May 2023

# Youth Report of Social Emotional Skills

## Measurement Manual

The **Youth Report of Socio-Emotional Skills (YRSS)** asks children and youth about *mental and behavioral aspects of their socio-emotional skills* in general (i.e., beyond the out-of-school time program setting and into environments such as home and school). The YRSS can be used as a pre-test for program planning purposes and, also, as a post-test for assessing socio-emotional skill growth. This manual includes the following section to support successful implementation and understanding of the YRSS:

# Introduction

QTurn's Quality-Outcomes Design and Measure (Q-ODM) toolbox includes a comprehensive suite of evidence-informed measures designed to assess the quality and impact of out-of-school time (OST) programs. This manual provides information about a self-report survey measure designed to assess children's and adolescents' socio-emotional skills. We also provide some technical information about the measure and general guidance about how to administer, score, and interpret it.

The Youth Report of Socio-Emotional Skills (YRSS) was developed from extensive practitioner input and academic research about the socio-emotional behavior of school-aged children and adolescents[1] and the socio-emotional mental skills likely to influence that behavior. The YRSS items were created, selected, and/or adapted from wide range of similar measurement instruments that were designed to assess youth's beliefs about their own socio-emotional skills.

The YRSS can be used within the context of most types of OST program offerings. It can be completed by youth shortly after they first enter a program offering, in order to assess their *baseline* socio-emotional skills, and shortly after or near the end of a program period, in order to assess socio-emotional skill growth. We generally recommend using the YRSS as a secondary outcome variable for typical OST program impact studies, and over longer periods of time between baseline and follow up, because we believe that it is less likely to detect socio-emotional skill growth than measures that are based on behavioral observations of youth (like the Adult Rating of Youth Behavior).

Please keep in mind that the YRSS does *not* provide a clinical assessment of children or youth. It is intended only for *lower-stakes* planning, improvement, and program evaluation purposes (e.g., where low scores signal areas of focus and support for children and youth but not failure, sanctions, or other disciplinary action).

**The following sections include:**

- The theory of change underpinning the measure.
- A technical guide to the measure covering
    - what it is,
    - how it was developed,
    - how and when to use it, and
    - how to administer it.

---

[1] Hereafter, we use the term *youth* where referring to both school-aged children and adolescents.

QTURN

# Theory of Change

The Youth Report of Socio-Emotional Skills (YRSS) is based on a theory of change (Figure 1) for how youth develop and grow their socio-emotional skills within out-of-school time (OST) settings and then transfer these skills to other areas of their lives (Peck & Smith, 2020). The theory of change is focused on the point of service because that is where adults and youth in OST programs directly interact with each other, so that is where we expect to see the kinds of staff practice and youth engagement that have the most direct impact on the behavioral expression of socio-emotional skills and socio-emotional skill growth. It also includes regional, community, and organizational levels because the quality of staff practice at the point of service depends a lot on the kinds of support staff receive from people working at these 'higher' levels (e.g., professional development opportunities, manageable numbers of youth allotted to each program offering, sufficient resources and staff to help manage the allotted number of youth, etc.). The theory of change also includes near and far transfer elements (e.g., how youth behave in school and the kind of progress they make on their educational or occupational journeys) because that is where we expect to see the ultimate benefits of socio-emotional skill growth.

