

Eliciting and Uplifting Youth Voice in Illinois Child Welfare Residential Care

Patricia Garibaldi, MS¹ (she/her), Linzy Pinkerton, MS¹, Neil Jordan, PhD¹, Wendi Wilkins, MA, LCPC¹, Alysha Thompson, PhD² & Cassandra Kisiel, PhD¹

¹ Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, ² Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, Seattle Children's Hospital, University of Washington

INTRODUCTION

- Inclusion of the voices and experiences of youth is critical for
 - quality improvement efforts, and
 - implementation of trauma-informed care⁷
- Youth report enhanced well-being in residential care when they have
 - relationships with peers and staff¹⁻⁵
 - coping strategies
 - familial connection⁶
 - some predictability and control over their environment^{2,7}

METHODS

- Surveyed 512 youth ages 12+ in Illinois child welfare residential treatment facilities in November 2018 asking:
 - The best thing about my residential program
 - Something I wish my residential program would change
 - More information I would like to share
- Data collection by Illinois child welfare Youth Advisory Board members and monitoring unit staff
- Qualitative data analysis using NVIVO software and grounded coding theory

RESULTS

- 90% of eligible youth contributed open-ended feedback in the survey
- Youth had more negative (61.4%) than positive (37.5%) feedback
- Youth identified many aspects of trauma informed care as being important to their experiences

Youth in Illinois child welfare residential treatment offer actionable and meaningful feedback about their care. They highlight many aspects of trauma-informed care as being critical to their experiences, including:



Figure 1. Study Codes by Frequency

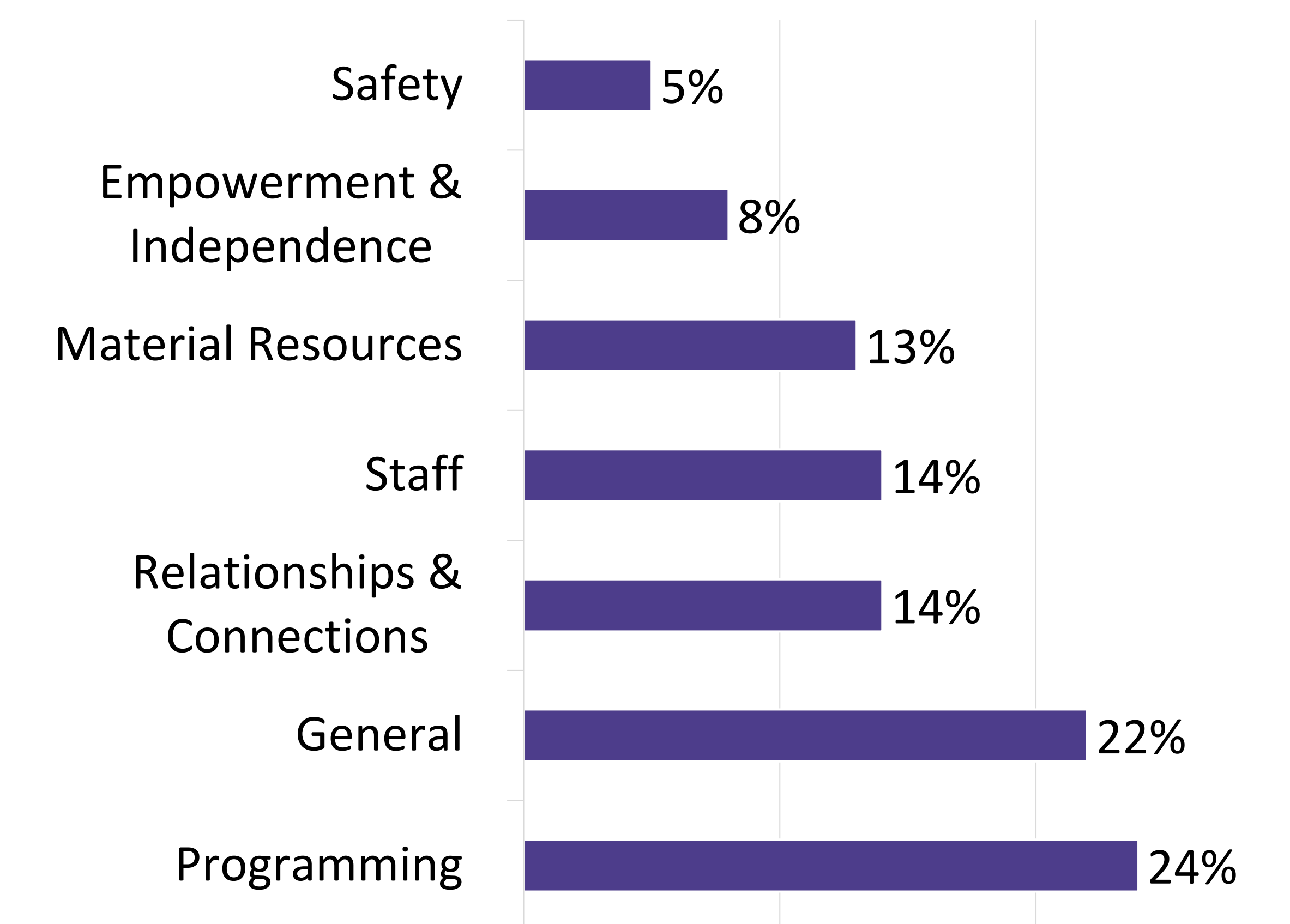
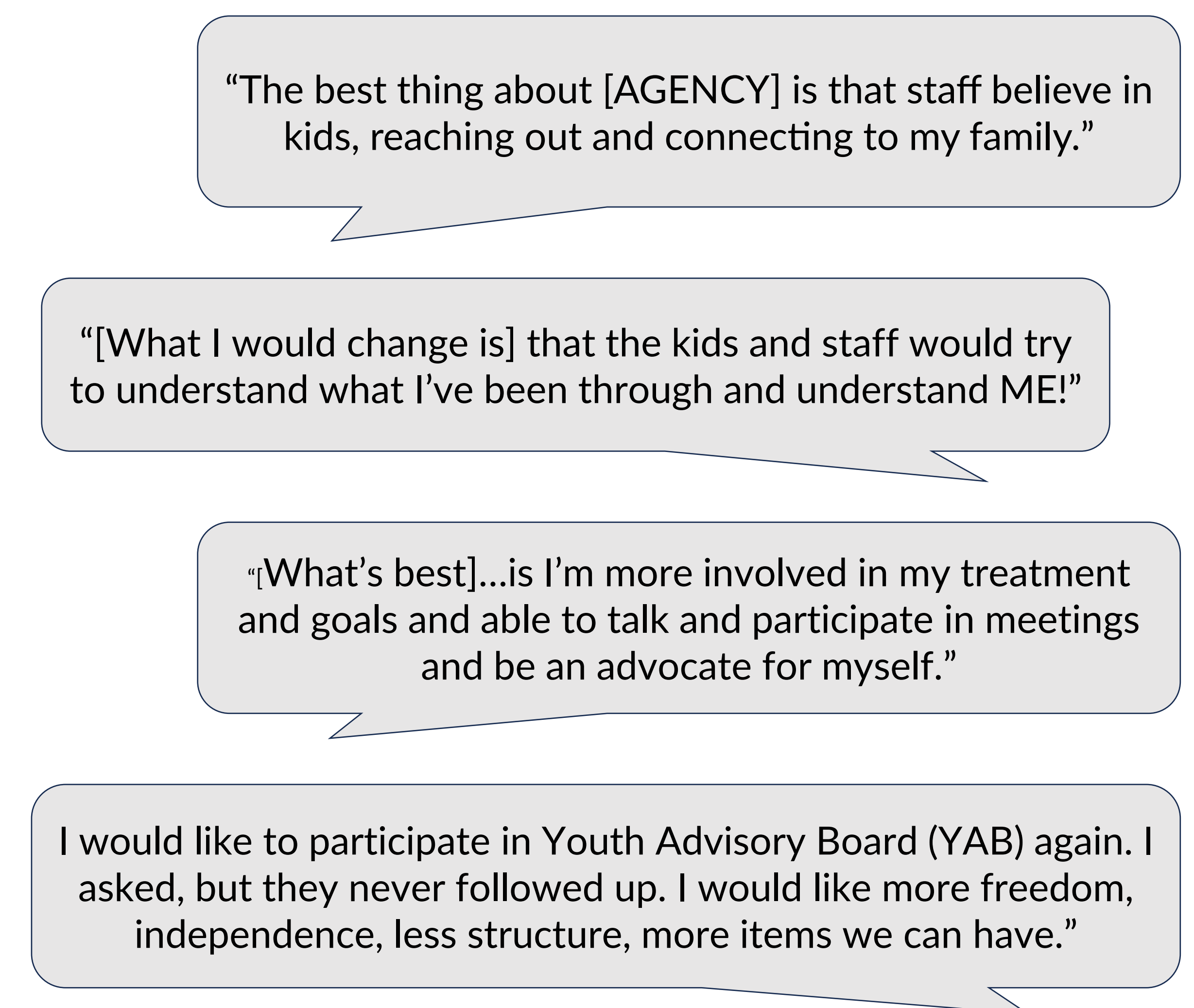


