

ACT SG Framework and Tools:

A User Guide



with support from



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1 Introduction

The ACT SG Framework and Tools provide a programme evaluation framework and tools for the youth-at-risk sector. It provides a common language for the sector when articulating the outcomes/skills that we would like our youths to achieve through the programmes they participate in.

Derived from positive youth development practice, the skills in the framework have been defined following a process of consultations with social service organisations running at-risk youth programmes; youths; academic experts; government offices and other relevant organisations.

This framework provides a common set of skills needed for positive youth development in accordance to the *Boston After School and Beyond* “Achieve-Connect-Thrive” framework, as adapted to the context of at-risk youth programmes in Singapore.

1.1 Why do we need this framework?

1.1.1 Develop service expertise

Programme evaluation was not a specialised area of youth work. The Baseline Study of Social Services for At-Risk Youths in Singapore conducted in 2012 had found that while the majority of programmes (86%) in the sector were evaluated in some way, evaluation design was often weak. Only about 1 in 10 programmes made use of standardised psychometric instruments which provided more robust measures of clients' progress and outcomes; most evaluation instead relied exclusively on collecting client opinions for feedback (Lim & Ng, 2012). The study also found that most organisations and agencies were keen to develop their expertise in this area.

Therefore, in developing this framework, it is intended to guide agencies and organisations to conduct and complete their programme or service evaluation with greater ease, and in a more systematic and structured manner. Validated tools are provided with the framework to assist with the evaluation. Through programme evaluation, youth workers can better learn about the benefits and potential success drivers of their programmes for youths served, generating insights for subsequent programme development and design and service delivery improvement. This would create value for beneficiaries downstream.

1.1.2 Establish a shared vision for at-risk youth programmes

The ACT SG Framework also serves to articulate a shared vision for youths in Singapore by identifying a common set of skills and desired outcomes that cut across the spectrum of youth programmes.

While there are many variations in the aims, objectives and focus of various youth programmes in the sector, every programme that seeks to engage youths should operate under the basic tenets of positive youth development, and address the issues and aspirations of youths in the local context in a culturally relevant manner. Positive youth

development (PYD) is a theoretical paradigm for professional social and youth work practice that takes a strength-based and person-centred approach to see the promotion of positive strengths and abilities as the goal of intervention. The ACT SG framework has thus attempted to abstract 13 common constructs of positive youth development found to be aspired toward for youths, found across the various programmes and initiatives for the youth sector locally.

Having a structured and common set of skills within a framework to guide evaluation may also provide opportunities for alignment and collaboration, and facilitate collective impact achievement in the sector. By having consensus forged to work toward the common positive youth development outcomes through this framework, there could be multipliers to efficiency and improvement in service delivery in the sector.

Possible uses of the framework at programme level:

- Articulate programme goals
- Develop logic models and evaluations
- Develop communication tools and materials

Possible uses of the framework at collective level:

- Identify commonalities and differences across programmes
- Implement research across programmes or organisations
- Crafting sectorial advocacy messages based on a common set of outcomes

2 The ACT SG Framework

2.1 Skills to Attain Success in School and Life

The ACT SG Framework is a standard catalogue of the core skills needed for youths in Singapore to attain success in school and life. According to the logic of the framework, youths are best positioned to succeed in school and life when they have mastery over 13 core skills to: (i) *Achieve* tasks and complete work; (ii) *Connect* to Others; (iii) *Thrive* as a Person.

The domains of Achieve, Connect and Thrive are expected to be interlinked – a youth with high competencies in one domain would often have competencies of a similar level in another; the converse is true for youths with lower-grade competencies. These point to the presence of an overarching construct of PYD which could be tracked at an overall-outcomes level, to summarise the impact of a programme in facilitating positive development in youths.

The Achieve, Connect and Thrive domains can also be laid out and understood with greater granularity, by presenting them in the 13 skills (facets). Namely, youths are thought to be best-enabled to:

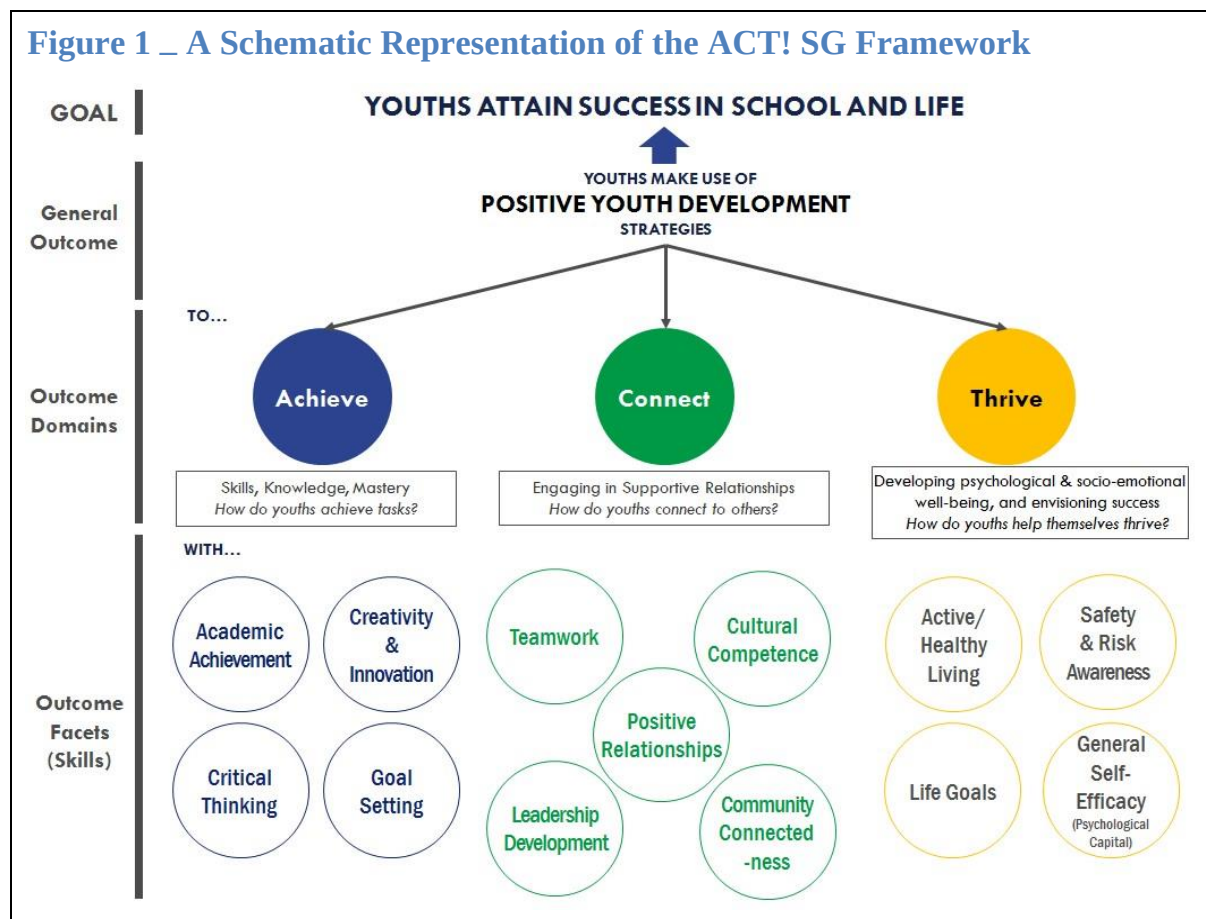
- *Achieve*, with the skills, knowledge and mastery in –
 - (i) Academic Achievement;
 - (ii) Creativity and Innovation;
 - (iii) Critical Thinking;
 - (iv) Goal Setting;
- *Connect*, by engaging in supportive relationships where they can develop –
 - (v) Teamwork;
 - (vi) Cultural Competence;
 - (vii) Positive Relationships;
 - (viii) Leadership Development;
 - (ix) Community Connectedness;

- *Thrive*, by developing psychological and socio-emotional well-being and be able to envision success for themselves via having –

- (x) Active/Healthy Living;
- (xi) Life Goals;
- (xii) General Self-Efficacy (Psychological Capital);
- (xiii) Safety and Risk Awareness

Both features of skillset variety (what skills a youth exhibits) and intensity (how much of each skill a youth exhibits) have to be taken into account when assessing the degree to which youths are enabled to attain domain-level outcomes.