**Figure 1:** *Theory of Change for Multilevel Cascades of Causes and Effects.*
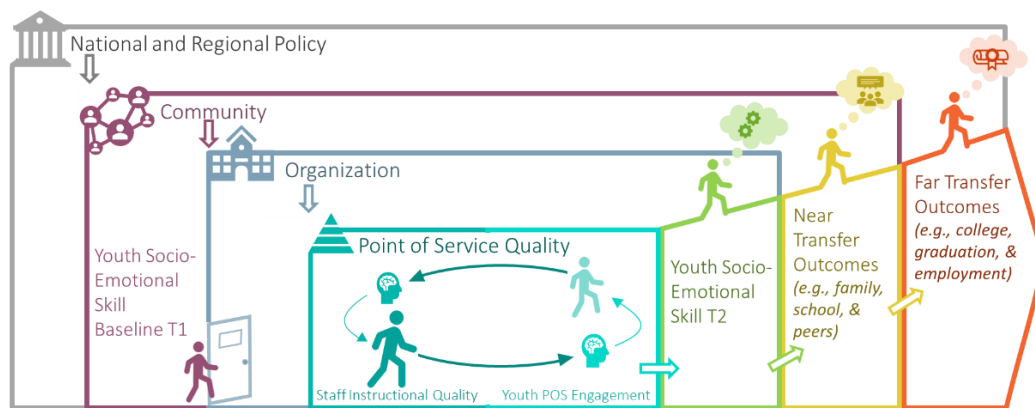


The theory of change indicates that high-quality staff practice at the point of service (e.g., 'meeting youth where they are at') promotes youth mental engagement at the point of service. Youth mental engagement promotes both the optimal behavioral expression of current skills and, through multiple interactions over time (e.g., feedback and mastery experiences), socio-emotional skill growth. In these terms, socio-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and youth develop essential life skills such as empathy, regulating emotions, responsibility, and teamwork. Socio-emotional *skills* are the relatively-enduring mental and behavioral results of these learning processes. These skills play a central role in youth's ability to do well in school, make successful transitions to adulthood, and achieve positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment, and good health.

# Youth Report of Socio-Emotional Skills (YRSS)

## About the YRSS

The Youth Report of Socio-Emotional Skills (YRSS) is a self-report survey used to assess youth's *functional* mental and behavioral skills in six domains of socio-emotional skill functioning (i.e., Emotion Management, Empathy, Initiative, Problem Solving, Responsibility, & Teamwork). Functional skills are the best an individual can do with no additional supports from the setting, so they are good indicators of how youth are likely to perform in most life settings. Functional skills are relatively-enduring socio-emotional skill *traits* that are transferred into and out of program settings; they are not static, but changes generally require effort, practice, and patience. As a self-report measure, the YRSS was designed to assess youth's functional socio-emotional skills, defined specifically in terms of attachment *schemas* (e.g., secure vs. anxious), *beliefs* about the self and world (including beliefs about their behavior), and their control over the focus of *awareness* (Smith & Peck, 2020). In short, each of the six YRSS domain scores for each youth reflects their particular configuration of schemas, beliefs, and awareness in each of the six socio-emotional skill domains.

The YRSS was developed from wide range of similar measurement instruments that were designed to assess youth's beliefs about their own socio-emotional skills (e.g., Child Trends, 2014; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2018). In the YRSS case, we selected, adapted, or created items that are specific to each of the six domains of socio-emotional skill functioning described in the SEL Challenge study (Smith et al., 2016).

### Validity

Although detailed psychometric information about the construct validity (e.g., the ability to distinguish between the scales and domains), criterion validity (e.g., the ability to predict youth's school performance), and reliability of the current version of the YRSS is limited, given the close alignment between the socio-emotional domain definitions and the YRSS item content, the YRSS can be viewed as highly face valid measure of youth's functional socio-emotional skills. Reliability has been assessed only in terms of the *internal consistency* among the items, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient (e.g., we have not conducted test-retest reliability analyses of YRSS scores). Across two samples of YRSS data (with n's averaging 108 youth, about 87% of whom were aged 10-14), alpha reliability estimates for the YRSS total score ranged from .87 to .89 and averaged .88.

As expected, the alpha reliability estimates for the YRSS domain scores vary by domain. For the three domain scores (i.e., Empathy, Problem Solving, & Responsibility) constructed from items designed to be reflective (i.e., each item refers to the same dimension), alpha reliability estimates ranged from .70 to .73 and averaged .71. The other three domains include items focused on multiple dimensions within domains (i.e., they are better viewed as *formative* than *reflective* scales), so alpha coefficients do not provide the best estimates of their reliabilities. For example, in the Emotion Management domain, item 1 is focused on downregulating negative emotions, item 2 is focused on impulsivity, item 3 is focused on the effects of being emotionally triggered, and item 4 is focused on impulse control. In these domains, higher scores indicate more skill, but different people with similar domain scores can have different forms of the same skill, meaning different combinations of item scores that yield the same domain score (e.g., one person might score high on impulsiveness but low on downregulating their emotions, whereas another person might score low on impulsiveness but high on downregulating their emotions).

