model, parent-child relationships lay the foundation for all future relationships that children will have. The assumption is that the parental relationships are children's strongest and most important relationships because they shape how they will eventually choose and relate to friends and romantic partners.

Researcher: *How do you think that parent-child relationships end up influencing the child's life?*

Participant: *The relationship with your parent, or parents, or caregivers, is the first relationship you have, usually. It's literally **the foundation on which all other relationships in their life can be built.***

Participant: *The key [to good relationships] is having that good, positive social interaction. And when somebody doesn't, I think that it is like a domino effect. **It starts at home**, and then it affects school, and then it affects friendships and relationships, and it just continues to go down.*

The *Family Foundation* model is enmeshed with other models—both those of relationships reported here and those of child development that FrameWorks has identified in previous research. Across our work on child development, FrameWorks has found that Americans consistently assume that the family is the primary influence on how children develop and that, in early childhood, parental behavior is the only influence that matters. This model, known as the *Family Bubble*, appeared frequently in our interviews on developmental relationships.

Researcher: *The relationship that children have with their families—how does that affect children’s lives in general?*

Participant: *I’m going to say it 100 percent has to do with everything. Because every friend I’ve ever had, and every person I’ve ever spoken to, if you go to the root of it, it’s straight back to family.*

The *Family Bubble* model interacts with models of relationships to produce the assumption at the heart of the *Family Foundation* model: that family relationships determine other relationships. *The Unconditional Commitment* model contributes to this assumption by creating a picture of relationships that fits neatly with people’s picture of the family. Unconditional commitment to children is expected from parents—but is a lot to ask of others. This reinforces the idea that relationships with parents necessarily stand at the center of children’s lives and that relationships with others can never substitute for parent-child relationships.

Researcher: *How is the parent relationship different from other relationships that children have?*

Participant: *Because it’s a one-of-a-kind relationship. Because kids will have two parents, if they’re lucky. And those parents are all there is. So, once those parents are gone, that relationship is gone; there’s no more parents. It’s a one-of-a-kind relationship. It’s that special connection you just have to have. Because you’re not whole without it. Parents can’t be replaced.*

Researcher: *What role do coaches play in the child’s life?*

Participant: *It’s a **secondary** mentorship or secondary relationship other than the parents. The parents give you your basic foundation of morals, right and wrong, what to do, how to treat people. Your coach or minister gives you a **secondary** set of values that mesh with the first set of values that they teach you.*

The *Family Foundation* model is nourished as well by the *Cycle of Self-Esteem* and *Normalization* models, which offer different mechanisms by which parental relationships affect later relationships. According to the *Cycle of Self-Esteem* model, if children have a weak or dysfunctional relationship with their parents,

then their other relationships will suffer because they will be unable to trust or form secure attachments. Under the logic of the *Normalization* model, if parents are bad role models, then children will develop harmful expectations about relationships, which will make it harder for them to engage in healthy relationships as they grow up.

Participant: *Sometimes it's better for kids to get out of a toxic environment and go to a foster care situation if the foster situation is better. Because it can result in a lot of bad things for the kids if the parents aren't on the same page, and always fighting and arguing in front of them. It's just gonna regenerate itself. It's just like bad eating, you know? If the woman in the house and the men in the house are obese, chances are the kid is gonna be that way, too.*

The *Family Foundation* model is a dominant way of thinking about what shapes children's relationships. It was so strong that participants had a hard time thinking and talking about relationships outside of the family.

The *Caring Linchpin* Cultural Model

Members of the public widely assume that the quality of children's and youth's relationships is shaped to a significant degree by the attitudes of the adults in their lives. People assume that some parents and teachers care about kids, and others simply don't. This model has consistently surfaced in FrameWorks' projects on education, and in more recent work on family, school, and community engagement.⁵ On those issues, the model is used to describe "good" teaching or parenting. Poor parenting or teaching is attributed to lack of concern, while good teaching, by contrast, is attributed to parents and teachers who care deeply. People assume that parents and teachers who "care enough" will do a decent job.

Participant: *I think a school that does well is one that has a teacher who, first of all, **cares about their students.***

Caring is assumed to be a feature of individuals—some people just care, some just don't—which makes it hard for people to see how teaching and parenting can be improved through structured programs. The assumption is that if people don't care, not much can be done about it.

Researcher: *What would be the most important relationships for people?*

Participant: *That's difficult. Because some people don't care about marriage, and **some people don't care** about family, and some people don't care about friends.*

In our interviews on relationships, caring was similarly prominent and was assumed to determine whether adults are willing to enter into meaningful relationships with children. If adults don't care about children, they won't be willing to spend the time and energy developing relationships with them.

Researcher: *What's going on in those really positive relationships?*

Participant: *I think they care. In every relationship, do you see the child? Do you see if there's pain? **Do you want to help?***

Experts see caring as a component of relationships, and, in different ways, the definitional models discussed in the previous section all assume that adults and children must care about each other, conditionally or unconditionally. The *Caring Linchpin* model, however, is not about *relationships* or what happens between parties. Rather, it is about whether and how much adults care for kids. In other words, the degree to which adults care for kids determines whether kids can have meaningful relationships.