Figure 1 _ A Schematic Representation of the ACT! SG Framework



2.2 Indicators of Positive Youth Development

The ACT SG Framework provides the following list of indicators, as a further elaboration on the examples of observable or inferred behaviours that are expected to be displayed by youths, in reflection of each skill:

Achieving

Academic Achievement

- ☐ Youth performs at expected grade level
- ☐ Youth performs above self-expectation
- ☐ Youth performs above teacher's expectation
- ☐ Youth improves overall grades
- ☐ Youth improves overall attendance

Critical Thinking

- ☐ Youth is able to form reflective judgment
- ☐ Youth exhibits analytical reasoning skills and is able to identify assumptions, reasons and claims
- ☐ Youth displays evaluative reasoning skills and is able to assess the credibility of information
- ☐ Youth demonstrates deductive reasoning ability
- ☐ Youth demonstrates inductive reasoning ability – ability to draw from inferences
- ☐ Youth is able to draw conclusions from reasons and evidence

Creativity and Innovation

- ☐ Youth is able to seek creative solutions to solve problems
- ☐ Youth expresses curiosity about topics learned in and out of school
- ☐ Youth demonstrates creative ideas in learning
- ☐ Youth is able to link learning and life goals

Goal Setting

- ☐ Youth plans to attend post-secondary education
- ☐ Youth is able to identify potential goals (both short and long-term)
- ☐ Youth has set a short-term goal (specific and measurable) and is aware of how to achieve it
- ☐ Youth has set a long-term goal and has plans on how to attain it
- ☐ Youth is able to identify barriers to his/her goal attainment with a focus on solution to the barriers

Connecting

Positive Relationships

- ☐ Youth develops positive and sustained relationships with peers
- ☐ Youth develops positive and sustained relationships with caring adults i.e. family; non-familial adults
- ☐ Youth has positive role models
- ☐ Youth is able to resolve conflicts with peers/adults constructively
- ☐ Youth is able to seek appropriate assistance and support from peers/adults in resolving problems
- ☐ Youth initiates interactions with adults
- ☐ Youth shows empathy towards others
- ☐ Youth demonstrates respect among peers/adults
- ☐ Youth develops friendship skills

Teamwork

- ☐ Youth collaborates well with others
- ☐ Youth is able to work effectively in groups
- ☐ Youth is dependable
- ☐ Youth is able to share responsibility

Leadership Development

- ☐ Youth is able to give both direction and support to peers
- ☐ Youth educates and inspires others to act

- ☐ Youth models positive behaviours for peers
- ☐ Youth is able to communicate opinions and ideas to others
- ☐ Youth is able to take initiative to organise others into action

Community Connectedness

- ☐ Youth feels a sense of belonging in the community
- ☐ Youth feels empowered to contribute to positive change in the community
- ☐ Youth considers the implications of his/her actions on others, the community and environment
- ☐ Youth demonstrates civic participation

Cultural Competence

- ☐ Youth displays social and cross-cultural skills
- ☐ Youth shows awareness of cultural differences
- ☐ Youth respects diversity and cultural differences
- ☐ Youth advances diversity in a multicultural society

Thriving

Active/Healthy Living

- ☐ Youth has a healthy BMI
- ☐ Youth participates in a minimum of 7 hours of physical activity weekly
- ☐ Youth develops and maintains healthy eating habits
- ☐ Youth develops skills to prepare food himself/herself

Life Goals

- ☐ Youth sets goals and believes he/she can achieve them
- ☐ Youth perceives he/she has the ability to thrive in future
- ☐ Youth has clear ambition
- ☐ Youth desires success in what he/she sets out to do

General Self-Efficacy (Psychological Capital)¹

- ☐ Youth is aware of his/her abilities
- ☐ Youth believes he/she is able to manage time and prioritise
- ☐ Youth displays productivity and good organisational skills
- ☐ Youth is hopeful of being able to adapt to difficult or complex situations
- ☐ Youth demonstrates accountability in his/her actions
- ☐ Youth believes that he/she can identify, manage and appropriately express emotions and behaviours
- ☐ Youth is hopeful of being able to access social/emotional support from others
- ☐ Youth demonstrates commitment in his/her tasks
- ☐ Youth advocates for self and perseveres despite setbacks
- ☐ Youth develops coping skills
- ☐ Youth takes responsibility for and acknowledges own strengths and challenges
- ☐ Youth takes responsibility for and acknowledges strengths and challenges of others
- ☐ Youth acknowledges responsibility for own actions

Safety and Risk Awareness

- ☐ Youth affiliates with peers who abstain from negative behaviours
- ☐ Youth avoids risky behaviours
- ☐ Youth avoids bullying behaviours
- ☐ Youth uses refusal skills to reject negative influences

¹ This skill or facet generally consists of indicators relating to the youth's successful performance of tasks and various (positive) practices, which is associated with the psychological construct of "General Self-Efficacy". While social sector users of the framework may be more familiar with the "General Self-Efficacy" nomenclature and may prefer referring to the facet as such, more broadly this facet can also be seen to be about "Psychological Capital", which is more popularly studied within the boundaries of organisational behaviour work. Psychological Capital refers to a developmental state characterized by high levels of self-efficacy, dispositional optimism, hope and resiliency (Çavuş & Gökçen, 2015; Luthans & Youssef, 2004); certain indicators within the facet concern themselves with the latter aspects. Both readings are suggested to be valid and have practical relevance for application.

This list may also serve as an aid to check on programme implementation, as a checklist for programmes aimed to improve on each skill for youths. Programme owners and youth workers may employ the list as a reference to reflect on how the way existing interactions or activities are carried out within their programme, or their social work practice in general, may foster or inhibit positive youth development attributes – namely, is the way the programme is conducted encouraging of, or actually disempowering youths in their developmental journey?

An alternative use of the list of indicators is as a reference to the design of other ACT SG Framework-centred evaluation and curriculum materials e.g. outcomes measures; interview scripts; programme manuals. Users and translators of the framework can ensure strategic coherence between their end-product and the ACT SG Framework, by using the same language of outcomes in their work while referencing to the concrete definition of what each skill is supposed to entail operationally.²

² The ACT SG Tools, as concurrently developed and contained in this user guide, is an example of how the indicators were used as inputs to the creation of outcomes evaluation tools in line with the framework.

2.3 A Measure of Youth Programme Effectiveness

2.3.1 Features of the ACT SG Tools

To assess whether youths have attained the outcomes stated in the framework, especially pertaining to a youth programme evaluation context, you can make use of the ACT SG Tools. There are three Tools – ACT SG Tool, ACT SG (Sports) Tool and the ACT SG (Arts) Tool. The ACT SG (Sports) and ACT SG (Arts) Tools are explained in the next Section.

The Tools have been derived to serve as a common, validated measurement tool which agencies can make use of, that is aligned to the language and intended outcomes of the ACT SG Framework.

The ACT SG Tools are primarily designed as self-report (Likert-type) survey instruments which most at-risk youths (ages 10 – 21) in Singapore can read and fill in by themselves. The vocabulary and phrasings used in the survey have been localised and crafted to be generally appropriate for the intended respondent demographics. A suggestion on how a session of data collection can be planned and conducted using the ACT SG Tools is detailed in the Annex on Managing the Data Collection Process.

