

Indicators of Flourishing For Children

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Education by All for the Well-Being of Children**

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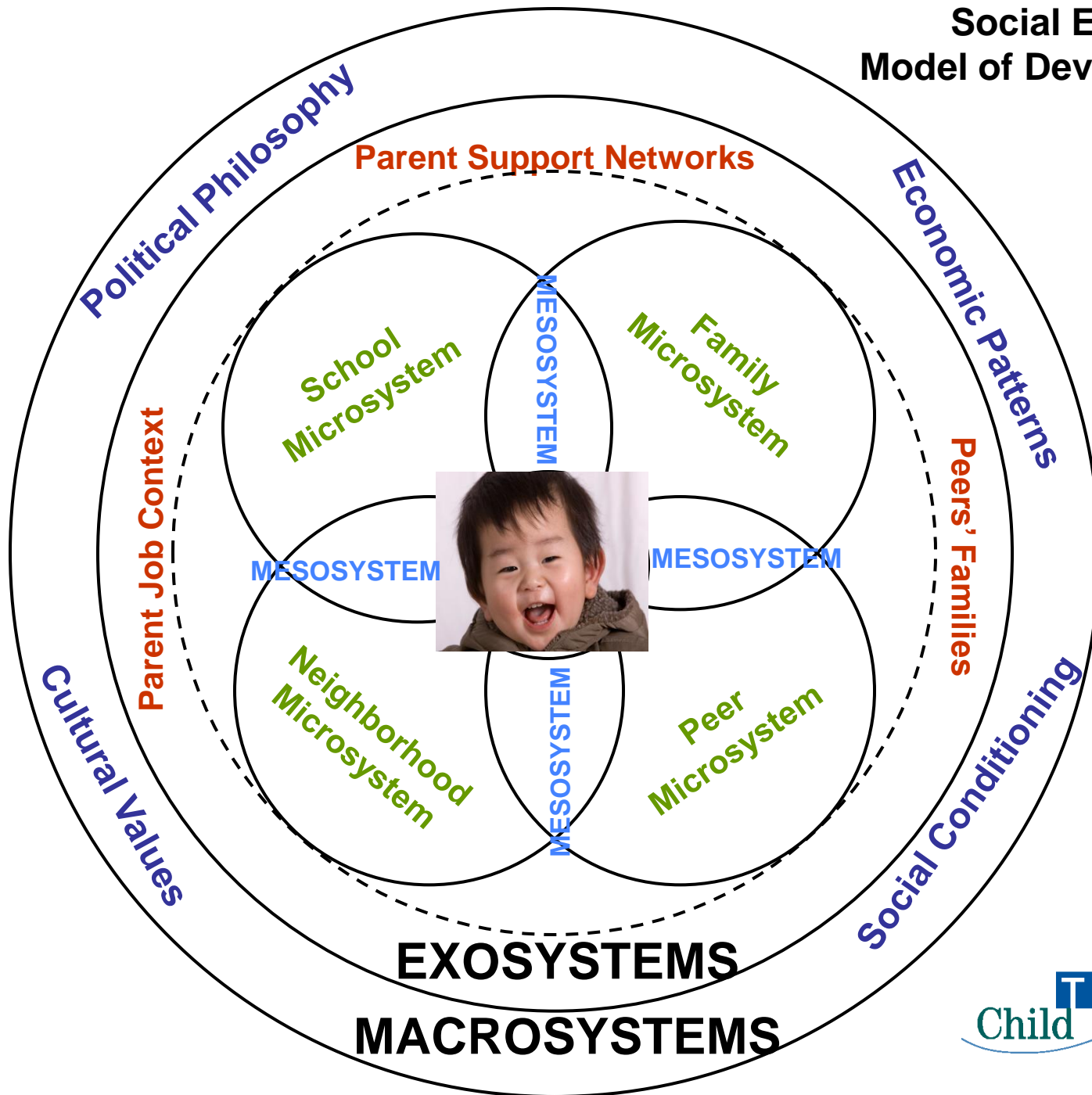
Washington, DC

USA

Child Trends

- Conducts research to improve children's lives
- Private, nonprofit, non-partisan
- Founded in 1979 to monitor the well-being of children
- Uses a holistic, ecological, and developmental framework
- Has 65 **Interdisciplinary** staff working on:
 - Early Childhood
 - Education
 - Youth Development
 - Child Welfare
 - Fertility and Family Formation
 - Parenting and Fatherhood