Figure 2. Representative Youth Quotes



DISCUSSION

- Youth care about how their days are spent and the programming they receive
 - Invest in activities
 - Youth want passes and visits
 - Food matters
- Relationships are essential, and staff are vital to youth experience of care
- Young people want to be independent and value opportunities to learn these skills

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- ⁶ Arsenault, C.L. & Domene, J. F. (2018). Promoting Mental Health: The Experiences of Youth in Residential Care. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 52(1), 16–.
- ⁷ Moore, T., McArthur, M., Death, J., Tilbury, C., & Roche, S. (2017). Young people’s views on safety and preventing abuse and harm in residential care: “It’s got to be better than home.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 212–219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.08.010>

Additional Information

Youth Reported Experiences of Illinois Child Welfare Residential Care: Analysis of Qualitative Data from >500 Youth

Patricia Garibaldi, MS (she/her)

Linzy Pinkerton, MS

Neil Jordan, PhD

Wendi Wilkins, MA, LCPC

Alysha Thompson, PhD

Cassandra Kisiel, PhD

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Chris Davidson, PhD

And represents the lived experience of...

Youth in IDCFS Residential Treatment

Background:

Why study residential care?

- Youth at residential treatment facilities present with complex psychiatric and behavioral needs
 - 70% of youth report past exposure to multiple traumatic events ¹
- There are systemic concerns regarding residential care:
 - It is highly resource intensive²
 - There is mixed evidence for its effectiveness ^{3, 4, 5}
 - There is a nationwide shortage of residential bed ⁶
- Yet, residential treatment may be the only option for youth with acute safety and wellbeing needs ⁴

¹ Greeson et al., 2011; ² Rosinsky et al., 2021; ³ Hair, 2005; ⁴ Gutterswijk et al., 2020; ⁵ Lanier et al., 2020; ⁶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017

Background:

Why study youths' perspectives of care?

- Inclusion of the voices and experiences of youth is critical for
 1. quality improvement efforts, and
 2. the implementation of trauma-informed care ⁷
- Youth are the most knowledgeable about what life in child welfare residential care is like
 - People are experts in their own lives

⁷ SAMHSA, 2014

Background:

Why study youths' perspectives of care?

- Existing studies show that youth in residential care provide useful feedback when given the opportunity
- Youth report enhanced well-being in residential care when they have/experience
 - relationships with peers and staff ^{8, 9, 10, 11, 12}
 - coping strategies
 - familial connection ^{13,}
 - effective coordination with educational systems ¹²
 - some predictability and control over their environment ^{9, 14}

⁸ Brummelaar et al., 2018; ⁹ Calheiros et al., 2013; ¹⁰ Harder et al., 2017; ¹¹ Roche, 2019; ¹² Pérez-García et al., 2019; ¹³ Arsenaault & Domene, 2018; ¹⁴ Moore et al., 2017

Research Questions

What do youth view as the strengths and weaknesses of Illinois child welfare residential treatment?

Hypothesis: Youth will discuss the importance of relationships with staff, familial involvement, and being involved in their care decisions.

To what extent is large-scale survey administration a feasible and effective way to gather youths' feedback about residential care?

Hypothesis: The survey will yield a sufficient response rate and provide insight into youth's experiences in residential care.