The ACT SG Tools have been made available in two versions – a 39-item shortform measure, and a 75-item full-form measure. For most if not all programme evaluation scenarios, where the reporting focus is to be placed on aggregated outcomes across the entire batch or cohort of youths enrolled in the programme, the 39-item shortform is recommended to be sufficient for use. The 39-statement short-form measure achieves about 90% of the same standard of accuracy as the full-form, while being reduced to approximately half the length. It is suggested for the use of the 75-item full-form to be reserved for scenarios where a higher degree of reliability and validity is called for. The 39-item is used when outcomes are reported at the programme-level. The 75-item is used when it is important to understand the specific outcomes achieved

on the level of each individual youth, rather than an aggregative or summative outcome at the cohort or programme-level.

The itemset for each version of the ACT SG Tools and instructions on scoring are as follows:

ACT SG Tools Itemset

	Item	Short Form	Full Form
1.	I feel good about my grades in school.	.	AA
2.	I have achieved better grades than I expected in school.	AA	AA
3.	I have performed above my teacher's expectation in school.	.	AA
4.	My overall grades are good.	AA	AA
5.	My school attendance is not good.	AA	AA
6.	I am able to explain the decisions I make.	-	CT
7.	I am able to break down a problem into smaller parts to work through them.	CT	CT
8.	I am unable to tell if the information I receive is reliable.	CT	CT
9.	I make decisions based on reasoning.	-	CT
10.	I make decisions based on facts.	CT	CT
11.	I am able to find creative ways to solve problems.	CI	CI
12.	I want to find out more about things I learn.	-	CI
13.	I try to learn things in a creative way. (For example, I use acronyms to remember difficult concepts.)	CI	CI
14.	What I learn now will not be useful for me later on in life.	CI	CI
15.	I plan to complete my post-secondary education.	-	GS
16.	I do not know what my goals are. (Goals are what I want to achieve in the future, e.g., swim the butterfly stroke.)	GS	GS
17.	I know how to achieve my short-term goals (within the next 2 years).	-	GS
18.	The short-term goals I set for myself are realistic. (Short-term goals refer to things I hope to achieve in the next year.)	GS	GS
19.	I have a plan to reach my long-term goals. (Plan refers to knowing what to do, to reach the goals.) (Long-term goals refer to things I hope to achieve in the next 5 to 10 years).	GS	GS
20.	I am aware of the difficulties I might face in reaching my goals.	-	GS
21.	I feel supported by my friends.	-	PR
22.	I feel supported by my family.	-	PR
23.	I feel unsupported by adults in my life. (Adults include parents, relatives, teachers, religious leaders, etc).	PR	PR
24.	I have people I look up to.	-	PR
25.	I am able to talk things through with my friends or family to solve problems.	PR	PR
26.	I talk to other adults in my life about my problems.	-	PR
27.	I care about other people's feelings.	-	PR
28.	I care about how my actions affect other people.	PR	PR
29.	I make friends easily face-to-face.	-	PR
30.	I like to work with others to solve problems.	TW	TW

31.	I am able to cooperate with people around me.	-	TW
32.	I can be counted on to help if someone needs me.	-	TW
33.	I am able to work on a project with others.	TW	TW
34.	I do not like to work in a team.	TW	TW
35.	I can be counted on to lead my peers when needed. (Peers refer to others around my age, such as my classmates.)	LD	LD
36.	I encourage others when needed.	-	LD
37.	I try to set a good example to my peers. (Peers refer to others around my age, such as my classmates.)	LD	LD
38.	I am able to share my ideas with others.	-	LD
39.	I am unable to organise others to do something (e.g., organise an event).	LD	LD
40.	I do not like spending time with others in my community. (Community includes my neighbourhood, clubs, schools, associations, societies and locations where I volunteer at.)	Com	Com
41.	I do things that can make a difference in people's lives in the community.	Com	Com
42.	I think it is important for me to be a good role model for others in the community.	Com	Com
43.	I think it is important to serve my community.	-	Com
44.	I have friends from different racial groups.	-	Cul
45.	I am aware of the traditions that other racial groups practise.	Cul	Cul
46.	I respect the different racial practices.	Cul	Cul
47.	I do not enjoy being involved in my racial traditions.	Cul	Cul
48.	I enjoy being involved in the traditions from other racial groups.	-	Cul
49.	I think my weight is unhealthy.	AHL	AHL
50.	I take part in physical activities for a total of at least 7 hours a week, every week. (Physical activities refer to activities that involve a lot of body movement, e.g., riding a bicycle, running, doing household chores.)	AHL	AHL
51.	I try to eat healthy.	-	AHL
52.	I am able to prepare food for myself with no help from others.	AHL	AHL
53.	I believe I can achieve my life goals.	LG	LG
54.	I believe I can make a good future for myself.	-	LG
55.	I do not have clear life goals. (Life goals refer to things I hope to achieve throughout or at a later part of my life, e.g., being compassionate to others.)	LG	LG
56.	It is important for me to do my best in what I set out to do.	LG	LG
57.	I know what my abilities are.	-	SE
58.	I am able to manage my time well.	-	SE
59.	I am able to manage in difficult situations.	SE	SE
60.	I always finish the work that I do.	-	SE
61.	I can manage my emotions well.	-	SE
62.	I can conduct myself well in front of others.	SE	SE
63.	I will seek help if I have a problem.	-	SE
64.	I can handle problems that come up in my life.	-	SE
65.	I always do what I promise to do.	-	SE
66.	I have skill or talent that others can use.	-	SE
67.	I cannot cope with the changes in my life.	SE	SE
68.	I am aware of my own strengths and weaknesses.	-	SE
69.	I am aware of the strengths and weaknesses of people around me.	-	SE
70.	I am responsible for my own actions.	-	SE
71.	I prefer to make friends who will be a positive influence on me.	-	SRA

72.	I avoid taking part in activities that may get me into trouble.	SRA	SRA
73.	I am against bullying.	SRA	SRA
74.	I know how to say no to things I shouldn't do.	-	SRA
75.	I engage in harmful behaviours (e.g., smoking, self-harm, using drugs, being violent).	SRA	SRA

The 39-statement short-form measure also includes 13 reverse coded items, i.e., items 5, 8, 14, 16, 23, 34, 39, 40, 47, 49, 55, 67 and 75, to facilitate data checking.

Youths are asked to respond to each item according to the prompt “There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer all questions. Read each statement carefully and decide how well it describes you using the following scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly Agree”.

Legend:

.	<i>Not Administered</i>	AA	Academic Achievement
CT	Critical Thinking	CI	Creativity and Innovation
GS	Goal Setting	PR	Positive Relationships
TW	Teamwork	LD	Leadership Development
Com	Community Connectedness	Cul	Cultural Competence
AHL	Active/Healthy Living	LG	Life Goals
SE	General Self-Efficacy (Psychological Capital)	SRA	Safety and Risk Awareness

2.3.2 Implementing the Tool for Programme Evaluation

While the ACT SG Tools can be relatively easily hand-scored, data entry templates in Microsoft Excel have been provided to facilitate computer-assisted scoring. In using the ACT SG Tools in a programme evaluation context, it is also highly recommended to follow a pretest-posttest research design – this is where youths enrolled in the programme are invited to fill in the survey twice (minimally). The data entry templates provided also offer for the data to be analysed according to the pretest-posttest design.

According to the design, the first time youths fill in the survey would be prior to any programme activities being conducted, allowing a *pretest* baseline to be established of their initial positive youth development state at status quo. The youths would then fill in the survey a second time upon their exit or graduation from the programme – forming a *posttest* indicator of their positive youth development state after having been involved with the programme.

As the scores are deemed to be relative representations of the youths' attainment on the corresponding construct scored for, responses from the same youth can thus be paired up and inspected for the degree of change between pretest and posttest. Generally, for programme evaluation with the ACT SG Tools, the ideal then is to see scores improve across all outcomes, if not at least then for the outcomes which have been identified to be the primary desired outcomes of the programme under evaluation. Via a *paired-samples t-test*, these differences can be aggregated across the cohort of youths enrolled in the programme and statistically tested to show if the cohort has had on the whole, a net improvement in their positive youth development outcomes. Any changes may be provisionally reported as being attributable to the effect of the programme – assuming, that these youths are not also concurrently undergoing other programmes or services which may also seek to improve them on similar outcomes.