The Gendered Intimacy Cultural Model

People consistently assume that the gender of the participants profoundly shapes relationships between children and adults. People assume that cross-gender relationships have greater potential for intimacy than same-gender relationships. This model seems to be grounded in a heteronormative model of romantic relationships that is tacitly imported into platonic relationships.

Participants frequently talked about how cross-gender relationships in the family (father-daughter and mother-son) are particularly close. While familial relationships are, of course, assumed to be nonsexual, people assume that father-daughter and mother-son relationships lay the foundations for future romantic relationships, which are assumed to be heterosexual, and teach children how to engage in the kind of intimacy that romantic relationships require.

Participant: *It's usually **dads and daughters** and **moms and sons**; they usually connect more.*

Participant: *For a little girl, dad is her first boyfriend. For a little boy, mom is first girlfriend. It's very important.*

This heteronormative model of gendered intimacy also explains the frequent talk among participants about the need for adult men to be careful around teen girls. Participants treated cross-gender relationships outside of the family between people who are old enough to be sexually active as inherently sexualized.

Because of gendered assumptions about men as initiators of sexual activity and cultural norms around men's attraction to young women, participants described close relationships between adult men and adolescent girls as inappropriate.

Participant: *There's a training that they put you through if you're a coach. You never put an underage child in your car, ever, for any reason. Especially if you're a guy and put a girl in your car. Never, you know.*

Participant: *I've seen coaches' hand around a teenager's waist. I think that's important. **You shouldn't touch her, period.** At all. No contact. You're not their father; you just shouldn't do it.*

The Culture of Poverty Cultural Model

Participants sometimes suggested that poverty negatively impacts on children's relationships. This suggestion was sometimes grounded in the assumption that people in poverty have dysfunctional behavioral norms and raise their children to mimic these bad behaviors, which perpetuates poverty. This model couples stereotypes about people in poverty—that they share a “culture of poverty” that perpetuates bad values and norms—with the logic of normalization, which explains why this culture is passed on automatically to young people.

We have identified the *Culture of Poverty* model in previous research on other issues, where it is used to explain a range of social outcomes.⁶ In our interviews on relationships, this model was used to explain why people in poverty develop dysfunctional relationships: they develop unhealthy expectations about relationships based on the relationships they see around them.

Participant: *If you're on welfare in the county all your life, what is the kid seeing? And that's what they're seeing. So, the chances are that's the type of person they're gonna seek out. That's the type of person they're gonna seek a relationship with—somebody who knows the game of welfare, the game of food stamps.*

Researcher: *Are there particular groups of children who tend to lack strong relationships?*

Participant: *Poor neighborhoods, which generally tend to be, in this town, Hispanic or African-American neighborhoods. If the family is involved in crime, oftentimes dad's gone, or someone's gone, and the relationships they had when they left are damaged. From our viewpoint as law-abiding citizens, not great. You've got people who are either criminals or tolerate criminals. People with incarcerated parents especially, because they're going to lack the parent. Or they've got a negative role model if they've got any. Not a positive one.*

This model obscures the role that structural conditions play in producing and perpetuating poverty. By attributing poverty to individuals' values, it prevents people from seeing the ways in which history and current policies that discriminate against people in poverty—especially people of color in poverty—keep them in poverty. The model similarly backgrounds the structural, rather than cultural, ways in which poverty affects children's relationships.

The *Environments Matter* Cultural Model

In contrast to the *Culture of Poverty* model, the *Environments Matter* model offers a structural, if thin, understanding of how social and economic environments affect relationships. The model assumes that the material and social resources in children's environments shape their development: "good" environments provide children with the material and social resources they need for healthy development, while environments that lack these resources make it more difficult for young people to do well. In this way of thinking, material constraints can limit people's opportunities to build healthy relationships by, for example, limiting the time that adults and children can spend with each other, or by limiting children's access to spaces where they might build positive relationships with adults.

Participant: *In school, there are certain things that are offered to children, like, they used to do the Girl Scout program, where a Girl Scout leader will come out to the school and show us a few things, but then you have to pay like \$30 or \$45 for a membership. I think that a lot of the things that are offered in schools you have to pay for. And **not everyone has money to be able to pay for things like that.** All these children are in free and reduced lunch programs, but then **you expect them to pay \$35 to be able to make a friend.** How are they going to do that?*

Researcher: *How do [impoverished] circumstances affect the parent-child relationship?*

Participant: *They've got to work to support their kids. If you're working, you're not with the kid.*

Participant: *It's hard to keep your kids out of gangs and drugs when you live in the middle of gangs and drugs.*

This model is recessive; it is less prominent in people's thinking than the above models. It is also relatively thin, in the sense that it does not provide a clear way of understanding the link between the availability or absence of resources and children's relationships. While it helps people see that resources affect relationships, it does not provide a full understanding of the range of ways that material environments influence relationships.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS OF MODELS OF INFLUENCE