Data Source

Youth Experience of Care Survey (12 YO+) Questions

Survey created by Northwestern research team members, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) monitoring unit staff, and Youth Advisory Board

24 Likert Scale Questions assessing the residential program, treatment, connections, staff, and schooling

3 Open-Ended Questions:

1. The best thing about my residential program:
2. Something I wish my residential program would change:
3. More information I would like to share about my experiences in my residential program or questions:



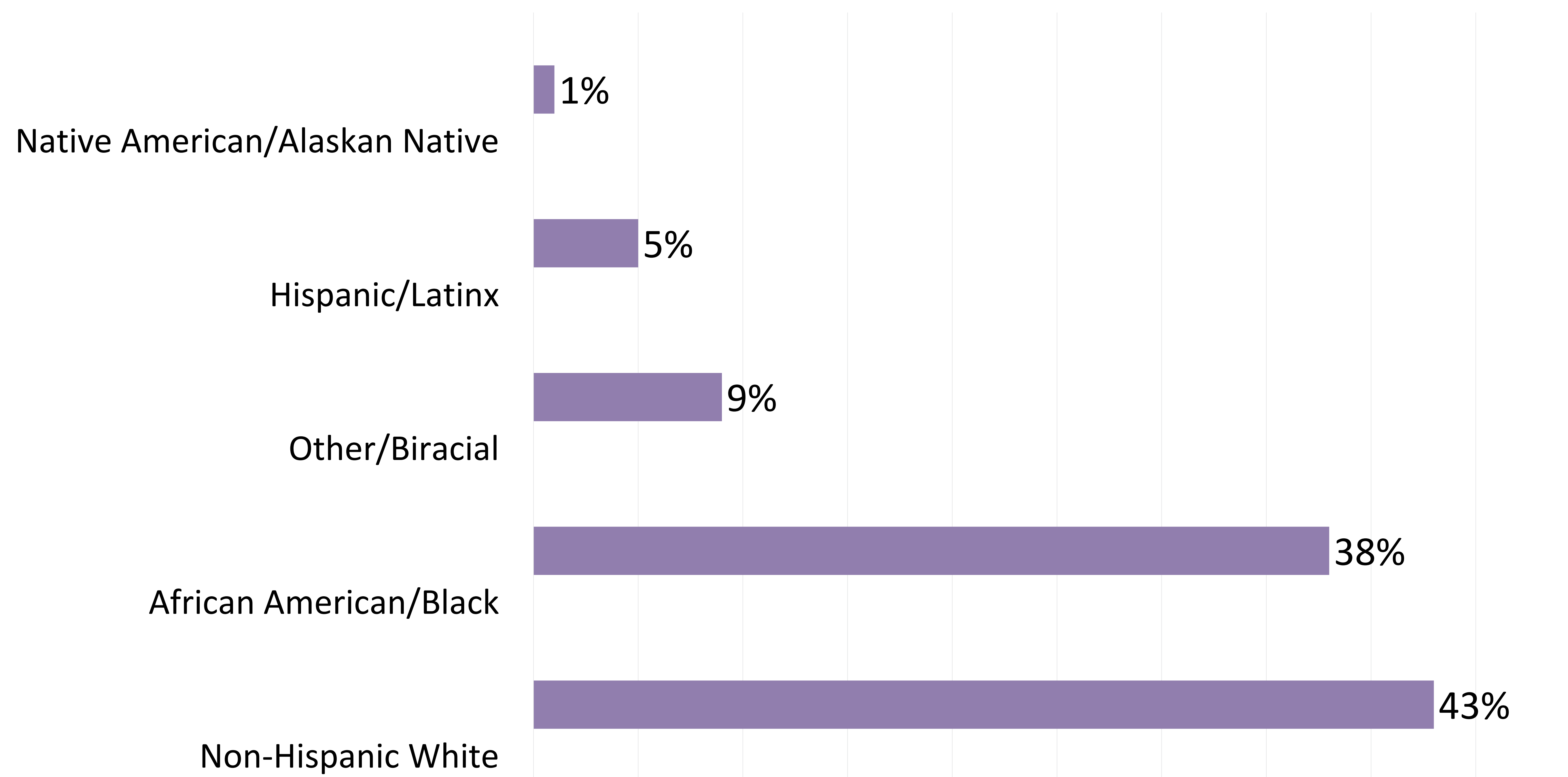
Data Sources

Data Collection

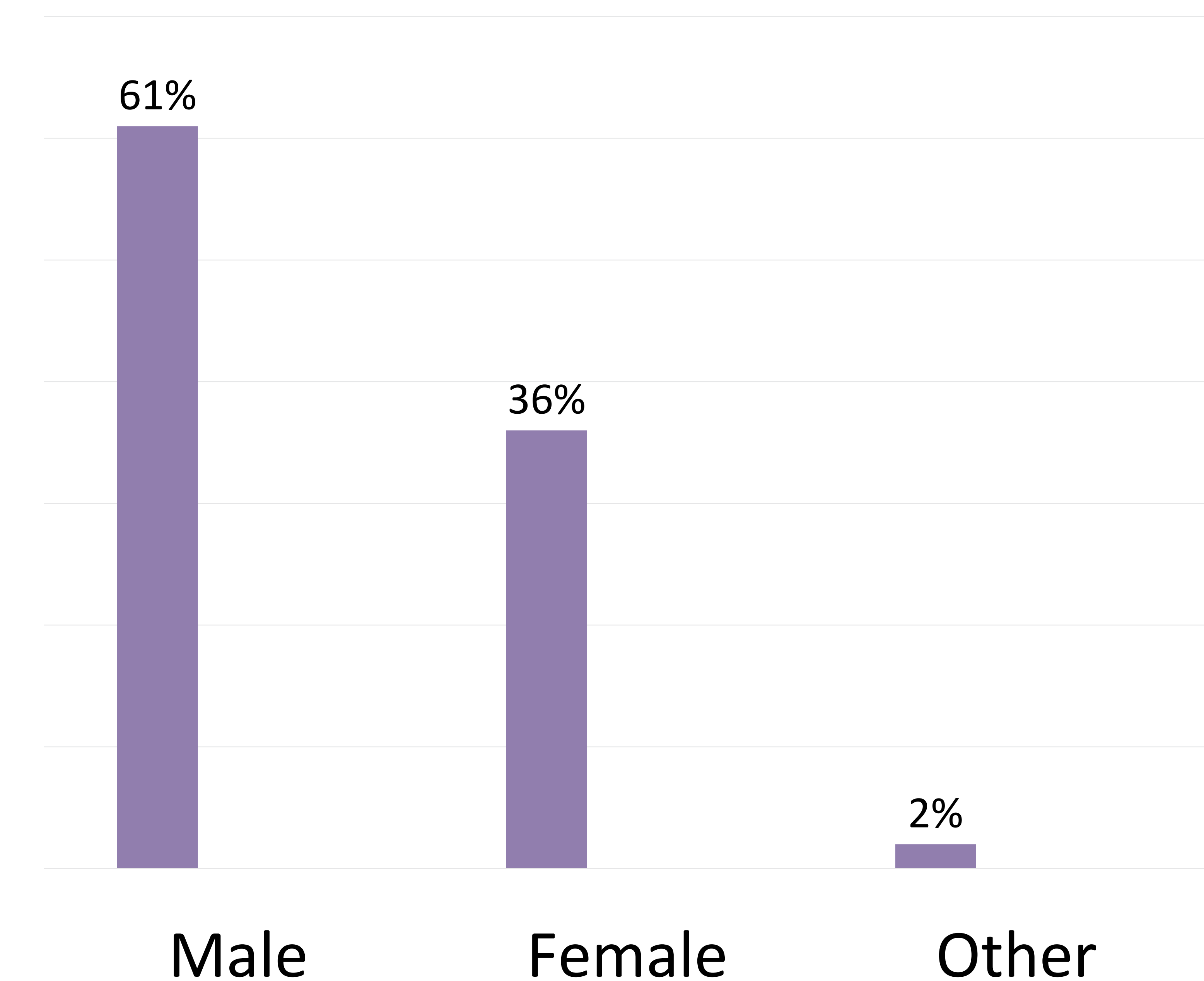
- All 570 youth ages 12+ in IDCFS residential treatment facilities in November 2018 were given the opportunity to voluntarily complete the survey
- The data were collected by IDCFS monitoring unit staff and members of the Youth Advisory Board