The use of the ACT SG Tools on their own may be sufficient to answer if a programme has achieved its outcomes to influence the youth's development positively.

However, as part of evaluation, agencies may also consider if they should access or collect further variables-of-interest for analysis. These variables could then be correlated with measured outcomes in the ACT SG Framework, to understand the drivers and barriers of positive youth development in the setting of their youth programme. This would greatly assist with generating evidence-informed insights for programme and practice improvement, and aid in the cultivation of service expertise.

2.3.3 Other Considerations of the ACT SG Tools

A likely query from implementers may be whether the ACT SG Tools can be administered in part, rather than as a whole. For example, if a programme evaluator was interested to only look at the effects of the programme on youths' Achieving domain, would it be permissible to only extract out the 12 items of the 39-item measure assessing the domain, and administer only those items to youths enrolled in the programme? We suggest not to do so. The Tools are recommended to be administered in their respective complete forms i.e. 39 items for the short-form, and 75 items for the full-form. There are a few reasons for this consideration to try to measure all available outcomes:

1. Although other domains or facets may not necessarily be the primary outcomes of the programme, they may, however, be useful to track as potential secondary outcomes of the programme.
2. It provides a check to ensure that a given programme does not promote the youth's development of particular capacities, at the expense of other also-worthy positive attributes.
3. Youth workers may find value in the complete assessment to provide a sense of the whole-person of the youth, to look at all aspects of a service user's life.

Finally, a note of caution – although the ACT SG Framework and Tools have been deliberately developed to serve as a catalyst to encourage more agencies and youth workers to take up the mantle of programme evaluation, and to work it into daily practice, this should not be seen as methodologically absolute or limiting:

1. Apart from the collection and analysis of quantitative outcomes data such as through the use of the youth-reported ACT SG Tools, programme evaluation is also amenable to and oftentimes strengthened by a multi-method approach i.e. through also examining and triangulating outcomes through qualitative interviews; objective indicators; feedback from parents, teachers and other peers of the youth; analysing case files.
2. Alternatively, if programme owners feel that there are specific or certain niche outcomes of their at-risk youth programmes which are not included by the ACT SG Framework, they should consider administering other scales or collect the missing information in other ways for evaluation/research. However, it is recommended that this is preferably done in supplement to or as an add-on module next to the ACT SG Tools. The rationale: while at-risk youth programmes may be each diverse and unique, the ACT SG Framework and Tools can serve as the baseline charter of youth work – all youths should be encouraged to do well across all the generic outcomes described in the Framework. In addition, a sector-wide adoption of the Framework and/or Tools would be of benefit to standardise the way impact is articulated across programmes, to improve the communicability of the work of the youth sector to more-novice stakeholders such as funders and the general public.

We hope that the ACT SG Framework and Tools may encourage more agencies and youth work professionals to start on the journey of evaluation for their service/programme, if not to enhance existing evaluation practices already in place.

3 ACT SG (Sports) Tool and ACT SG (Arts) Tool and the Game for Life Framework

The ACT SG (Sports) Tool and the ACT SG (Arts) Tool have additional questions based on the Game for Life (GFL) framework that has been developed by Sport Singapore (SportSG). The GFL framework was developed to provide sport educators with a structured framework to design sporting activities that infuse values for facilitating character and leadership development through sport. The framework (see table 1) constitutes three elements that have to be integrated and implemented for effectiveness: identifying the values and attributes of good character, establishing the platforms through which desirable values can be developed, and purposeful actions that need to be taken by the coach/instructor to yield teachable moments.

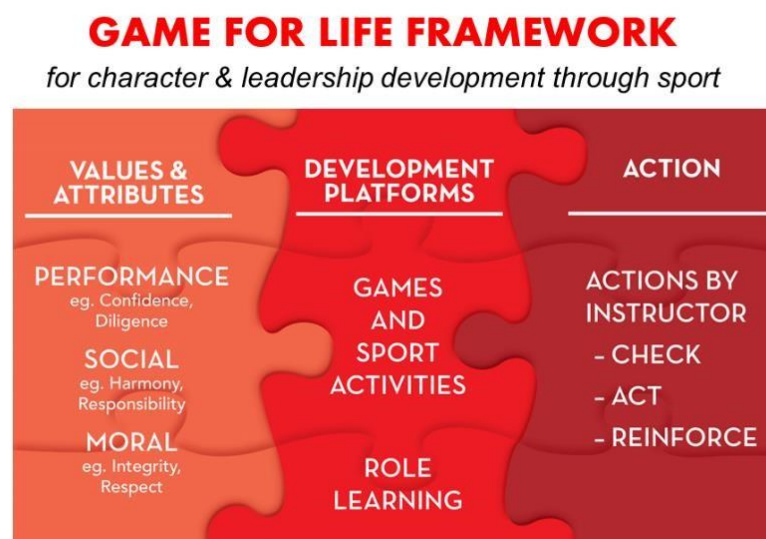


Figure 1. Elements that make up the GFL Framework

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (**MSF**), through its Central Youth Guidance Office (**CYGO**), collaborated with SportSG to contextualise the GFL framework and toolkit so as to develop a Game for Life for Youth-At-Risk (**GFL (YAR)**) framework and toolkit, to enable a more structured approach to be taken for the planning and execution of sport programmes catered towards character development for YAR.

The Circle of Courage (see Figure 2), a model of positive youth development based on the 4 principles of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990) was cross-referenced against the GFL framework, to identify certain values and attributes that were most relevant for YAR. In addition to this, focus group discussions were also conducted with coaches/youth workers to further streamline the set of values and attributes into 5 key constructs that were deemed most critical for development in YAR, namely, Confidence, Respect, Excellence, Compassion and Teamwork.