Social Ecological Model of Development



How Can Indicators be Used to Describe Child Well-being

- Description
- Monitoring
- Setting goals
- Increasing accountability
- Informing practice

Characteristics of Indicators

- Are measurable
- Markers that track change over time in conditions, behaviors, competencies, and attitudes
- Determine how progress will be monitored
- Can measure: inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes

Indicators Cannot be Used to:

- Determine causality
- Claim credit for program success
- Assign blame for program failure
- Evaluate the performance of individuals or programs, without considering the larger context

Types of Indicators

- ***Population***: measure changes in well-being of aggregate groups of children
- ***Program***: measure the outcomes for program participants
- ***Performance***: how is the system or program doing in meeting its goals
- ***Structural***: focus on infrastructure
- *Individual assessments are not well-suited for indicators of trends among groups of children*

Relationship Between Program level and Country level indicators

- Keep program indicators and outcomes distinct from pop level indicators and outcomes -- **but there is a relationship.**
- Program outcomes -- are about the children in a particular program, which may comprise a greater or lesser share of the whole child population.
- While not "responsible" for whole-population trends or outcomes, programs make (and should be accountable for) a contribution (greater or smaller) to those outcomes.
- The role of programs (and additional activities not captured in formal programs) is to share in the common purpose represented by the outcomes articulated for the whole population.

Criteria for Indicators

- Easy to understand
- Based on research connecting it to child well-being
- Based on reliable data or sources that allow periodic measurement
- Valid cross-culturally or cross-nationally
- Balanced across domains of child well-being
- Parsimonious
- Malleable to policy or program interventions

Key Indicator Questions

- What do we care about now?
- What will we care about in 10 years? 20 years?
- What 5 things do you want to tell public about in each domain?
- Are indicators of context (such as poverty) separated from those of well-being of children to inform policy?
- In what populations will we look for change in this indicator?
- What is current status of our target population on this indicator?
- How will we measure progress on this indicator? How often?
- Will goals be set? If so, are they reasonable?
- Envision flourishing children, then decide what needs to be monitored to get there

Evaluating Indicators

- Is indicator at the right unit of analysis and level of aggregation to measure change?
- Are trends moving in expected direction given program implementation?
 - Intensity and breadth of programs
 - participation
 - Time exposed
- Are disparities among groups closing?
- Can it be used to formulate policy or interventions?