- 1. The *Family Foundation* model limits the recognition that relationships beyond the family are important to development.** The model is thus highly unproductive for communicators arguing for elevating relationship-building in spaces outside the family. By promoting the idea that nonfamilial relationships cannot ever replace what parent-child relationships provide, the model directly undermines the agenda of cultivating developmental relationships between a wide range of adults and children. While family relationships are, of course, vital, communicators should focus their communications real estate on nonfamilial relationships to avoid reinforcing the public's tendency to focus solely on familial relationships.
- 2. The *Caring Linchpin* model makes systemic ways of promoting developmental relationships “hard to think.”** Members of the public tend to explain whether children and youth have developmental relationships as dependent on the motivation of the adults in their lives, which makes it hard for them to see how environments structure opportunities to build and access developmental relationships. Communicators should avoid overemphasizing the importance of care or concern, as this is likely to focus people on adults' personal attributes, rather than on the features of the environment that facilitate or obstruct developmental relationships.
- 3. The *Gendered Intimacy* model hampers thinking about cross-gender relationships.** This model not only reinscribes heterosexist assumptions, but also constrains thinking about who can build developmental relationships with whom. Members of the public assume that relationships between adult men and adolescent girls need to be at arm's length because of the possibility—or perceived possibility—of inappropriate behavior. People's gendered modeling of relationships leads people to write off a whole category of possible developmental relationships up front. Communicators need strategies to effectively challenge these assumptions. Further research is needed to know which strategies will work best.
- 4. The *Culture of Poverty* model stigmatizes people in poverty and obscures how poverty structurally constrains relationships.** This model is unproductive in a wide range of ways, including that it reinforces negative stereotypes of people in poverty. It prevents people from seeing how people's material environment structurally shapes opportunities to build and access relationships, which prevents people from recognizing the need to take affirmative steps to provide access to relationships. In locating problems in the values or “culture” of impoverished families and children, and depicting the perpetuation of this purportedly negative culture as an unbreakable cycle, it also leads people to assume that providing young people with positive relationships won't make a difference, and that adults from outside that “culture” won't be able to connect with young people across that line of

difference. To avoid cuing this model, communicators should avoid linking values or culture to poverty in any way.

5. **The *Environments Matter* model offers a productive, structural way of thinking about how factors and resources outside the family influence children's relationships.** Communicators should strengthen and expand this recessive and thin model. As noted above, it helps people understand that material and social environments matter for relationships, but it does not provide people with a full understanding of the various ways this happens. Finding effective strategies for explaining these mechanisms is vital. Unless people understand the connection between environments and access to relationships, they will not see why changes to children's environments, through large-scale programs that make developmental relationships available to children, are necessary. Identifying the best ways to accomplish this is a key task for future research.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROMOTE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

Members of the public had very little to say about how to foster positive relationships between adults and young people. They suggested a couple of things, but these ideas were thin and emerged only when participants were explicitly asked to suggest ways to promote relationship-building.

Personal Effort

People tended to fall back on the idea that adults in young people's lives have an individual responsibility to care about and build relationships with these children. People assumed that strong relationships between children and adults outside the family develop because adults take it upon themselves to forge a connection, not because the environment fosters these relationships.

Researcher: *How do good relationships between coaches or leaders of programs come about?*

Participant: *The leader has to want to. Like they want to be there. It's really because they want to, because most of the time those are either volunteer or they get just a tiny little stipend, so they want to do it.*

Researcher: *Are there things that can be done to improve the relationships children are making with adults?*

Participant: *Honestly, I think it comes down to the individual behaviors. Unless you want a shit ton of forced government control, which, in the States, depending on where you are, people like or don't. Unless you force it on people, I don't really think there is. You got to have **buy-in**.*

When participants suggested that teachers or other adults outside the family should build relationships with children, they assumed it should happen through the personal initiative of adults, rather than inspired and supported through programs or resources provided by the school or community. In thinking about role models and mentoring, for example, people attributed these relationships to the personal desire and effort of the adults involved, rather than to programs that enable these relationships to develop.

Teach Children Relationship Skills

When members of the public *did* think programmatically about how positive relationships might be promoted, they tended to focus on teaching children relationship skills from a young age.

Participant: *Ideally, there would be a national program of some sort implemented to teach kids, age appropriately, from pre-K all the way through high school, about what a healthy relationship is, what respect is.*

Researcher: *Do you think there are any programs or policy changes we could make to positively affect the relationships kids have with adults?*

Participant: *Like a friendship class or relationship class. It doesn't have to be a formal class when they're tiny. We could have a friendship learning corner, or something. You take the half hour out of the kindergartener's day, and we talk about scenarios that are age appropriate.*

This way of thinking puts the onus on children themselves to develop relationships. Here, schools' role is not to directly cultivate relationships or give adults the capacity to initiate positive relationships with children, but rather to equip kids to participate in relationships where they present themselves. This solution likely comes to mind when people are thinking with the *Family Foundation* or *Culture of Poverty* models, which lead people to believe that children from “broken” homes or “toxic” communities lack the ability to form positive relationships because they have been damaged by their family or community environment. Programs that teach children how to form and sustain relationships would, presumably, be designed to counter these negative early influences.