**Analysis**

After calculating the YRSS domain scores, this information can be used to inform *continuous quality improvement* (CQI) processes, such as decisions about future training and professional development opportunities or program planning. For example, organizations serving high percentages of youth who score very low in a given domain may decide to focus training and program offerings more closely on staff practices that directly address youth socio-emotional skill development needs in that domain. If the YRSS is also used as a follow-up measure, then the YRSS domain scores can be used to assess socio-emotional skill change. The typical way change is assessed involves comparing the YRSS domain scores from the baseline assessment to the YRSS domain scores from the follow-up assessment.

Another way that changes in youth's socio-emotional skills can be assessed, that complements the typical *variable-centered* strategy of calculating change scores for one domain at a time (as described above), is by using *person-centered* (aka, *pattern-centered*) methods that treat the six domain scores for each youth simultaneously, as integrated skill sets (i.e., their socio-emotional skill *profile*). In this way, youth's socio-emotional skills at baseline and follow-up are indicated by their socio-emotional skill profiles at each of these time points, and change over time (e.g., growth, stability, or decline) is indicated by how youth move from their baseline profile to their follow-up profile. As part of QTurn's Q-ODM toolbox, after analyzing the YRSS domain score data using variable-centered methods, we generally provide reports to each organization that show the six YRSS socio-emotional skill domain scores as a set of profiles characterizing the participating youth. For example, we provide reports showing the percent of youth with high-, moderate-, and lower-skill YRSS profiles at baseline and follow-up and the percent of youth who followed socio-emotional skill growth, stability, or decline pathways.

This kind of person-centered information can be used for both CQI and program evaluation purposes, such as assessing the extent to which staff practices are having their intended impact on youth's socio-emotional skill growth. In addition, where organizations are part of larger networks using the same measure, this kind of socio-emotional skill profile and pathway information can be easily aggregated to the network level providing, for example, the basis for more rigorous evaluations of the impact of program quality on youth's socio-emotional skill growth. Whether considered at the organization or network level, finding evidence of socio-emotional skill growth using YRSS scores supports conclusions like (a) the youth participating in our program offerings are improving their socio-emotional skills and, potentially (e.g., where program quality data are included), (b) the reason youth are improving their socio-emotional skills is because we are creating high-quality program offerings.

# How and When to Use

The YRSS can be used in different ways to suit different purposes. For example, the YRSS can be completed by youth shortly after they first enter a program offering in order to assess their *baseline* socio-emotional skills. To get the most accurate responses, it is best to wait until staff and youth spend about four hours of program time together before having them complete the YRSS so that youth feel completely comfortable asking questions about any of the words or phrases used in the YRSS items. Baseline socio-emotional skill information can be used for program planning purposes (e.g., to tailor program offerings to the needs of the youth who are attending).

The YRSS can also be used at both baseline and follow-up, shortly after or near the end of a program period, in order to assess youth's socio-emotional skill growth. For the purpose of detecting changes in socio-emotional skills, we generally recommend annual assessments of youth's functional socio-emotional skills because (a) functional skills should theoretically take longer to change than optimal socio-emotional skills and (b) self-report measures tend to be less valid than observational measures due to *response bias* (e.g., demand characteristics, social desirability, acquiescence). Response bias usually shows up as scale scores that are higher (or lower) than what we would normally expect (i.e., ceiling and floor effects). In other words, people tend to self-report higher (or lower) scores than may accurately represent their true standing, and such biased baseline scores make it more difficult to detect actual changes.

In any case, response bias does not necessarily affect every youth's survey responses in the same way, and waiting until staff and youth become comfortable with one another before administering the baseline YRSS is designed to minimize response bias. If this protocol is well implemented, and particularly where building socio-emotional skills is the primary focus of the program offering, then using the YRSS as a follow-up measure after only a relatively short amount of program time (e.g., 2 months) can be an effective way to assess socio-emotional skill growth, as long as we do not have unrealistic expectations about the amount of change we are likely to find. For example, the average amount of change across all youth may not appear to be very large, even though we may be able to identify a smaller subset of youth who evidence substantial socio-emotional skill growth.

Socio-emotional skill growth information can be used to understand youth's development and the relation of this development to other aspects of programming (e.g., the impact of instructional quality on socio-emotional skill growth).