Analytical Cohort (N=512)

Race



Sex



Length of Stay at time of survey administration (days)	$\bar{x}=375$
Youth Age (years)	$\bar{x}=15.5$

Methods: Qualitative Data Analysis

Coding 1300 responses

- **Codes:** themes and concepts occurring repeatedly in the data that categorize the common needs and experiences of study participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994)
- Grounded coding theory:
 1. Inductive coding approach to identify underlying themes
 2. Coders collaborated to create preliminary codebook
 3. Coders then coded independently, compared codes, and reconciled discrepancies through consensus
 4. This resulted in 7 main codes with each code having 2-9 subcodes

Results: Study Codes

Programming:

Clinical and recreational programming

General:

General, non-specific feedback

Relationships & Connections:

Youth's interpersonal relationships and connections

Staff:

References to professionals working at the residential facility

Material Resources:

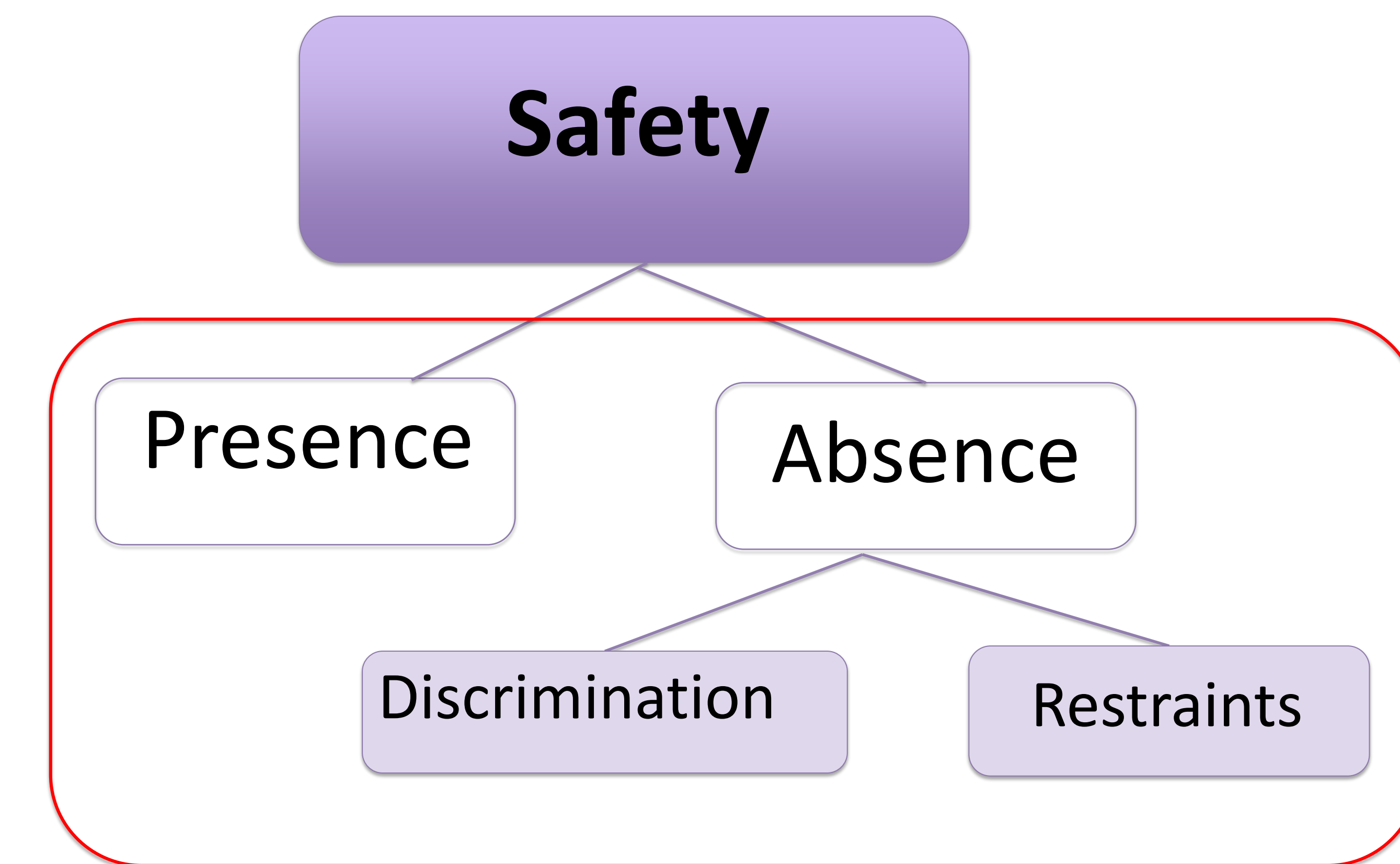
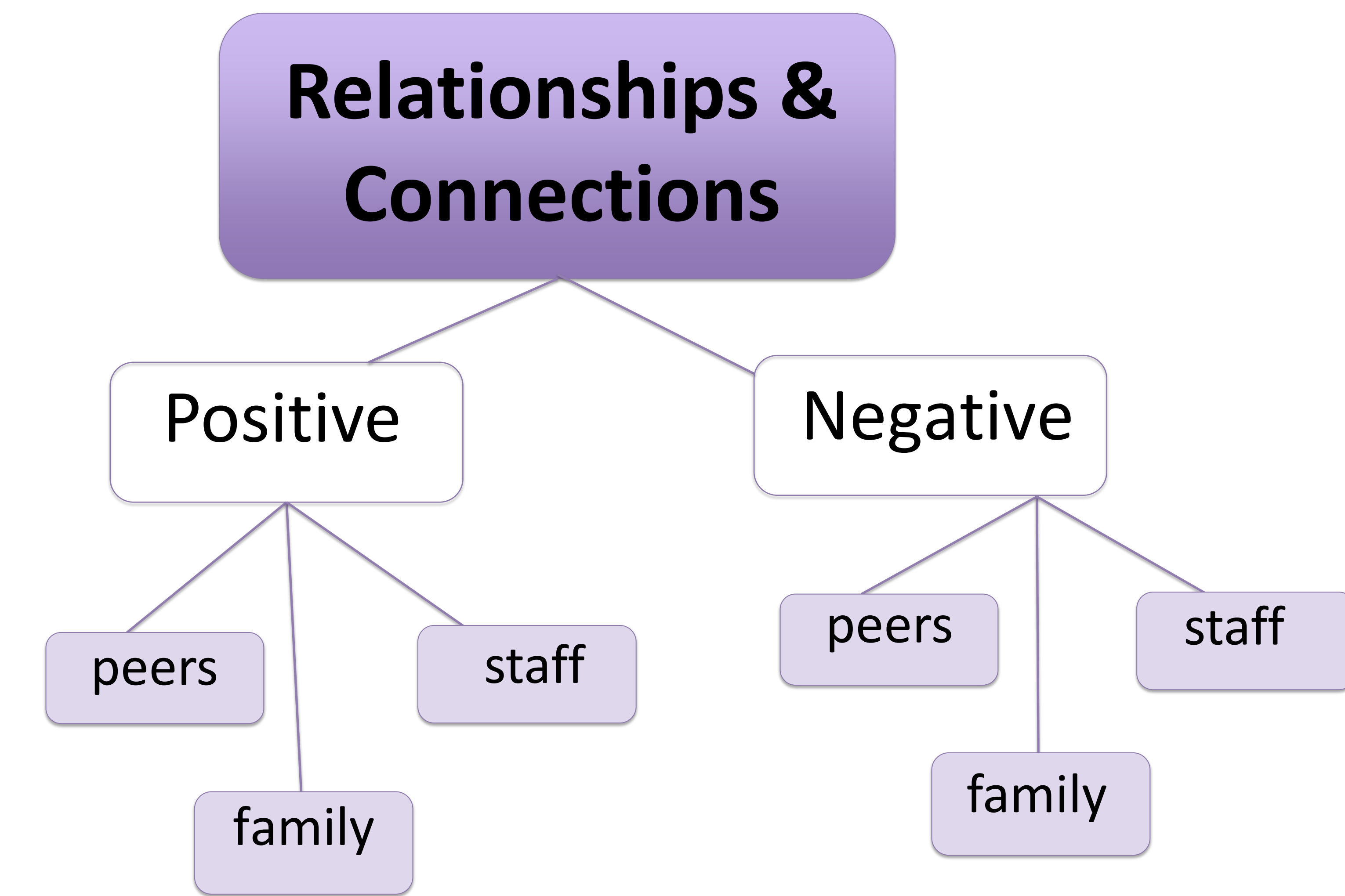
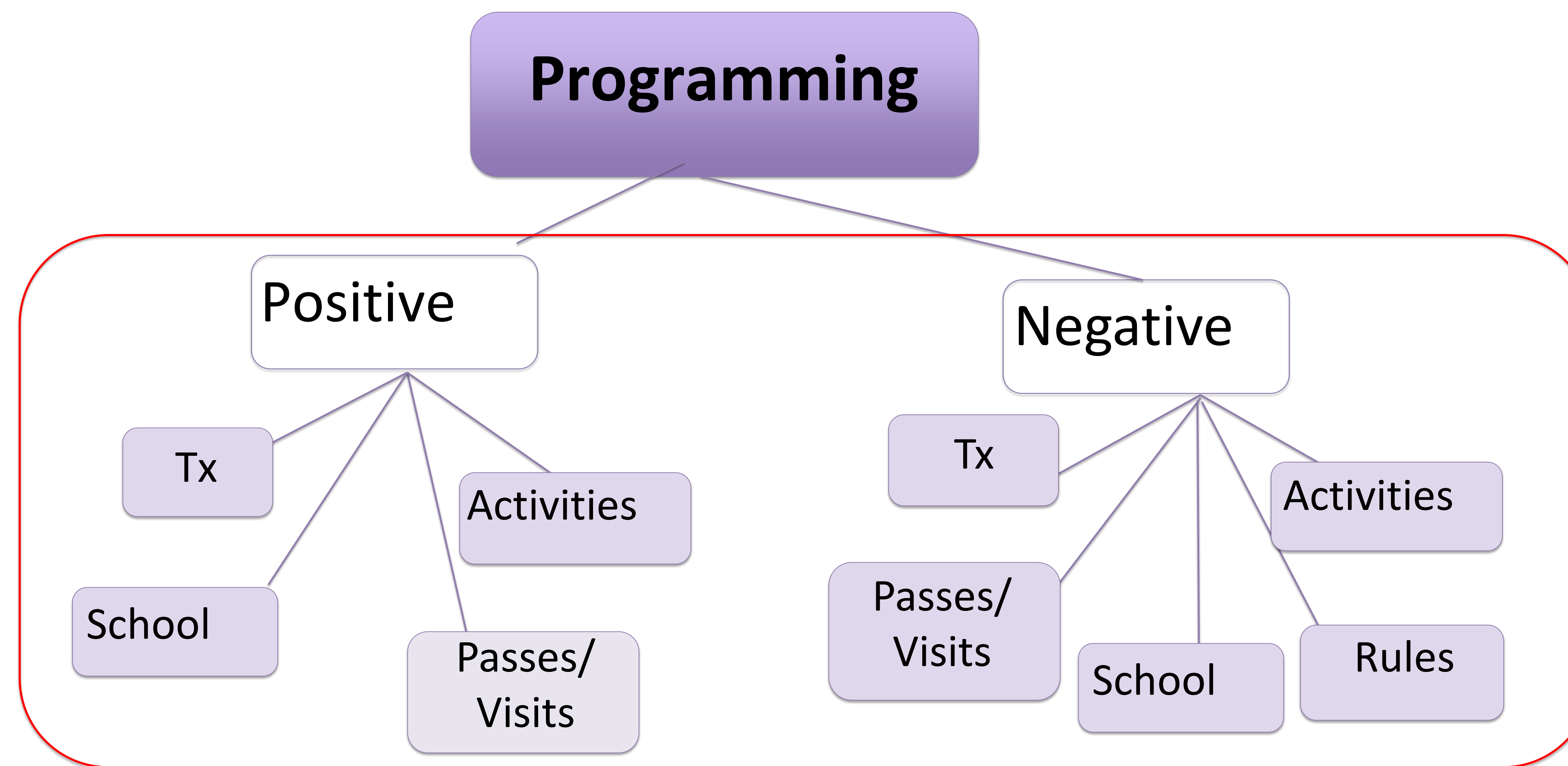
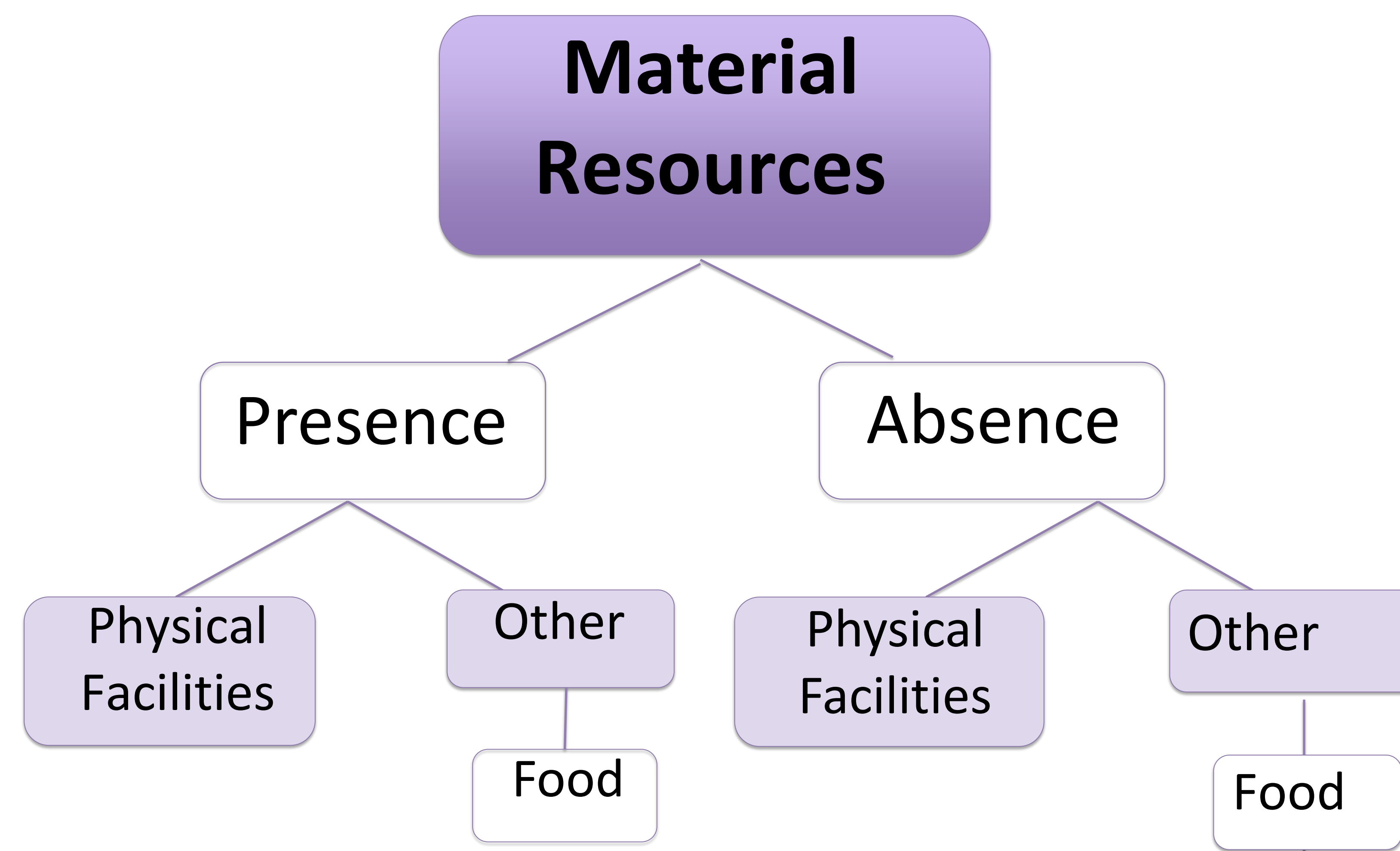
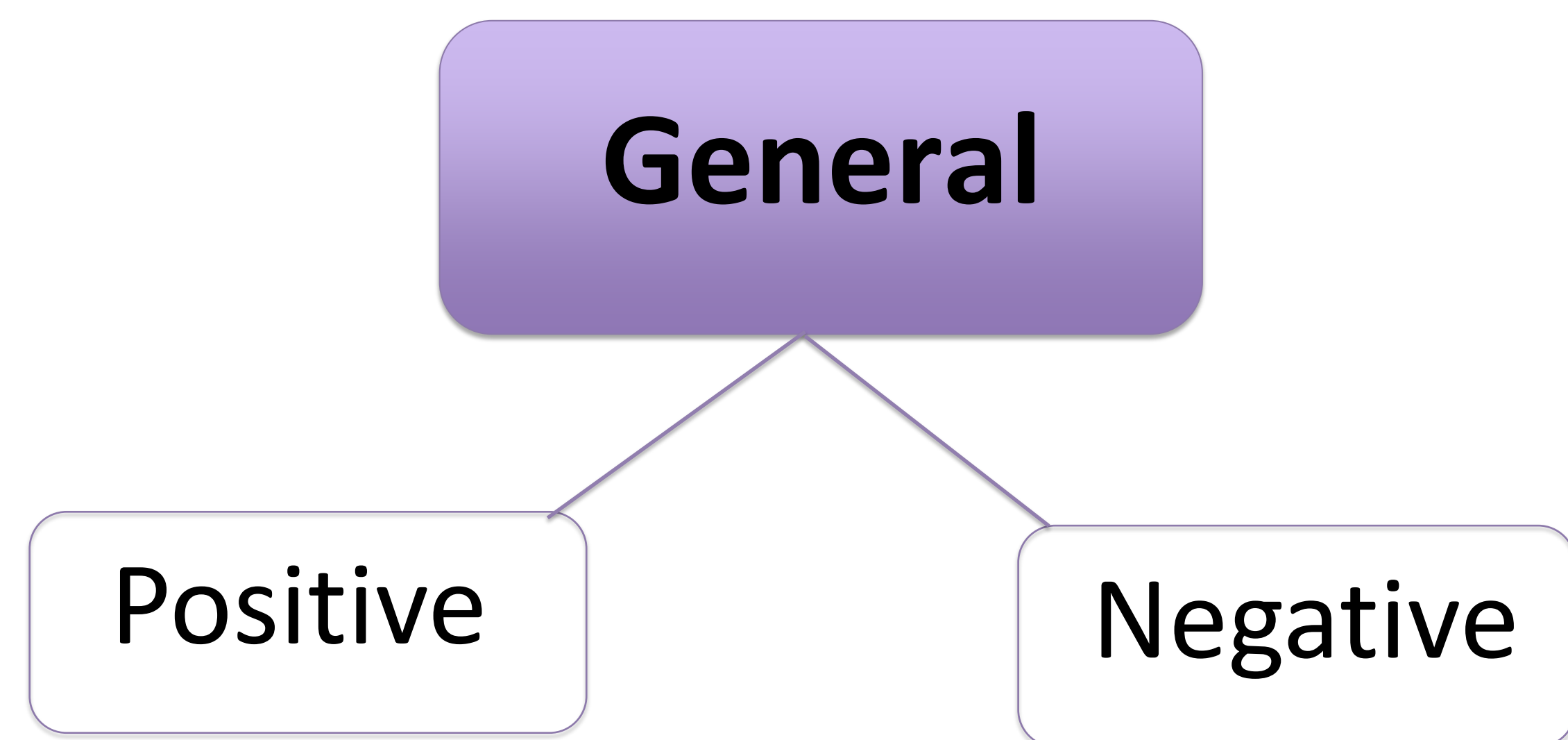
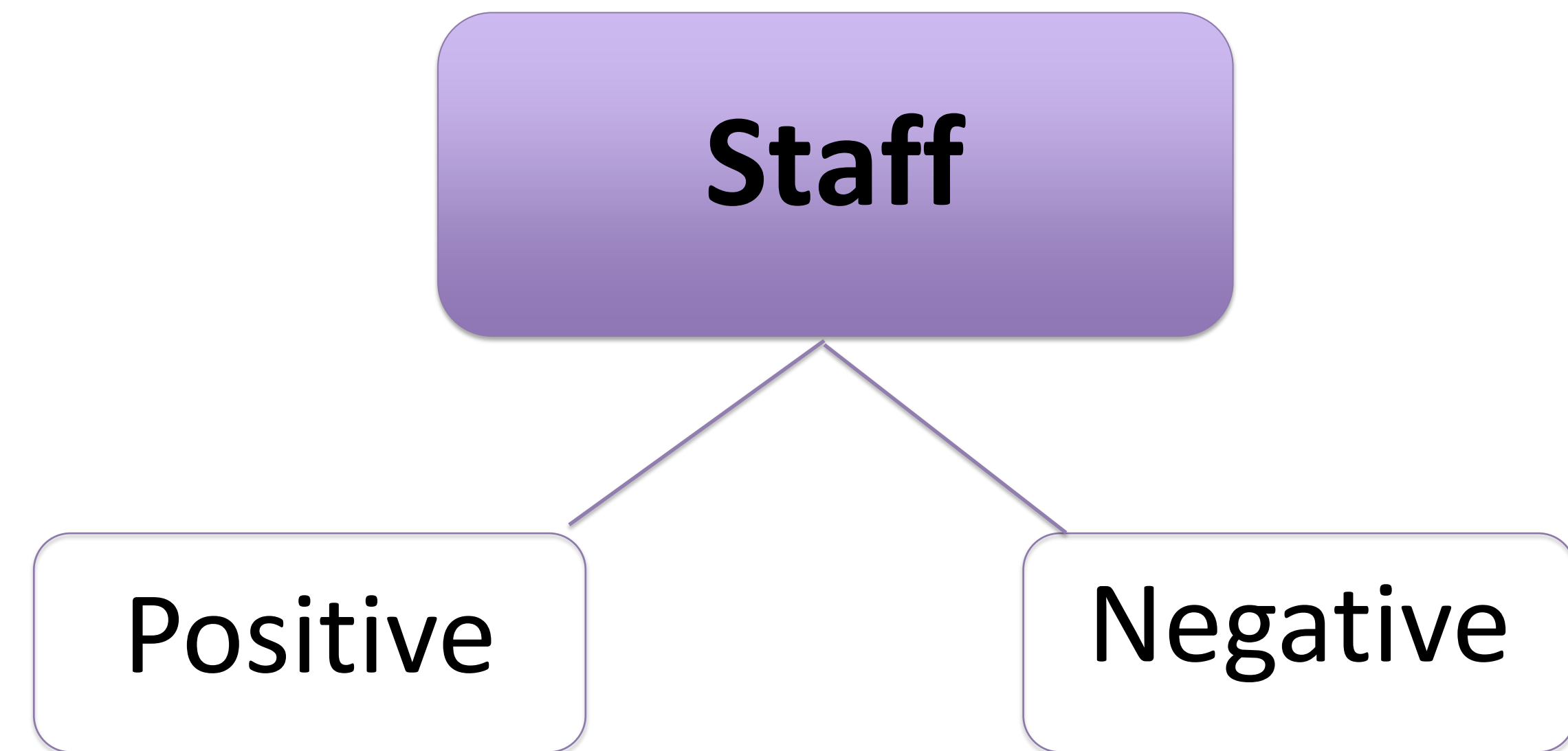
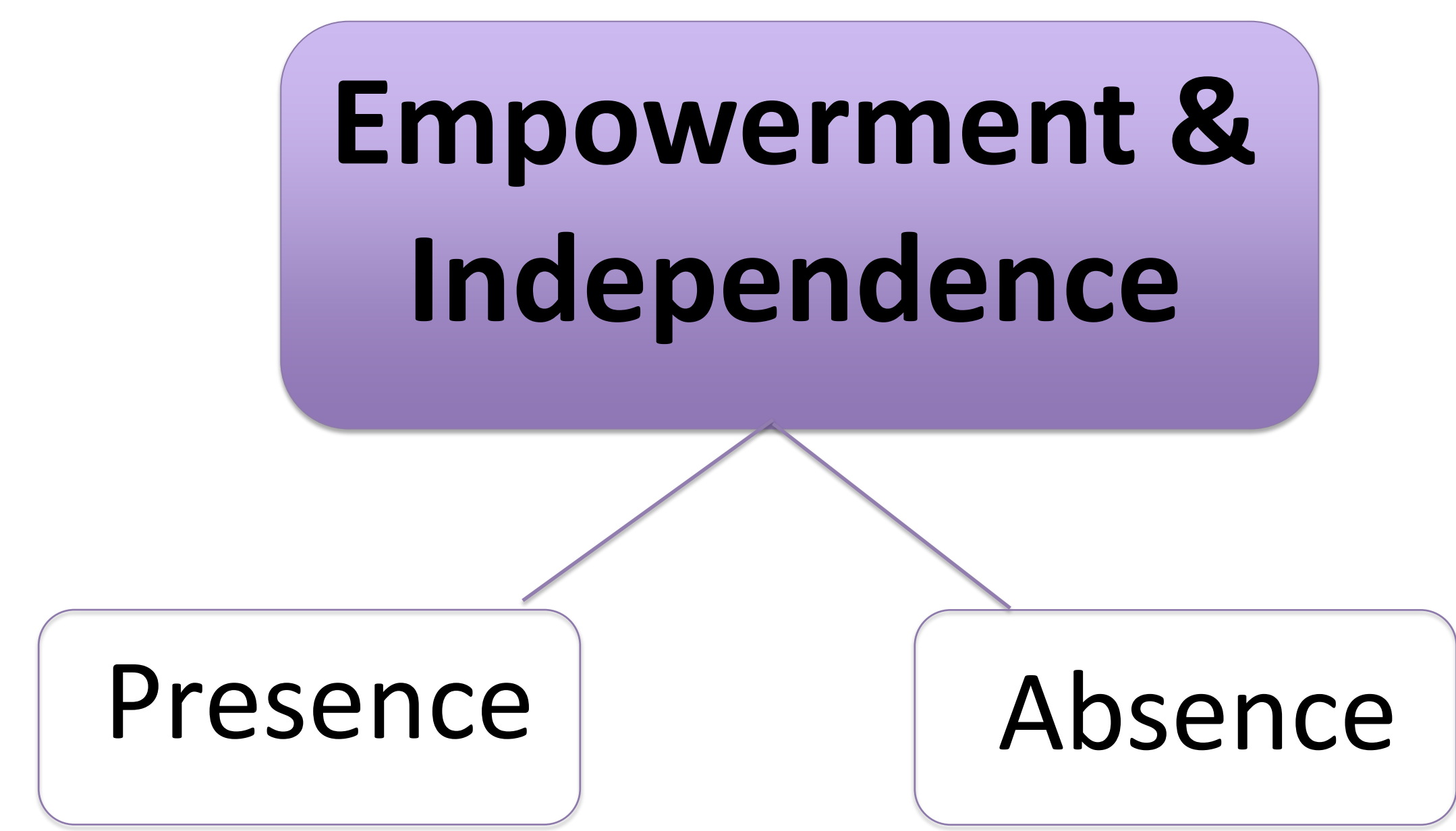
E.g., food, clothes, technology, physical space and facilities