Programs and Policies: A Cognitive Hole

When asked to think about programs or policies that might help promote positive relationships, participants had few concrete ideas beyond teaching relationship skills to children. This is a result of the overarching tendency, reinforced by the various cultural models reviewed in this report, to view relationships as a product of highly personal factors, rather than as phenomena supported by structural factors that programs and policies address. With the exception of the recessive *Environments Matter* model, the public lacks

productive ways of situating relationships in a broader social and material context. As we suggested earlier, foregrounding and deepening structural ways of thinking about the factors that shape relationships is a precondition for opening up productive thinking about programs and policies that address these factors.

Researcher: *Are there any other sort of programs or organizations that you think might fill that need for, maybe, kids who don't have strong relationships?*

Participant: *No, I don't know of many.*

Researcher: *Do you think there are any programs or policies in particular that would help children have good relationships?*

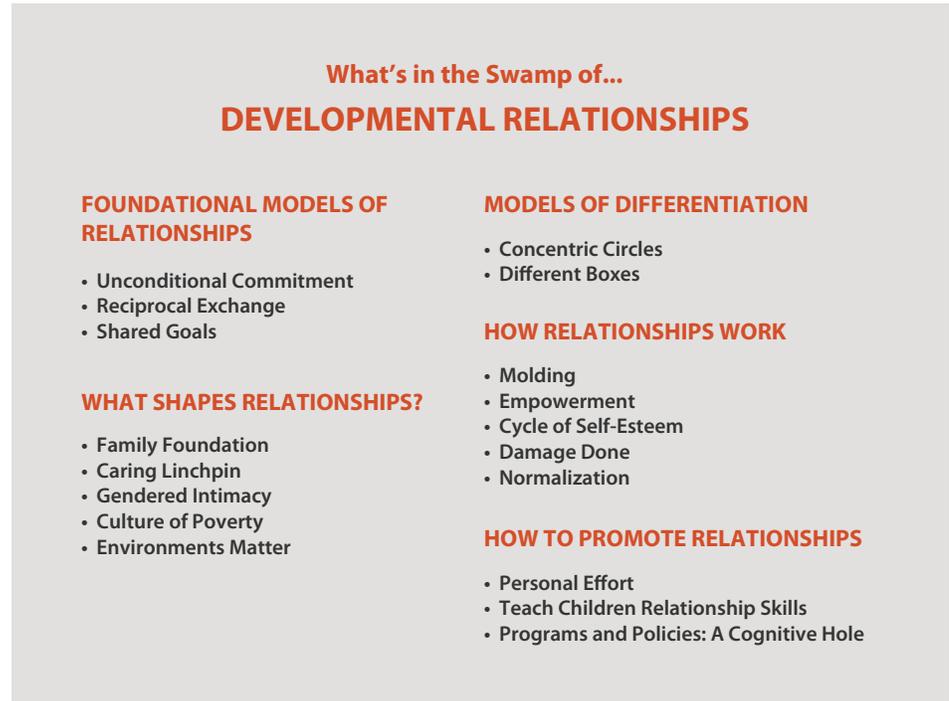
Participant: *I'm sure there is. I just can't think of anything off the top of my head. Just drawing a blank.*

Communications Implications of Solutions Thinking

1. **The focus on personal effort in building relationships detracts from the need for programmatic and policy solutions.** Although relationship-building does, of course, require personal effort and engagement, communicators should make sure to stress instead the institutional steps needed to support developmental relationships.
2. **The idea of teaching relationship skills to children obscures the need for institutions and organizations to address access to relationships and adult capacity.** While there is nothing inherently wrong with teaching relationship skills to children, this should not be presented as the only or primary way of addressing children's lack of positive, developmental relationships. Communicators should always stress the need to address access to relationships and adult capacity to engage in them, rather than putting the onus on children, which could cause people to blame children for lacking positive relationships.
3. **The public's inability to identify programmatic and policy solutions is both a symptom and an opportunity.** The public's difficulty in thinking of programs or policies that could foster developmental relationships grows out of people's highly personalized, decontextualized ways of thinking about relationships. Communicators must bring social context into view to make programmatic and policy solutions seem appropriate. At the same time, the public's inattention to policy solutions is also an opportunity. The public does not have any reservations about programs or policies for promoting relationships that communicators must actively counter. As a result, once we identify effective ways to introduce these programs and policies, communicators have an open lane in moving these into public consciousness.

THE SWAMP OF DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Taken together, the cultural models presented above comprise the “swamp” of cultural models of developmental relationships. These are the implicit understandings and assumptions that lie just under the surface and that become active when representatives from these three groups are asked to think about engagement. The following graphic depicts this swamp of understanding.



Mapping the Gaps: Key Communications Challenges

In this report, we have reviewed how experts explain developmental relationships and described the underlying patterns of thinking that shape how members of the public think about these relationships. In this section, we identify the overlaps between expert and public understandings, and map the gaps between them to reveal important communications challenges and opportunities for Search Institute, and others in this field.