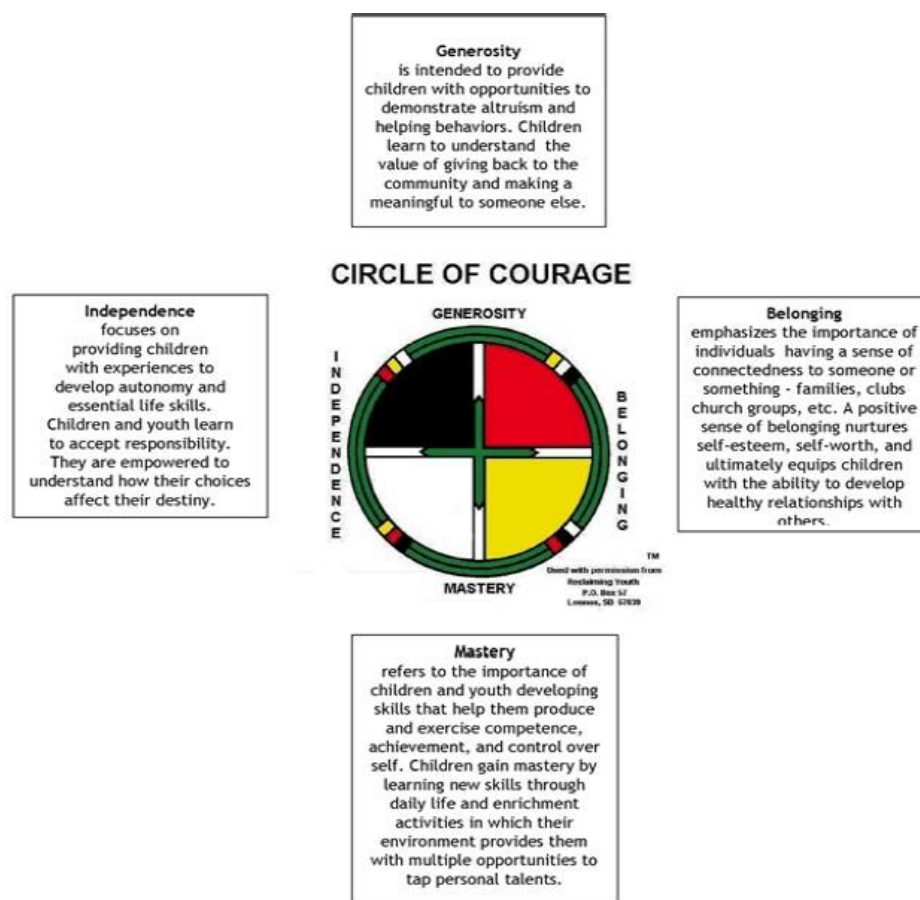


Figure 2. The 4 principles that make up the Circle of Courage

Hence, SportSG and the National Arts Council (NAC) developed a series of items to evaluate the application of GFL (YAR) framework principles by the coach/youth worker, and resulting values-based behaviours demonstrated by YAR. These items have been further integrated into the ACT SG Tool, which seeks to provide the public sector with a common language of evidence-based outcomes which are strongly correlated with positive youth development through sport. This ACT SG

(Sports) Tool and ACT SG (Arts) Tool, can be used to index the client's achievement of such outcomes in the context of their participation in at-risk youth sport and arts programmes respectively.

3.1 Development of the ACT SG (Sports) and ACT SG (Arts) Tools

The additional questions to the ACT SG (Sports) Tool and the ACT SG (Arts) Tool were built with items measuring the 5 constructs that were deemed to be most relevant for YAR (Confidence, Respect, Excellence, Compassion and Teamwork), with additional items on the inculcation of values, that allow for participants to relate their experiences and behaviours during sports activities and arts activities. The questions were grounded on Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) which describes training effectiveness in terms of how individuals reacted, learnt, applied and demonstrated results as a result of receiving training. The Tools measure levels 3 and 4 (see Figure 3). One scale measures the implementation of values education by the coach/youth worker (level 3) and one scale measures values-based behaviours (level 4) were developed. All additional items in the ACT SG (Sports) Tool were validated, resulting in a final measurement tool comprising 30 items (see Tables 1 & 2); 15 items evaluating values education and 15 items evaluating behaviours demonstrated. For the ACT SG Arts Tool, the 15 items evaluating values education are the same as the ACT SG (Sports) Tool and there are 23 items evaluating behaviours demonstrated. (see Table 3 for the 23 items evaluating behaviours demonstrated in arts programmes). Questions 16, 21, 24 and 25 of the ACT SG (Sports) Tool, and Questions 17, 21, 26, and 33 of the ACT SG (Arts) Tool are reversed coded to facilitate data checking.

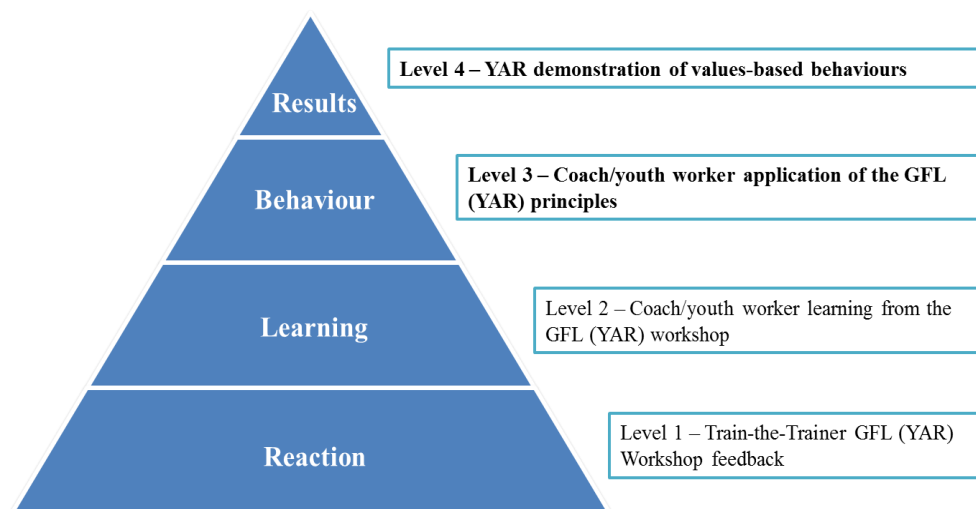


Figure 3. Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model

Using the Tools, agencies would be able to assess the effectiveness of the coach/youth worker in inculcating values, and changes in participant behaviours in arts/sports context, as well as outcome objectives in the three domains of Achieve-Connect-Thrive.

Additional Items measured in the ACT SG (Sports) Tool

	Items
Application of GFL Framework Principles by Coach/Youth Worker	<i>During Sport Activities, my coach/youth worker...</i>
	1. ...not only focuses on learning a new skill but also on values as well.
	2. ...identifies one or two values.
	3. ...asks us whether we have learnt any values.
	4. ...explains how certain values can be demonstrated.
	5. ...discusses with us about how our behaviours are related to certain values.
	6. ...explains how values can be applied in our daily life.
	7. ...shows us how we can demonstrate certain values.
	8. ...gives us examples of values-based behaviours.
	9. ...shares stories that exemplifies certain values.
	10. ...corrects our behaviours when we do not demonstrate the right values.
	11. ...gives feedback on how we can better demonstrate certain values.
	12. ...sets certain standards for demonstrating values-based behaviours.
	13. ...praises us when we demonstrate the right values.
	14. ...highlights to the group when we demonstrate positive values.
	15. ...encourages us to demonstrate certain values.

Table 1. Application of GFL (YAR) Principles

GFL Values-based Behaviours	Question
Confidence	16. I cannot handle more difficult skills in the sport.
	17. I am able to carry out skills as well as most of my teammates.
	18. I can be counted on to understand and carry out my skills well.
Respect	19. I show respect to my teammates, even if I do not agree with them.
	20. I will play by the rules of the game.
	21. I do not pay attention to my coach when he/she is coaching us.
Excellence	22. It is important to me to do my best in what I set out to do.
	23. I always do what I promise to do.
	24. I do not have a skill or talent others can use.
Compassion	25. I do not care about other people's feelings.
	26. I try to help others whenever I can.
	27. I can be counted on to help if someone needs me.
Teamwork	28. I value what my teammates can do for the team.
	29. I will do what it takes for the sake of the team.
	30. I am committed to my team's objectives.

Table 2. GFL Values-based Behaviours Demonstrated (ACT SG (Sports) Tool)

GFL Values-based Behaviours	Question
Confidence	16. I have learnt new arts skills.
	17. I cannot handle more difficult activities in the arts programme now.
	18. I learnt that I can accomplish new or difficult tasks if I try my best.
	19. I am proud of what I have accomplished in the arts programme.
	20. I enjoy showing my art to others or performing for them.
Respect	21. I do not pay attention to my arts instructor when he/she is teaching us.
	22. I show respect to my group members, even if I do not agree with them.
	23. I accept differences in abilities amongst my group members.
	24. I am polite/kind to my arts instructor.
	25. I am polite/kind to my friends.
Excellence	26. It is not important to me to do my best in what I set out to do.
	27. Even though I may find the activity challenging, I do not give up.
	28. I will work hard during the sessions to improve on arts skills that I am not good at.
	29. I challenge myself to be better the next time round.
	30. I encourage my friends to be better the next time round.
	31. I have learnt to be disciplined in order to complete the arts activity.
Compassion	32. I am concerned about my friends' well-being.
	33. I look down on friends who are not as good at picking up the arts skills.
	34. I try to be sensitive to my friends when they are in a bad mood.
	35. When I get angry with someone, I will not get into a fight with them.