We recommend using the YRSS with youth ages 10 and older. We also recommend encouraging youth, while they are completing the YRSS, to ask questions about any words or concepts about which they are uncertain. The YRSS should take about 10 to 20 minutes to complete and can be used with youth in any kind of program offering.

Please keep in mind that the YRSS does *not* provide a *clinical* assessment of youth. The YRSS is intended only for *lower-stakes* planning, improvement, and program evaluation purposes (e.g., where low scores signal areas of focus and support for youth but not failure, sanctions, or other disciplinary action).

QNTURN

# Administration and Scoring

**YRSS Items**

The YRSS includes 24 core items and two additional questions about the youth and their attendance. The response scale for items 3-26 is:

> 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always

The additional questions, items B1 and B2, are useful for understanding important factors that may help you to interpret your findings.

B1. How old are you? [1 = 9 or less, 2 = 10-12, 3 = 13-15, 4 = 16 or more]
B2. How many hours do you attend this program in a typical week? [1 = 1 or less, 2 = 2-3, 3 = 4-5, 4 = 6 or more]

**Emotion Management**
1. I easily calm myself down when feeling upset.
2. I react to things before thinking much about them. (R)
3. My strong feelings get in the way of interacting with others or participating in activities. (R)
4. I easily stop myself from doing things I shouldn't do.

**Empathy**
5. I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.
6. I understand how people close to me feel.
7. It is easy for me to feel what other people are feeling.
8. I feel bad for those who are worse off than me.

**Initiative**
9. I stay focused and on-task despite distractions.
10. I give up when things get difficult. (R)
11. I work as long and hard as necessary to get a job done.
12. I am willing to risk mistakes and setbacks to reach my goals.

**Problem Solving**
13. I start a new task by thinking about different options for doing it.
14. I make step-by-step plans to reach my goals.
15. I make back-up plans in case things don't work out.
16. I am good at managing my time (e.g., I show up on time; I get things done on time).

**Responsibility**
17. People can count on me to get my part done.
18. I do the things that I say I am going to do.
19. I take responsibility for my actions, even if I make a mistake.
20. I do my best when a trusted adult asks me to do something.

**Teamwork**
21. I seek help from others when I need it.
22. I respect other points of view, even if I disagree.
23. I go out of my way to help others.
24. I encourage others to do their part.

QTURN

## Scoring

1. Youth's responses to all items marked by "(R)" should be reverse scored, such that:

   1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, and 5 = 1.

2. The mean of the response values across all items within a domain should be calculated to yield a single domain-specific scale score for each youth. For example, to produce a score for the domain of Emotion Management, you should calculate the mean score of items 1-4. If some item responses are missing, scale scores can be calculated as long as there are responses to at least 3 of the 4 items in each domain (but remember to calculate the mean score based only on the number of questions for which youth have actually provided a response). Each of the six domain-specific scale scores should range from 1 to 5.

## Prompt

Your responses to this survey will help us create the best possible program experiences for youth. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

## Instructions

Please read each statement, and then think about yourself in terms of the statement. If you are not sure about the meaning of any of the words, please ask for more information. Mark the box that best describes how you see yourself in general.

You are not required to answer any of the questions, and you can stop at any time. If you want to change any of your answers, please mark an "X" through the old response and fill in the new one.

Please note that higher scores are not better or worse – all people will have a mix of high and low scores, and we want to know your unique mix!

Please try to be as "true to you" as possible. When you are not sure, just pick the response option that is closest to how you think about yourself and keep moving. Thank you!

## Protocol

Place each youth's study ID number on each survey. Distribute the surveys to the corresponding youth, and ask them to return it to you (or put it in a designated location) after they complete it. Ask youth to read the instructions and ask any questions they may have. While they complete the survey, encourage them to ask for clarification about the meaning of any words about which they are uncertain. Give them about 20 minutes to complete the survey.