OVERLAPS BETWEEN EXPERT AND PUBLIC UNDERSTANDINGS

There are several points of overlap between expert and public understandings of relationships. These overlaps represent the common ground that communicators can build on to communicate key ideas about developmental relationships and to increase support for programs and policies that encourage and sustain these relationships.

Experts and the public:

- Agree that children and youth benefit from **strong, healthy relationships outside the family**.
- Understand that adults other than parents—such as teachers, coaches, and mentors—**influence children’s outcomes and can help them achieve their goals**.
- Recognize, at least at points, that **relationships between adults and young people can be reciprocal**, with each party contributing to and benefiting from the relationship.
- Recognize, at least at points, that **relationships can be built on shared expectations and be goal-oriented**.

- Understand that **different relationships can provide different benefits** to children's development.
- Recognize, at least at points, that **adults provide guidance in developmental relationships, but that youth must have the agency** to make choices and mistakes.
- Agree that **trust is a critical component of positive relationships** between children and adults.

GAPS BETWEEN EXPERT AND PUBLIC UNDERSTANDINGS

There are also significant gaps between expert and public understandings of relationships. These gaps represent areas where reframing is needed to shift and expand the public discussion around developmental relationships.

1. Relationship Partners: Diverse People vs. Family First and Foremost.

Experts argue that, while familial relationships are a key component of children and young people's development, relationships with other adults and peers are vital and can also be transformative. Members of the public, by contrast, are often so focused on familial relationships, particularly those between parents and children, that other relationships fall out of view. The public's focus on the family is a major barrier to adopting experts' affirmative agenda, which focuses primarily on relationships outside the family.

2. Relationship Dynamic: Bidirectional vs. Unidirectional.

According to experts, developmental relationships are necessarily mutual and reciprocal, in the sense that both adults and young people contribute to and benefit from the relationship. While members of the public can, at times, think about relationships between adults and children as reciprocal, people often think about these relationships as a one-way link in which adults act for children's benefit. This simultaneously disempowers children and obscures the benefits that adults receive from engaging in developmental relationships with children.

3. Role of Children: Active vs. Passive.

This gap is closely tied to the previous one. Experts see children as having an active role as contributors to the relationship and as increasingly autonomous persons in the world. While the public sometimes understands children in a similar way—particularly when thinking with the *Empowerment* model—people frequently think of children as passive objects, not active subjects, both within relationships and in the world. Understanding developmental relationships requires shifting from a passive model of children to an active one.

4. Adverse Experiences: Capable of Being Addressed vs. Impossible to Repair.

Experts argue that, when children experience adverse events, supportive relationships help address the harm caused by trauma and buffer against negative outcomes. Members of the public, on the other hand, think that children who have experienced trauma, lack secure attachment with parents, or children raised in poverty are beyond repair; the damage caused

by these experiences is impossible to repair and will prevent children from establishing strong, healthy relationships. The public assumes that if a child has experienced serious trauma, subsequent supportive relationships will not make much of a difference.

5. **Caring: One Feature of Relationships vs. Key Determinant.** Experts see care as one feature of developmental relationships but stress that there are other features as well, and that *establishing* developmental relationships requires environments that make them possible. For members of the public, care is not only seen as a central feature of any relationship but also a key *determinant* of whether young people have positive relationships. The public assumes that relationships stem from adults who care enough to establish a connection with children. This overwhelming emphasis on care as a determinant of relationships backgrounds the structural factors that facilitate or impede the building and maintenance of developmental relationships.
6. **Environmental Influence: Structure vs. Culture.** Experts argue that environments structure adults' and children's opportunities to develop positive, transformative relationships. The availability of resources—including time, training, and funding for shared activities—makes developmental relationships possible. When the public thinks about how environments affect relationships, people tend to focus on cultural factors such as values and norms, often bringing negative stereotypes of poor communities to bear in ways that blame these communities and contribute to fatalism about the possibility of building strong relationships for all children. Shifting people from purely cultural understandings of environments to more structural understandings is a central task for reframing.
7. **Cross-Gender Relationships: Valuable vs. Ill-advised.** While experts argue that adults of all kinds can build valuable, developmental relationships with all kinds of children, the public is wary of nonfamilial cross-gender relationships, particularly those between adult men and teen girls. The public's assumption that cross-gender relationships between adolescents and adults have an inevitable sexual dimension, in both reality and perception, severely constrains opportunities for developmental relationships for adolescents by cutting the pool of adults in half. Communicators need to find a way to counter this assumption while also assuring people that there are practical ways to manage perceptions of cross-gender developmental relationships that prevent people from "getting the wrong idea" about the nature of the relationships.
8. **Programs and Policies: Essential vs. Off the Radar.** Experts argue that developmental relationships must be actively promoted through programs, policies, and capacity-building in schools and communities. Members of the public, by contrast, see almost no role for policy. More generally, they see these relationships as developing organically and struggle to identify ways that they can be actively and intentionally fostered. As noted elsewhere, this gap is tightly linked with the gap around the influence of environments on relationships.