Teamwork	36. I learnt that I can sometimes make better artworks/performances together with my friends than I can on my own.
	37. I made new friends during the arts programme.
	38. I have improved my friendships during the arts programme.
	39. My friends and I help each other improve.

Table 3. GFL Values-based Behaviours Demonstrated (ACT SG (Arts) Tool)

4 Which Tool to Use?

There are three versions of the ACT SG Tools, namely the ACT SG Tool and the ACT SG (Sports) Tool and ACT SG (Arts) Tool. The ACT SG (Sports) has additional questions based on the Game for Life (GFL) framework that allows the participants to relate their experiences during sports activities in your programme. The ACT SG (Arts) Tool has additional questions that allow the participants to relate their experiences during arts activities in your programme. If your programme has a sport component, the **ACT SG (Sports) Tool** should be used. If your programme has an arts component, the **ACT SG (Arts) Tool** should be used. **The same tool must be used at the start of the programme and upon completion of the programme**, i.e. if the ACT SG (Sports) Tool is used at the start of the programme, the ACT SG (Sports) Tool should be used at the completion and likewise for the ACT SG Tool and the ACT SG (Arts) Tool.

Suitability of the Arts or Sports Programme for the ACT SG (Sports) / (Arts) Tool

The objectives of the arts or sports programme should focus on youth development and character development outcomes through arts / sports. We recommend that the programme:

- Consists of minimally 8-10 sessions of goal-oriented, progressive, structured skill development of a particular arts form/sport (not multiple arts forms or sports)
- Has some element of competition for sports (e.g. small sided games with each other, friendly competitions with other teams)
- Designed in a way that can achieve the needs and inculcate core values (such as confidence, respect, teamwork, excellence, compassion which are in the Tool) for the youth at-risk

5 Electronic Scoring Templates

The scoring templates for each ACT SG Tool may be found on the MSF website, where the ACT SG Tools are located.³

The data entry fields in the templates have been based on the ACT SG Tools Short-Form. The scoring template is provided to allow for pretest-posttest data entry and analysis of the Short-Form in Microsoft Excel software, and also includes additional fields for keying in data collected from the ACT SG Sports or Arts module (if relevant and used).

ACT SG Tools Scoring Instructions

Start by scoring the survey individually for each youth.

1. Assign a score to each item based on the response of the youth.

i.e. Score ‘Strongly Disagree’ as 1 point; ‘Disagree’ as 2 points; ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ as 3 points; ‘Agree’ as 4 points; ‘Strongly Agree’ as 5 points.

If there are missing responses to an item, make a note of the item and do not assign a score for the youth on that item. Ambiguous or uncertain responses should also not be scored as they should be considered invalid.

e.g. If a youth appears to have responded ‘Strongly Disagree’ and ‘Disagree’ on an item, the response should not be scored; do not attempt to score the item as 1.5 points (average of 1 and 2 points). If a youth appears to have circled the empty space between ‘Strongly Disagree’ and ‘Disagree’, or ‘1’ and ‘2’ for an item, the response should be considered ambiguous and also not be scored.

A large number of missing responses, or evidence of aberrant response patterns (e.g. 1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1; 1-2-3-4-5-5-4-3-2-1) on a survey can, however, be indicative of poor data quality – the youth may not have adequately understood or paid attention to the survey. In this case, the analyst may consider in the interest of research validity to exclude the youth’s survey from further analysis.

³ <https://www.msf.gov.sg/NCPR/Our-Initiatives/Pages/NCPR-Initiatives.aspx#benchmarks>

2. To generate the *skill/facet scores* for each particular skill, sum up the scores from items marked to belong to that skill, and divide that by the number of items summed.

e.g. Assuming that a youth is filling up the Short Form, and has filled up items 2, 4 and 5 (as referenced from the itemset) as ‘Strongly Disagree’; ‘Disagree’ and ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ respectively. To derive his/her score on Academic Achievement, divide the sum of his scores on items 2, 4 and 5 [e.g. 1+2+3=6] by the number of items [3]. This would result in an Academic Achievement score of 2.

The skill/facet can only be scored if all of the items that make up the skill are filled in.

3. To generate the *domain scores*, the formula is as follows using the facet scores as an input:

Achieving score = (Academic Achievement score + Critical Thinking score + Creativity and Innovation score + Goal Setting score) / 4

Connecting score = (Positive Relationships score + Teamwork score + Leadership Development score + Community Connectedness score + Cultural Competence score) / 5

Thriving score = (Active/Healthy Living score + Life Goals score + General Self-Efficacy score + Safety and Risk Awareness score) / 4

A domain can only be scored if all its skills/facets have a valid score assigned.

4. To generate the *overall positive youth development score*, the formula is as follows using the domain scores as an input:

Overall PYD score = (Item 1 + Item 2 + + Item 39) / 39

The overall PYD score can only be computed if all 39 items have a valid score assigned.

Further analyses may proceed after this stage, using the facet-level, domain-level and overall-level outcomes scores generated for each youth. The steps provided above would generate *raw scores* for analysis, which would be sufficient for most general analyses. However, skilled analysts may also consider the use of methods such as structural equation modelling to generate *refined scores* for analysis. Regardless, to ensure the reliability and validity of the subsequent analyses, the following advice is recommended from the Tool developer's perspective:

- As a rule-of-thumb, check that no more than 10% of scores are missing from each item, across the cohort of youths surveyed. Should that be the case, it may be indicative of a systematic limitation of the tool with the cohort of youths or other administration issues. Consider if the validity of the Tool in detecting the outcomes has been compromised, before continuing to score the affected items at facet, domain and overall-outcomes level.
- Scores generated from the 39-item and 75-item measures are not parallel. This means that they cannot be directly compared with each other, even if the same youth provides them on the same outcome. If any comparison is desired across versions, it is recommended to re-score the Full Form measure into the Short Form – for instance, although all of the items 57 – 70 may have been administered as part of the Full Form, to derive the General Self-Efficacy score (for comparison), only items 59, 62 and 67 should be looked at.

6 Norms

A Norming Study was conducted to generate norms for the ACT SG Tool and ACT (Sports) Tool. The Norming Study aims to establish benchmarks for agencies to use to compare a youth's scores to a normative sample which will allow a more purposeful, targeted planning and designing of interventions.

A door-to-door survey was conducted with a total sample size achieved of 3,524 (weighted on n=3,500) Singaporean youths between the ages of 10 to 21 years old. The responses collected by each interviewer were validated based on a 40% rate (i.e., out of 10 surveys conducted by an interviewer, four surveys will be audited to ensure that the correct respondent in the listing has indeed participated and received his/her survey incentive from the interviewer).

The rating for every statement ranges from 1 to 5. The higher the mean score (i.e., closer to 5), the stronger the performance in the particular statement. The norms were generated for the overall PYD score, Achieve domain, Connect domain, Thrive domain in the ACT SG Tool; and the Sports domain in the ACT SG (Sports) Tool.

Users may compare the youth's mean score of a domain against the norms table for that domain, to understand the youth's scores against the norms (i.e., benchmarks) based on the percentile.

ANNEXES

1 Annex on Managing the Data Collection Process

1.1 Research Ethics

Before any data collection with the ACT SG Tools with youths, there are three issues of research ethics for which survey users are advised to consider: (i) data privacy and confidentiality; (ii) voluntary participation; (iii) parental informed consent.

1.1.1 Data Privacy and Confidentiality

Firstly, data privacy or anonymity relates to whether or not the data collected can lead to the identification of the individual participant who filled up the survey. By themselves, the itemset of the ACT SG Tools does not collect any kind of personal identifiers which may lead to the identification of the youth, and it is often considered ethical research practice to limit the extent of personal identifiers collected to only that which is necessary for the research purpose. Data confidentiality is a related point, which means that the data collected should not be improperly divulged; the agency is ethically responsible to take proactive steps to protect the data from being revealed without good reason.