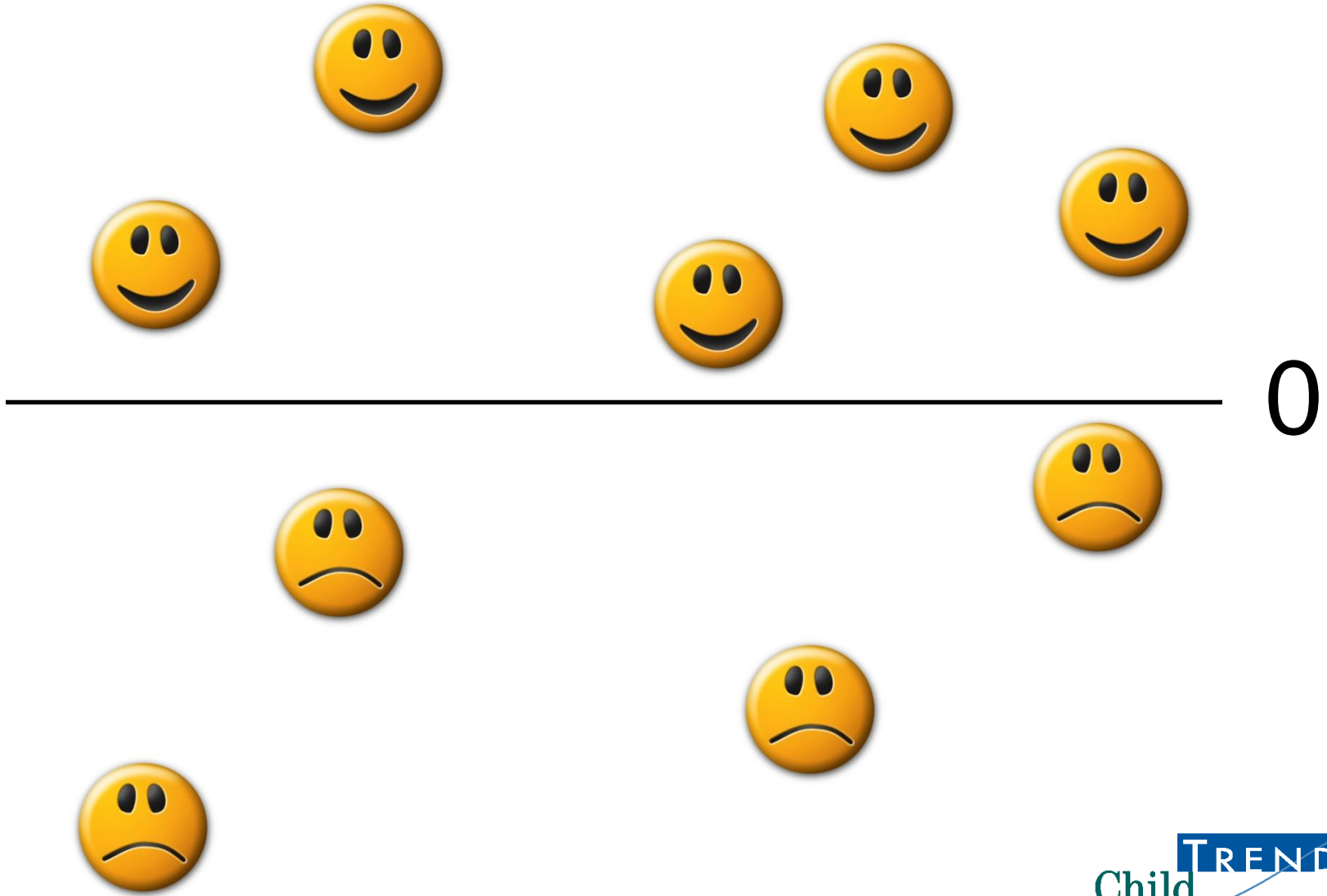
Policy considerations

- Be careful about setting targets: if too high, leads to discouragement
- What is the public framework? Programs don't work? Youth are lazy?
- Our public perception study: people ignore data to fit their frame
- Advantage to strength-based monitoring: positive trends can change perceptions, increase attendance and support for programs

Why Measure What Children Need to Flourish?

- What gets measured is what gets valued
- Currently, many indicators of well-being are actually negative, such as drug use and crime rates
- Current measures do not accurately portray children and youth: positive as well as negative indicators are needed
- Nations, international organizations, schools and programs want to be able to monitor their children's strengths as well as their deficits
- Rigorously validated measures of positive development help define what children need in order to flourish
- Children respond to interventions which address their assets rather than their deficits

Problem free ...*is not fully prepared*



1) Defining What is a Positive Indicator

- Positive Indicators: the competencies, behaviors, assets, attitudes, relationships and contextual characteristics that help children and youth flourish
 - Research is building consensus
- Varied approaches to assess positive indicators:
 - Empirical analyses to assess concurrent and predictive validity
 - Obtain opinions for evidence of agreement or disagreement
- Positive/negative indicators not just opposite ends of a single continuum



Examples of Existing Conceptual Frameworks

DeSeCo

**Multi-national
Project**

**U.S. National
Research
Council**

**Child Well-being
Index**

**Positive Youth
Development**

Search

Using tools
interactively

Safety and physical
status

Physical development

Physical

Competence

Commitment

Acting
autonomously

Personal life

Intellectual
development

Educational/intellectual

Confidence

Positive ident

Functioning in
socially
heterogeneous
groups

Civic life
Children's activities

Psychological and
emotional
development

Psychological

Connection
Character
Contribution

Social compe
Positive value

Social development

Social



	0 to 5 years	6 to 11 years	12 to 17 years
Physical health, development, & safety			
Cognitive development & education			
Psychological/emotional development			
Social development and behavior			
Spiritual Development			

Individuals

**Physical health,
development, &
safety**

**Psychological/
emotional development**

**Social development
and behavior**

**Cognitive development
& education**

Spiritual development

Relationships

Family

Peers

School

Community

Macrosystems

Context

Family

Peers

School

Community

Macrosystems

Physical Health, Development & Safety

Constructs	Indicators
Overall health	Positive health status, health maintenance care
Healthy habits	Eating, exercise, sleep habits
Safe from accident, injury	Wearing bicycle helmets, seatbelts, etc.
Risk management skills	Skills and knowledge to avoid drug and alcohol use and risky sex