Initial Recommendations and Future Research

There are moments, threaded throughout public thinking, when the public thinks about the role of relationships in children’s development in ways that are closely aligned with experts. When thinking in these ways, the public can see that relationships between adults and young people can, and should be, reciprocal and mutually satisfying. Similarly, the public is capable of recognizing that adults should guide and empower young people, building their autonomy and sense of self by providing them with opportunities to learn by doing and processing young people’s decisions with them. At times, people see that nonfamilial relationships have distinct purposes in young people’s lives and are critical for healthy development. And occasionally, people are able to see that environments structure opportunities to build positive relationships and can limit some young people’s access to relationships.

Yet these moments in public thinking are coupled with, and often overwhelmed by, moments when people’s thinking diverges sharply from experts’ views. Although the public can think about relationships between adults and young people as two-way, mutual, and empowering, and can see young people as having agency within them, more commonly they think of adults acting on passive children. Moreover, most of the time, the focus on family relationships crowds out thinking about the value of nonfamilial relationships. Environments’ effects on relationships tend to stay in the background, and, when they do come to mind, people typically think of “culture” rather than the material and social constraints on access to relationships. Thus, the public tends to draw on stereotypes of people in poverty to explain how “those” communities have dysfunctional relationships due to bad values and norms. This lack of attention to the structural effects of environments on relationships makes it hard for people to see why policies and programs are needed to cultivate relationships for young people.

These productive and unproductive moments in public thinking coexist, reflecting the fact that the public can think in fundamentally different ways about relationships and development. Reframing developmental relationships involves pulling forward the productive ways of thinking and backgrounding unproductive ones. Further research is needed to identify the best ways of tackling the most difficult communications challenges that emerge from this study. But based on the cultural models research findings, we can offer the following provisional recommendations about what to do and what not to do:

- **Stress the different purposes of different relationships.** Communicators should talk about the distinctive functions and benefits of different relationships—including teacher-student, coach-player, and peer relationships—to leverage the productive *Different Boxes* model. This strategy will help prevent people from defaulting to the idea that familial relationships are the only ones that really matter.
- **Explain how developmental relationships provide a buffer for adversity.** A critical reframing task is countering the public assumption that children without strong, healthy family relationships are permanently damaged and will never be able to establish developmental relationships. Communicators need to explain the power of developmental relationships for children who have faced adversity or who lack strong family relationships.⁷
- **Don't dwell on caring.** Caring is, of course, important for any relationship. But the public is quick to assume that caring is the *central*—and perhaps *only*—determinant of relationships. Thus, focusing on caring makes it harder for people to see the ways in which environments structure access to relationships. Communicators should broaden the discussion beyond the motivations and attributes of individuals, and explain how social and material contexts structure relationships.
- **Note that developmental relationships are fostered by systems, not just individuals.** Members of the public have a difficult time thinking about how programs and policies promote developmental relationships because they tend to think of relationships as one-on-one interactions that people enter by choice. Communicators can fill this “cognitive hole” by providing examples of programs that foster developmental relationships and explaining how organizational structures can facilitate these relationships.
- **Explain how social and material contexts facilitate or undermine relationships.** Communicators should make a point of broadening the view beyond the individuals who do or don't participate in relationships, and highlight how institutions and communities provide resources and opportunities that shape access to relationships. Further research is needed to determine the best way to accomplish this. In the meantime, though, it is vital to explicitly introduce this context into conversation. Communicators should draw explicit connections between environment and access to relationships to bring context more clearly into view.

- **Use active, reciprocal language to describe interactions.** To cue thinking about relationships as mutual, two-way interactions between active subjects, communicators should use sentences that position youth as subjects, not objects. For example, instead of talking about how “adults build relationships with youth,” communicators can talk about how “adults and youth build relationships with each other.” Communicators should talk about what children and youth *do* within relationships, and, when discussing how adults help young people grow, they should stress how adults empower young people to *act* in new and different ways.
- **Where appropriate, characterize relationships as advancing shared goals.** Communicators should leverage the *Shared Goals* model to help people recognize the value of nonfamilial relationships. This understanding of relationships is especially conducive to many types of developmental relationships, including relationships with mentors, coaches, religious leaders, and other people in children’s lives outside the family. Communicators should stress the value of *shared* goal-setting to help people recognize the importance of sharing power.
- **Avoid instrumental language.** Highly instrumental ways of thinking about relationships make it hard to recognize the deeper ways in which relationships can transform young people’s identity and self-understanding. While communicators should certainly talk about the shared benefits of developmental relationships, they should be careful not to use transactional language about what parties “exchange” or what parties “gain” from interactions.
- **Offer concrete examples of effective programs and policies.** The public struggles to think about how relationships could be systematically promoted, so communicators must provide people with examples of what can be done. In conjunction with explaining how environments structure relationships, communicators should explain how programs and policies that restructure environments can facilitate relationship-building and provide more widespread access to and opportunities for developmental relationships.