It is understood that for administrative reasons, youth workers may often wish to have survey respondents fill in their names or other personal identifiers onto the survey so that it is easier for the former to track who has completed the survey. It is also understood that for research reasons, agencies may also wish to collect further biodata and participant demographic information concurrent with the ACT SG Tools, to be analysed together with the scores generated from the Tools. These may, however, create potential risks for the data to be linked back with their initial respondent by unauthorised parties, with the information being potentially abused or its disclosure to cause discomfort to the youth. To manage the issues concerning data privacy and

confidentiality then, the following starter rules-of-thumb are proposed for the management of personally identifiable information and research data:

Limit: Agencies should in the first place *not* collect what is not necessary. If a piece of personally identifiable information has been deemed important to achieve a certain purpose, agencies can further review if the information can be collected in a more-limited resolution without compromising its objective. For instance, instead of collecting full NRIC numbers to link the survey to other data/records, agencies can consider collecting just the last four characters of the NRIC number to be matched.

Protect: Agencies should prevent the unauthorised disclosure or access of collected records, minimally through access control mechanisms. Completed forms should be passed back by individual youths to the youth worker directly, and hardcopy surveys and other data sheets once collected should be locked up in a secure cabinet/locker with access being allowed only to personnel responsible for coding and analysing the findings. For information that has been computerised, the electronic dataset file should be encrypted or password-protected.

Censor: Agencies may occasionally decide to share collected raw data with other parties, for the purposes of re-analysis or further research. In these cases, agencies should ensure that in the materials that are shared, any personal identifiers should be removed (as they are not often required) or if that is not possible, to reduce their level of detail to make individual identification impossible (such as banding continuous/similar responses into a smaller set of categories e.g. age into age-bands; school of study into level of study). To facilitate traceback, common codes/pseudonyms can be assigned to participants in the dataset, with the code-person map known only to the initial agency.

1.1.2 Voluntary Participation

Secondly, the tenet of voluntary participation means the doing or completion of the survey should be an optional, albeit highly encouraged, activity for individual participants. The youth's participation in evaluation or research, although beneficial for service accountability and improvement efforts, is not instrumentally part of the social service or programme he/she is enrolled in, since it does not lead to any expected positive youth development benefit for the individual. Instead, it is essential that youths should be engaged with responsibly to inform them of the purpose and non-compulsory nature of the survey. As an example of what to brief to youths about the survey as to seek their voluntary participation, refer to Section 3.2.

In line with the tenet of voluntary participation, agencies and youth workers should not coerce, force or set conditions for youths such that they are compelled to participate or perform in the survey in order to receive services or other substantial benefits. A relevant discussion here to be had is on the provision of incentives to youths for participating in the survey – which, agencies are allowed at their own discretion, to provide, especially if it helps to improve participation rates. However, what is prohibited is to give an incentive which is disproportionate to the effort of completing the survey, as it would create an effect of compulsion or inducement on the youth to take part. In other words, the incentive should be kept fairly valued and not excessive – some suggestions are to give a small voucher or stationery piece.

The incentive should also not be associated with the quality or dosage of the programme received or other social service benefits i.e. a youth/family's eligibility to receive a financial assistance package should not be conditioned upon the youth filling up the survey. Additionally, it is advised not to frame the award of the incentive in negative terms i.e. it should be framed as “if you do the survey, then you will get this” rather than “if you don't do the survey, then you won't get this”. Lastly, the incentive should be kept consistent and fair, and not vary between youths enrolled in the same programme at the same time, which also helps to avoid perceptions of favouritism.

1.1.3 Parental Informed Consent

Thirdly, agencies should consider the need to engage with parents of the youths prior to the survey. Depending on the context concerning the use of the ACT SG Tools and institutional policies, it may be necessary as part of ethical research practice, to seek parental informed consent for the youths to participate in the evaluation/research. In a local youth at-risk programme evaluation or practice research context, it is often possible to build in and concurrently obtain the consent of parents for data to be collected from youths for research and evaluation, at the time of the youth's enrolment into the programme. Most agencies already have some form of their own template for this. Agencies which do not have such clauses already incorporated in their client registration forms, may consider including the following paragraphs in documents to be read and acknowledged (signed) by parents:

“I consent for my child/ward's participation in any surveys and other research projects conducted by the agency, and agree for him/her to furnish his/her personal data upon request for such purposes. I understand that all data collected will be used solely for research purposes only: to understand the effectiveness of the programme(s) my child/ward is enrolled in, identify possible areas of improvement, and to inform potential social service and policy development.

I also consent for the agency to share any of the data collected with third-parties, including but not exclusive to other social service organisations, public agencies and academic institutions (and their agents and representatives). I understand that the data will only be shared as necessary in order to facilitate research audits, and to fulfil the research objectives as stated in the above paragraph.”

If however, the ACT SG Tools are to be administered to youths for reasons which are not related to programme evaluation i.e. norms collection or other research, there may be no prior or convenient opportunity for parents to be notified at all of any data collection to be done with their children; it may also be difficult to reach these parents. On this point of parental consent hence, it is advised for individual users of the Tools to

make their own review of the circumstances of data collection. Agencies may also wish to seek the opinion of an independent ethics review board to make the final determination.

1.2 Participant Management

The ACT SG Tools are meant to be answered by the youth respondents themselves, who are the interest of the evaluation/research. It is not an instrument designed for proxy reporting; youth workers or other adult administrators should not therefore respond to the survey on behalf of the youth for it would adversely affect the quality of the instrument. However, in the case of youths with reading difficulties or are at a low reading level, a youth worker is allowed to assist upon request by reading aloud the items to them, or to provide broad examples of attitudes, thoughts and behaviours, consistent with the item for the youth respondent's understanding. The youth should however ultimately think about their responses to the statements themselves, and be allowed to decide the answer they want to provide in the survey.

The Tools can be flexibly administered in either an individual setting or a small group context. Regardless of how the session will be conducted, following place and time arrangements are made to ensure that the quality of data collection will be consistent and satisfactory:

- Place: Provide a neutral environment for the youth to do the survey in, where noise and other potential distractions can be minimised. This can be in a quiet corner at your activity centre, with adequate lighting and at a comfortable room temperature. If the survey is done in groups, ensure that the youths are briefed to answer the Tool by themselves and that they would not be disruptive toward each other. It is not recommended to let the youth bring the survey home/school to finish, as there could be the presence of interfering factors to affect their responses.

- Time: The survey should be completed in one sitting, though they may take short breaks in between. It is suggested not to set a time limit for youths to complete the survey; instead, they should take as long as they like. Youths can be encouraged to finish the survey by allowing them to go for short breaks if they are getting restless, or by providing simple sweets or snacks for them to consume as they do the survey.

Finally, it is essential also to prepare the youths to fill in the survey. The youths should be made to understand why they are being asked to do the survey; this would also assist in managing their behaviour and motivation to complete the session. A suggested paragraph that youth workers may use in briefing youths on the survey, in an evaluation context, prior to administering the (short-form) Tool is as follows:

“We are passing you a survey (worksheet) to fill in. This survey has 39 questions that will ask you about what you feel, think and do, and will take about 15 – 30 minutes to fill up. You can choose not to do it, but it will be important to us that you do as it will help us understand how the programme is helping you. There are no right or wrong answers as this is not a test – we just want you to answer honestly on what is true for you. Whether you do the survey or not, or how you respond to questions on the survey, will not affect how you are treated in the programme. Are you willing to fill in the survey?”

Youth workers may also include a statement on the privacy and confidentiality of the survey, if relevant:

“What you fill in will not be told to your parents, your teachers, or your friends. Everything you fill in will be kept private between you and the centre. If we ever need to share responses from the centre on the survey with anyone, they will not know that it was you specifically who filled it in.”

Finally, the youth worker may instruct to start the survey:

“If there is anything which you do not understand, please raise your hand or let me know, and I can come and help you. If you need a break, you can also let me know. Do note that at any point of time, you have the right to withdraw; should you feel uncomfortable and do not wish to participate further, you can let me know and we can stop this immediately. If you are willing and ready, you can begin to fill in the survey.”