Psychological / Emotional Development

Overall psychological, emotional well-being	Happiness, subjective well-being flourishing, life satisfaction
Self-management	Age-appropriate autonomy, emotional self-regulation, persistence, constructive time use
Agency	Planfulness, resourcefulness, positive risk-taking, realistic goal-setting, motivation
Confidence	Positive identity and self-worth
Optimism and resilience	Positive outlook and constructive adaptation to adverse events

Social Development & Behavior

Moral character	Ethical behavior, integrity
Prosocial values	Caring, empathy for others
Social intelligence	Communication, cooperation, conflict-resolution skills, trust, intimacy
Cultural intelligence	Cross-cultural competence
Environmental awareness and behavior	Knowledge, positive behaviors
Civic awareness, motivation	Age-appropriate concern and motivation regarding community, social or public issues, civic knowledge, civic self-image and self-efficacy and connectedness

Cognitive Development & Education

Educational attainment	Secondary and postsecondary enrollment and completion; career and technical training; licenses, attainment expectations
Educational achievement	In language, math, science, reading, writing, etc.; curricular-based achievement and literacy
Academic self-concept	Self-perception of academic performance, ability
Critical thinking	Evaluation/analytical/problem-solving skills
Knowledge of essential life skills	Financial management, decision-making skills, home maintenance, etc.
Positive attitude toward learning	Curiosity, active learning strategies, mastery motivation, study skills
School engagement	Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement
Interactive use of technology	Able to use computers and communication technology; internet; networking sites
Creativity	Arts: music, writing, art, theater, dance, etc.; ability to develop new views, approaches to tasks
Civic knowledge	Knowledge of tenants of democracy, government, laws, justice, tolerance
Career and technical knowledge	Knowledge of occupations, salary ranges, requirements needed

Spiritual Development

Constructs	Indicators
Sense of Purpose	Believing one's life is meaningfully connected to a higher purpose
Religiosity	Engaging in religious practices, including private ones
Spirituality	Capacity to connect to transcendent unity

Relationships: Family

Positive relations with parents	Warmth, closeness, communication, support, positive advice
Positive relations with siblings, extended family	Warmth, closeness, communication, support, positive advice
Positive functioning of family as whole	Outings, celebrations, vacations, family meals together

Relationships: Peers

Positive friendships

Supportive friendships, quality of relationship with peers, opportunity to meet friends or invite friends home

Relationships: School

Positive relations with teachers	Student report of teacher support
Positive engagement and connection	Participation in school clubs and extracurricular activities at school
	Sense of belonging at school and peer acceptance

Relationships: Community

Positive relations with non-family adults	Advice, support, communication
Engagement in community institutions	Participates in organized recreation activities
Sense of belonging in community	Participates in activities at community organizations/institutions
Civic engagement	Current or past participation with organizations such as human-rights groups, religions associations or youth clubs
	Intentions regarding future political and civic participation as adults (e.g. voting, campaigning, volunteer work)
Constructive and non-taxing employment	Hours worked
Positive digital/electronic relationships	Hours spent and content of media interactions

Relationships: Macrosystem

Positive group identity	Relates positive to own group membership without disparaging others
Engages with positive ideologies, movements	Cultural, spiritual, political, economic

Contexts: Family

Positive parenting	Warmth, communication, role modeling, time/discussions with children, appropriate structure/monitoring, high expectations
Parental activities and enrichment	Read books to child, go to the library, go on outings
Parent involvement in community	School, religious institution, community organizations
Resources	Steady parental employment and adequate income/benefits, adequate housing, child care, parent education, number of adults in household, health services, cognitive/developmental resources (books, phone, internet, magazines, newspapers)
Social capital	Quantity and quality of social, family and business networks
Safe household	Absence of smoke, in good repair, no lead, etc.

Contexts: School

Access to good schools	Parent satisfaction with school or wishing to transfer?
Safe schools	Safe from bullying, discrimination, crime

Contexts: Peers

Positive peers

Peers who do not engage in risky behavior and who are good students

Contexts: Community

Safe neighborhoods	Safe from violence, crime, environmental toxins
Positive physical environment	Recreation facilities and spaces
Caring adults	Appropriate structure, high expectations
Activities	Organized child/youth/recreational activities
Community institutions/organizations	Active/religious, social, political, environmental organizations, and civic institutions
Services	Adequate social/economic services
Positive social norms	Values support diversity, tolerance, work, families

Contexts: Macrosystem

Cultures/subcultures	Societal values, lifestyles, spending patterns
Belief systems	Spiritual, philosophical, political, economic

Flourishing Children Book: *What Do Children Need to Flourish?*

Funded by John Templeton Foundation

- 21 conference papers focused on gaps in measurement of positive development
- Available positive measures include: involvement in afterschool activities, school achievement, religious attendance, volunteering
- We commissioned papers for new research around the country on positive measures
- Most measures were found to be reliable and valid, but used small convenience samples

Measures in Book Include...