These recommendations provide initial strategies that communicators can use to create more effective messages about developmental relationships. Further research is needed to identify communications tools and strategies capable of overcoming the deepest and most challenging gaps identified above. The following set of tasks comprises a prospective “to do list” for future framing research:

- **Generate understanding of how nonfamilial relationships help all children develop important social skills and expand opportunities for achievement.** The public tends to see nonfamilial relationships as a pale imitation of family relationships, which leads people to conclude that these relationships are not essential. It also leads them to assume that nonfamilial relationships can only make a limited difference when children lack strong

familial relationships or have faced adversity. More research is needed to learn how best to overcome the idea that nonfamilial relationships are of limited importance, and recognize the value of relationships outside the family to children's development and success.

- **Deepen understanding of what relationship-rich environments look like and how they can be intentionally designed.** While there is some limited recognition within public thinking that environments can constrain access to relationships, research is needed to identify the best ways to pull forward this way of thinking and fill out people's understanding of *how* environments structure relationships and how they can be intentionally designed to promote developmental relationships. This research must simultaneously determine the best ways of inoculating against stereotypes of people in poverty and the idea that low-income communities' values and norms undermine healthy relationships.
- **Strengthen the understanding that relationships between children and adults are two-way streets.** The public does, at times, understand relationships in reciprocal terms and recognize the active role of children and youth within relationships. But existing thinking tends not to foreground shared power and decision-making. A key task for research is to ascertain how to deepen understanding of the value of empowering youth within relationships and in the world and the ways in which these relationships benefit both young people and adults.
- **Counter unproductive ideas about establishing relationships across lines of difference.** Public thinking about poverty and normalization limits thinking about the possibility for established relationships across lines of difference, especially between adults and young people from different social classes and racial or ethnic backgrounds. In addition, the gendering of relationships severely constrains thinking about when positive relationships can be developed and between whom. Research is needed to determine how to counter the assumption that developmental relationships cannot or should not cross lines of difference.
- **Generate understanding about the value of both long-term, developmentally intensive relationships and shorter-term, less intensive relationships.** For the public, the most emotional and time-consuming relationships are the most important for children's development. Parents are bound to children not only by genetics but also by the ongoing, emotionally intensive nature of the familial relationship, and the most influential relationships mimic that intensity. The idea that short-term or infrequent interactions are beneficial—and even critical—for children's development is missing from public thinking. Research needs to be done to determine how to communicate about the importance and practicality of low-intensity developmental relationships.

- **Increase understanding of and support for effective programs and policies.** This is a key task, as the public does not currently see a role for policies and programs in promoting and supporting relationships; instead, they think that establishing mentoring and other kinds of developmental relationships is a personal responsibility. Research can help identify ways of framing programs and policies that generate support for developmental relationships and that help people see their essential components (e.g., cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness).

Addressing these challenges will require communications tools of varying types. Values are likely needed to collectivize people's orientation and help them see relationships as a societal concern, rather than a merely personal one. Explanatory tools—such as explanatory metaphors, explanatory chains, and examples—are needed to expand people's understanding of what developmental relationships are, how they work, how environments structure relationships, and how policies can promote them. Exemplar policies may be useful in generating a recognition of what prioritizing relationships would involve. And messengers may be valuable in helping people recognize the crucial roles played by different parties, such as families, teachers, mentors, coaches, peers, religious leaders, and others. Further research is needed to develop and test these types of communications tools.

Conclusion

The cultural models findings presented in this report provide a map of the terrain that communicators must navigate when talking with the public about developmental relationships. By mapping the gaps between expert and public thinking, we have identified the key areas where communicators must direct their focus and that future research must address.

While the public does have some very useful ways of thinking that communicators can tap into, communicators must also avoid some potential pitfalls. Cultivating a full understanding of developmental relationships requires deepening the public's understanding of key features of these relationships—most notably, power-sharing—and placing these relationships in material and social contexts. This research suggests that deepening understanding in these ways is needed to generate support for institutions prioritizing relationships and for creating inclusive, culturally responsive programs and policies that can promote developmental relationships.

This initial set of recommendations can begin to expand the public's understanding of these relationships. These recommendations seek to leverage the more productive public perspectives on relationships while also diverting thinking away from less productive cultural models. Future research will develop a specific and comprehensive reframing strategy capable of addressing the deep challenges identified in this report.

Appendix: Research Methods and Demographics

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

To explore experts' knowledge about the core principles of developmental relationships, FrameWorks conducted 14 one-on-one, one-hour phone interviews with participants whose expertise included research, practice, and policy. Interviews were conducted between August and October 2017 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and transcribed for analysis. FrameWorks compiled the list of interviewees, who reflected a diversity of perspectives and areas of expertise, in collaboration with Search Institute.

Expert interviews consisted of a series of probing questions designed to capture expert understandings about what developmental relationships are, which factors influence whether young people have developmental relationships, the benefits of developmental relationships, and how we can foster them. In each conversation, the researcher used a series of prompts and hypothetical scenarios to challenge experts to explain their research, experience, and perspectives; break down complicated relationships; and simplify complex concepts. Interviews were semi-structured in the sense that, in addition to pre-set questions, researchers repeatedly asked for elaboration and clarification and encouraged experts to expand on concepts they identified as particularly important.