The youth worker is advised to remain present in the proximity while the youth fills the survey, in order to attend to any questions or requests. However, the former should ensure that his or her presence is not seen as imposing on the youth or causing the youth to second-guess his/her responses. When the youth has completed the survey, the youth worker should collect it back and may do a check to ensure that:

- X The survey has been answered correctly. What this entails is to ask the youth if he/she has understood all the questions asked, and to perform a physical check of the survey to ensure that there are no pages skipped or responses made in error (e.g. circled two responses or circled in between).

If there are any invalid or missing responses, the youth worker may gently check with the youth whether he/she had deliberately decided not to answer the question. If the question had been missed out by accident, the youth worker can allow the youth to make a remedial response and fill it in accordingly. If the youth mentions that he/she does not understand the question, the youth worker should explain the item to the youth in simpler terms and let the youth attempt to answer it.

- X The youth has accorded a right level of attention to the survey. What this entails is to ascertain that the youth has not just answered the survey just for the sake of getting it done with. This can usually be inferred to be the case when the youth appears to have taken a very

short amount of time to do the survey i.e. just 2 – 3 minutes. Alternatively, it can also be inferred when it appears that the youth gives the same response throughout sections or a page of the survey (e.g. 1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1), or appears to respond according to a number pattern (e.g. 1-2-3-4-5-5-4-3-2-1).

If the youth is suspected of giving inattentive responses to the survey, the youth worker may gently check with the youth whether he/she had any issues with the conduct of the survey. The youth worker can also ask a probing question such as “How come it looks like there is a pattern to your answers?” and observe the youth’s reply. If the youth reveals that there is a problem which the youth worker can judge to be easily rectified e.g. youth wanted to quickly finish the survey to go for a break, the youth worker can offer to correct the conditions e.g. provide a break for the youth, and let the youth redo the survey (or the affected sections). If the youth expresses that he/she does not want to do the survey, then the survey (or the affected sections) should be discarded as invalid.

In the event that the youth does not make any statement to suggest that he/she may have been inattentive to the survey, the youth worker may exercise his/her discretion to judge if the survey should be rejected as invalid. The youth worker may, as part of the debriefing, inform the youth that if they have contributed responses which are not correct or honest, they should inform the former and that there will be no negative consequences taken out against them as their participation in the survey is entirely optional (the survey can then be withdrawn).

Finally, once the youth worker is satisfied with the youth’s participation, the youth can be thanked and dismissed/debriefed.

1.3 Overcoming Poor Data Collection Practices

In our data collection experience, there are also certain poor practices that are typically carried out by data collectors for reasons of convenience or a lack of awareness concerning the effects of these practices on the data validity. We wish to suggest some possible process substitutions to effectively overcome these practices:

X Conducting the pre-test at the wrong time

This happens when the pre-test, instead of being conducted *immediately before* the commencement of the first session/visit of any service or programmatic activity, it is instead held at any point in time later – some common occurrences are: holding the pre-test either halfway through or at the closing of the first session with the youth, or when the youth arrives for the second session of the programme. This is usually justified to be done due to a perception that it is more important for a service provider to deliver services first rather than conduct research, or because collectors feel a need for a period of interaction with the youth to build rapport before any data collection can proceed.

In our view, this practice causes certain difficulties. The reason the pre-test should always be conducted before the delivery of any services, is once the youth worker begins to meaningfully engage with the youth or conducts activities which draw the youth out from his or her usual mental state, the youth may: (i) be primed to provide different responses from what he/she might give initially, (ii) already start to receive the benefit of change from the programme. Not only would this result in the pre-test becoming an inaccurate representation of the youth's *status quo* levels, but it could also lead to a narrower degree of change being observed at post-test – to be an inaccurate representation of the efficacy of the programme evaluated.

Instead, we maintain that the pre-test must be strictly administered at its intended timing, in order for the full range of effects of the programme on the youth to be reliably and validly captured come post-test. Some data collectors may ask for there to be time catered for rapport building before survey administration; we suggest that this could be done without involving programmatic elements. For effective data collection, it is only

necessary for there to be rapport – not a relationship. Rapport entails that there should be a mirroring and alignment of expectations between the parties who should be mutually honest and attentive to each other, within the scope of the research task. Through the process of explaining to and guiding them through the informed consent process, youth workers can equally build rapport with youths, by way of pleasantly introducing themselves to the youth, describing to the youth what the survey measures, and highlighting how the survey would be important to help understand the youth. The youth worker may also be attentive to cues to indicate if the youth may be unsure of the purpose and nature of the survey, and take the chance to clarify the matter, to help the youth feel engaged and motivated to fill up the survey.

X Providing respondents during post-test, a reference to their pre-test scores

This happens when either during or just before administering the post-test to respondents, data collectors provide respondents with a copy of their pre-test responses to the same set of questions from earlier for reference. Sometimes, respondents are even asked to fill up their post-test response on the same survey sheet where they had earlier filled in their pre-test, using a different ink to circle post-test responses.

While data collectors may feel that this saves on resources (e.g. paper; filing) needed to administer the survey, or it helps the youth to recall and anchor their current responses based on how specifically they thought about the concept asked from earlier, this is actually not desirable. This can introduce a bias in the respondent to feel that he/she must now circle responses which are better than before, out of self-esteem enhancement reasons – such as to feel that they have been “successful” or spent their time productively in the programme, rather than out of a genuine reflection that they have improved.

Instead, we recommend administering the pre-test and post-test on separate sheets of paper, and for the respondent not to have any knowledge of their previous answer on the questionnaire. For the ACT SG Tools, the language used has been deliberate in referring only to the youth’s current situation as well, and there is no need for them to recollect to the past – there is hence no cause for the practice to persist with the Tools.

X Seeking responses from proxies (e.g. youth workers; parents; teachers)

This happens when the ACT SG Tools are being used, and instead of the youth being the respondent to the survey (as intended by design), questions are instead being responded to by others familiar with the youth – such as youth workers, parents, teachers etc., assuming the youth’s perspective. When this has to be done, it is usually justified that it is necessary as the youth is unavailable, or the youth cannot understand or respond to the measure.

While the ACT SG Tools has not been tested for the degree of agreement between self and proxy-report, many survey instruments, in general, do show a disagreement between self and proxy-report when compared. This is usually attributed to the lack of the proxy respondent’s complete awareness of the target respondent’s inner thoughts and daily ongoing. Even if the proxy respondent is very well-acquainted with the target, in the youth context, the youth is unlikely to spend most of his/her time and relate meaningfully to only with one possible proxy respondent e.g. parent; youth worker; friend. In order for an accurate global picture of the state of youth to be captured by proxies, there would need to be the collection and informed merger of perspectives from the youth’s parents and siblings; significant others; teachers, and peers. Otherwise, the response provided by the singular proxy could be inadequate.

Instead, we suggest that to further encourage youths to respond to the survey by themselves, data collectors should notify target youths in advance to avail themselves for the survey. While most youths should not face any issue with the language used in the scale, for those who do have trouble understanding the questions, the youth worker prepares to explain the terms using simpler words that are suitable for the youth to understand.

If the youth has difficulty responding according to the response anchors used in the ACT SG Tool i.e. “Strongly Disagree”; “Neither Agree nor Disagree” etc., as all the questions are of positive valence, we advise that the youth worker could perhaps associate each response option with an icon of a smiley face as such – more upset faces indicate disagreement with the statement, while more cheerful faces indicate agreement:

				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

In administering the Tool, the youth worker can then show the youth the range of smiley faces and what they represent. The youth can then be prompted to point to or indicate which smiley face best represents how much they find each statement to be true, for the youth worker to note a score. This aids to significantly reduce the difficulty of answering the questionnaire for youths who may not be as verbally oriented.