- Positive formation of self: character, attitudes, spirituality, and identity
- Healthy habits, positive behaviors, and time use
- Positive relationships with parents and siblings
- Positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning and school environments
- Enacting positive values and behaviors in communities: civic engagement, pro-social orientation, frugality, and generosity

Measures We Tested to Get the Youth Perspective

- Life satisfaction
- Hope
- Gratitude
- Money management/frugality
- Generosity
- Spirituality and purpose
- Parent-youth relationships
- Peer relationships

Teens' Views on Thriving

- Relationships: stable and supportive relationships with parents, friends, siblings, teachers, counselors
- Behaviors: staying in school; maintaining good health through nutrition and exercise; avoiding alcohol, smoking, and sex; extracurricular activities; controlling anger; speaking English correctly, contributing financially to family
- Attitudes: religion or faith; being respectful and responsible

Spirituality and Purpose

- In a new U.S. survey –NSYR– 84% believe in God.
- In Europe – WVS-2000 from 40% of 18-24 in Sweden to 99% in Poland believe in God
- Spirituality and religiosity protect against risk behaviors: substance use, violence, sexual activity, school problems, gambling; and promote positive outcomes: school success, helping others, good health, valuing diversity, leadership, overcoming adversity, impulse control
- Purpose is related to positive identity, self-esteem, goal orientation, spirituality

Spirituality and Purpose

- “I know I wasn’t put on this earth for nothing, I know that God put me here for a special reason, I just don’t know what the reason is yet, but I know I will find out soon.”

Gratitude

- “You should be grateful that you’re breathing, you’re living, and that you’re exploring, learning, and growing....I think it’s more important to just be humble and be grateful for everything, not just material things. Be grateful that it’s raining, that it’s snowing, that someone is smiling at you, just be grateful for the little things as well as the bigger things.”

Child Trends' Current work on Flourishing Children for JTF

Defining constructs, developing and testing items with youth, then piloting survey

- gratitude, spirituality, altruism, generosity, hope, purpose, empathy, life satisfaction
- environmental stewardship, entrepreneurship, financial contributions to family, frugality
- Parent and peer relationships
- Social competence, tolerance, conflict resolution, forgiveness
- Diligence, school engagement, planfulness, agency, reliability and trustworthiness