Analysis employed a basic grounded theory approach.^{8,9} Researchers categorized common themes from each interview. They also incorporated negative cases into the overall findings within each category. This procedure resulted in a refined set of themes, which researchers supplemented with a review of materials from relevant literature. Findings were refined through two feedback sessions with experts in the field. Members of Search Institute, America's Promise, and MENTOR subsequently met with FrameWorks' researchers to further refine the expert story.

CULTURAL MODELS INTERVIEWS

The cultural models findings presented in this report are based on a set of interviews with members of the public, supplemented by a review of FrameWorks' past work on childhood development, adolescence, and education. To understand the public's current thinking, FrameWorks conducted 20 in-person, in-depth interviews with members of the public in Philadelphia, PA, San Pedro, CA, and San Antonio, TX, in November and December 2017.

Cultural models interviews—one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours—allow researchers to capture the broad sets of assumptions, or cultural models, that participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area. These interviews are designed to elicit ways of thinking and talking about issues—in this case, issues related to relationships and their role in development. Interviews covered thinking about relationships generally before turning to a discussion of children's and youth's relationships, focusing on relationships between young people and adults. The interviews touched on the different kinds of relationships children and youth have, their effects on children's lives, how they develop, and what can be done to promote them.

The goal of these interviews was to examine the cultural models that participants use to make sense of developmental relationships. Therefore, researchers gave participants the freedom to follow topics in the directions they deemed relevant. Researchers approached each interview with a set of topics to cover, but left the order in which these topics were addressed largely to participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' written consent.

By including a range of people, researchers were able to identify cultural models that represent shared patterns of thinking among members of the public. These participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and were selected to represent variation along the domains of ethnicity, gender, age, residential location, educational background (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), political views (as self-reported during the screening process), religious involvement, and family situation (e.g., married, single, with children, without children, age of children). The sample included eight women and 12 men. Of the 20 participants, 12 self-identified as "Caucasian," three as "African American," four as "Hispanic," and one as "Asian." Five participants described their political views as "liberal," five as "conservative," and 10 as "middle of the road." Eight participants reported living in a suburban or rural area, and 12 in an urban area. The mean age of the sample was 41 years old, with an age range of 20 to 62. Four participants had a high school degree or less; 14 had completed some college or had graduated from college; and two had graduate degrees. Seven were married, and 12 were parents of at least one child.

Findings are based on an analysis of these 20 interviews. To analyze the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understood issues related to developmental relationships.¹⁰

First, researchers identified common ways of talking across the sample to reveal assumptions, relationships, logical steps, and connections that were commonly made but taken for granted throughout an individual's talk and across the set of interviews. In short, the analysis involved patterns discerned from both what was said (i.e., how things were related, explained, and understood) and what was not said (i.e., assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, analysis revealed conflicting models that people brought to bear on the same issue. In such cases, one conflicting way of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other, in that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants' thinking.

Analysis centered on ways of understanding that were shared across participants. Cultural models research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. It is not designed to identify differences in the understandings of various demographic, ideological, or regional groups (which would be an inappropriate use of this method and its sampling frame).

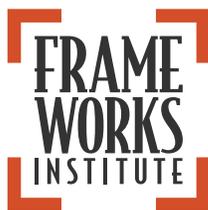
Endnotes

1. For more on passive models of child development, see, e.g., Fond, M., Smirnova, M., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Sweetland, J. (2017). *When more means less: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of dual language learners*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; Bales, S.N., & Trester, A.M. (2015). *Framing child and youth development: A FrameWorks MessageBrief for the National Collaboration for Youth and the National Human Services Assembly*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
2. The *Molding and Empowerment* models roughly align with the passive and active models of development that we are identifying in current research on adolescent development.
3. See Kendall-Taylor, N. (2012). *The Resilience Scale: Using metaphor to communicate a developmental perspective on resilience*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
4. See Volmert, A., Fond, M., & O'Neil, M. (2015). "It's hard to wrap your head around": *Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of child maltreatment and child sexual abuse in Alberta*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
5. See Pineau, M.G., L'Hôte, E., Davis, C., & Volmert, A. (2018). *Beyond caring: Mapping the gaps between expert, public, practitioner, and policymaker understandings of family, school, and community engagement*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; Bales, S. N., Kendall-Taylor, N., Lindland, E., O'Neil, M., & Simon, A. (2012). *Talking about skills and learning: A FrameWorks MessageMemo for the Core Story of Education project*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
6. See, e.g., Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). *Talking about poverty: How experts and the public understand poverty in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
7. FrameWorks' previous research on resilience found that the *Resilience Scale* explanatory metaphor can help people understand how supportive relationships can increase resilience in the face of adversity and counterbalance negative effects. See Kendall-Taylor, N. (2012). *The Resilience Scale: Using metaphor to communicate a developmental perspective on resilience*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
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