QTURN

# License for Download and Use of QTurn Measures and Manuals

This is a limited license covering your use of QTurn LLC's intellectual property (IP) in the form of six measurement manuals (documents) that include the following QTurn measures: *Teacher Practices Instrument* (TPI), *Adult Rating of Youth Behavior* (ARYB), *Adult Rating of Youth* (ARY), *Youth Rating of Socio-emotional Skills* (YRSS), *Teacher Wellness Instrument* (TWI), and *Youth Engagement Survey* (YES). Hereafter, you are the licensee and we, QTurn LLC, are the licensor; i.e., we at QTurn are extending a limited license to use the listed documents in certain ways and not in others. Please read it carefully. By downloading the QTurn measurement manuals, you agree to all terms in this agreement. If you don't agree, don't download and don't use.

**Definitions**. (a) *User* or *licensee* – any person or entity that downloads the QTurn measurement manuals. (b) *Copyright* – All of the written, audio, and visual material provided as QTurn content are the copyright material of, and are owned wholly by, QTurn LLC without limitation. You agree not to make copies without permission of the licensor. (c) *Intellectual Property* (IP) is defined as (1) trademarked symbols, (2) all published and/or copyrighted content, and (3) trade secrets, such as private consulting communications and methodology, and all information that could be marked "internal."

**Licensee Rights**. (a) This license confers on the licensee the right to use the measures and manuals at a single location for the benefit of your organization. You do not have the right to contract with additional organizations to re-sell or license the content in the measures and manuals in any circumstance, without prior written permission of QTurn LLC. (b) You may not sell the QTurn measurement manuals. (c) You may not create derivative works from the QTurn measurement manuals for use outside of the location and organization for which this license is being granted without the express written consent of QTurn LLC. (d) This end user agreement must be printed with all copies of QTurn IP used at your location and organization.

**Fees**. (a) This license confers upon the licensee the right to print one copy of this material and to make subsequent copies as necessary to equip other staff at your location and organization. (b) There is no fee. (c) Licensor accepts no other responsibilities or obligations related to the content as to defects during or after download.

**Responsibilities**. (a) You, the licensee, assume all risk and responsibilities associated with downloaded QTurn measures and manuals and their effective use. (b) You agree to use the QTurn measures and manuals in a way that is appropriate per protocols and guidance. (c) You further agree not to use the QTurn measures and manuals for decision-making that is higher stakes or otherwise poses threat, harm, or risk to anyone at any time. (d) You agree not to compete with QTurn LLC using QTurn measures and manuals and agree not to enter into any kind of agreement with any partner to do the same.

**Ownership**. You agree that all aspects of QTurn IP including the measures and manuals and all other QTurn materials, audio, visual, methods, techniques, plans for implementation, systems, authorships, and ideas are proprietary IP and/or valuable trade secrets of the licensor and are protected by law. The licensor retains all rights to QTurn IP in copyrights and trademarks, trade secrets, and other intellectual property rights therein. Your possession of QTurn measures and manuals, or any other QTurn IP, does not transfer any rights to you except as set forth in this agreement.

**Term**. (a) This license begins at download, continues for one year from that date, and will automatically update in one year. (b) If the licensee breaches terms of this agreement, the licensor may terminate this agreement with 10 days written notice.

**Limitations**. (a) Licensor makes no warranties, express or implied, and excludes any warranty of fitness for a particular purpose or merchantability. No one else can make any warranty or representation about QTurn IP other than as provided in this paragraph. (b) The licensor will never be liable to you or any third party for any damages of any sort nor any form of action (criminal or civil).

**Indemnification**. You agree to hold the licensor harmless from any claim, damage or cause of action (inclusive of negligence, misrepresentation, error, or omission) or other breaches of this agreement by you.

**Your representations**. You have done your own research and due diligence regarding QTurn IP and have made your own independent determination of value and risks. No promises or other representation have been made by the licensor or the licensor's agents other than as provided in this agreement. Modifications of this agreement are not valid without the licensor's written consent.

**Miscellaneous**. (a) The parties to this agreement are independent contractors and nothing in this agreement should be construed to create relations of partnership or joint venture or any other entanglement. You will not make any representations to any third party that you have authority to act in the name of QTurn LLC or to obligate QTurn LLC in any way. (b) If we have a dispute, it will be settled in the courts in Washtenaw County Michigan. (c) You agree that the licensor has made no representation or warranty concerning your success and that the licensor disclaims any warranty or representation as to the success of the QTurn IP under this agreement.