Methodological Issues

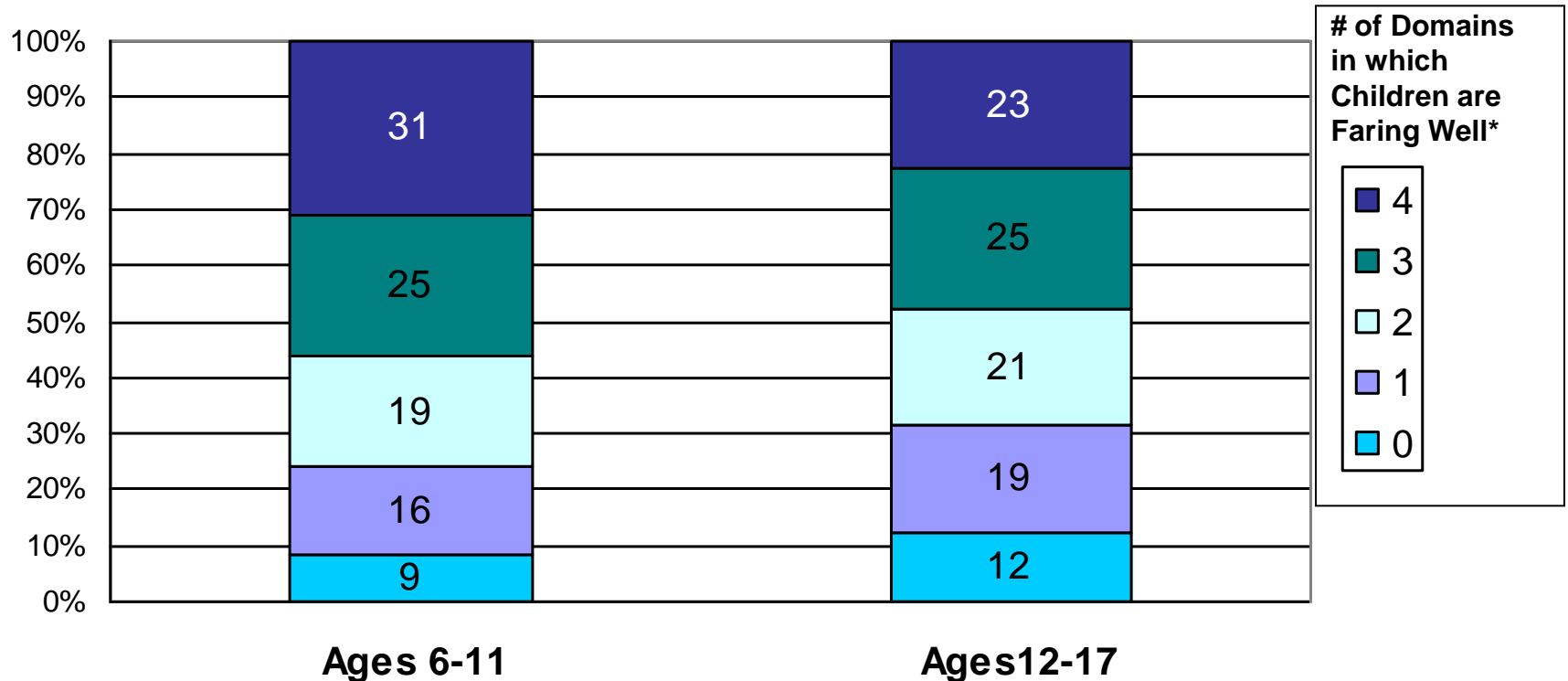
- 1) Defining What is a Positive Indicator
- 2) Involving Children and Youth
- 3) Cross-Cultural and Cross-National Validity
- 4) Micro versus Macro Data
- 5) Survey versus Administrative Data
- 6) Reporters of Information
- 7) Periodicity
- 8) Longitudinal Data
- 9) Items versus Scales
- 10) Relative versus Absolute Measures
- 11) Validity, both Concurrent and Predictive
- 12) Sub-Populations with Special Needs or Perspectives
- 13) Cut Points

Measurement Issues with Strengths-Based Indicators

- Strengths are more prevalent than deficits
- Cut-points on positive indicators can be arbitrary, since everyone has some
- Need consensus and research on how much is enough to tip outcome
- Upward bias in reporting of positive behaviors
- Indices can focus public attention, but mask trends in component indicators and domains, which is where policy is focused

Micro data present a picture of the actual circumstances experienced by individual children

Cumulative Child Well-Being Across Domains



**Score of 75+ in a domain*

2) Involving Children and Youth



- Input of children and youth needed to identify factors that make them happy, motivated and successful as children



- Several research projects of involved children and youth in conceptualizing outcomes

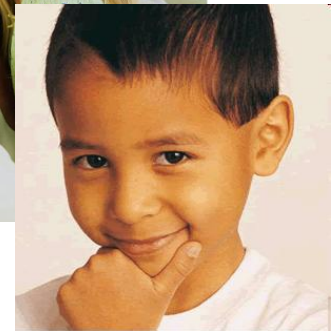
3) Cross-Cultural and Cross-National Validity

- Does the value placed on certain positive indicators vary by group?
- Is it necessary for positive indicators to be endorsed by all or most groups to be used within a country or across countries?



4) Reporters of Information

- Observers (e.g., parents and teachers) often asked to provide information about development and well-being of children
- Many positive constructs are subjective, making it optimal to obtain the perspective of that person directly
- Capacity of children to provide such information varies by age



5) Sub-Populations with Special Needs or Perspectives

- Goal to provide metric for assessment of outcomes over time and across groups
- Also need to have measures for critical sub-populations
- Incorporate groups into process of developing and testing indicators
- Measures that are biased against groups should be avoided





**Research in the Service of Children
1979-2009**

www.childtrends.org

www.childtrendsdatbank.org

Book: *What Do Children Need to Flourish?*

<http://www.springeronline.com>