Safety:

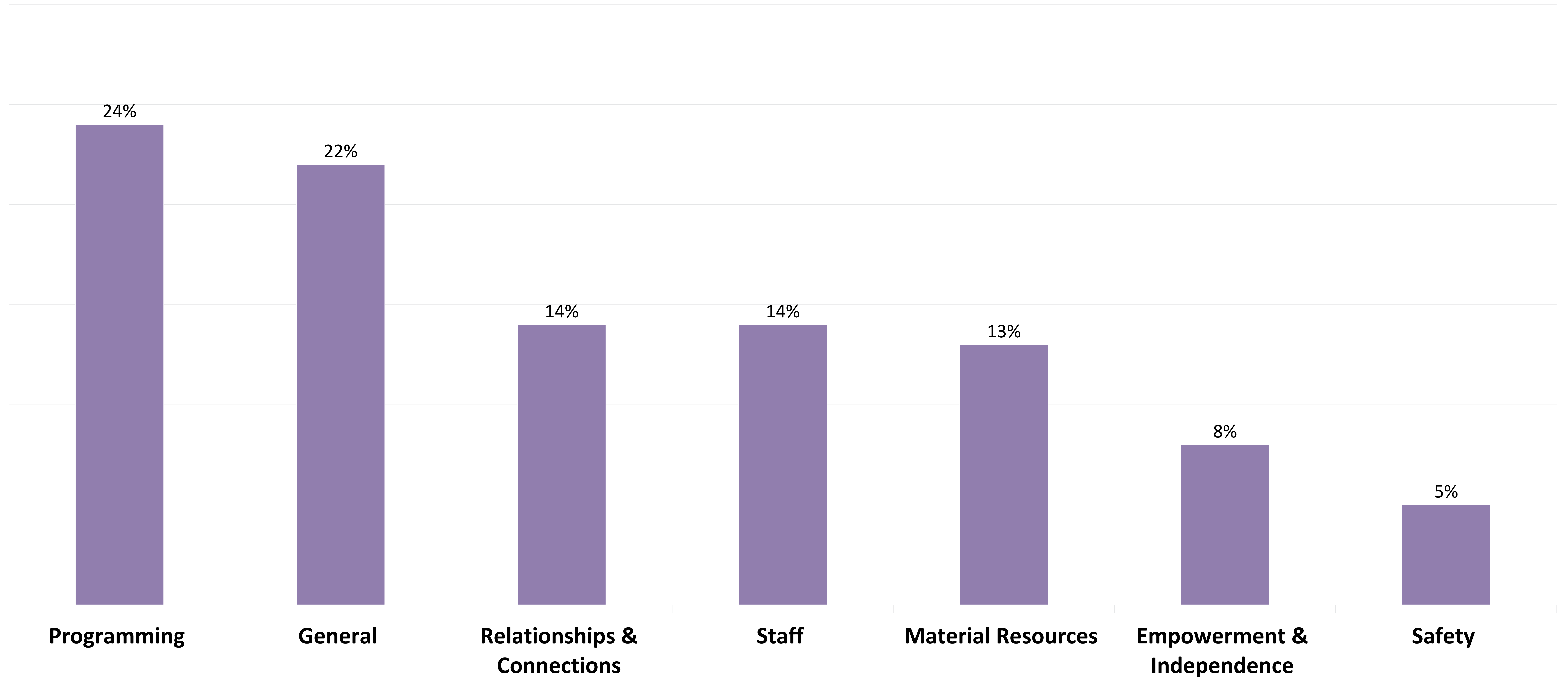
Physical and/or psychological safety and security for youth

Empowerment & Independence:

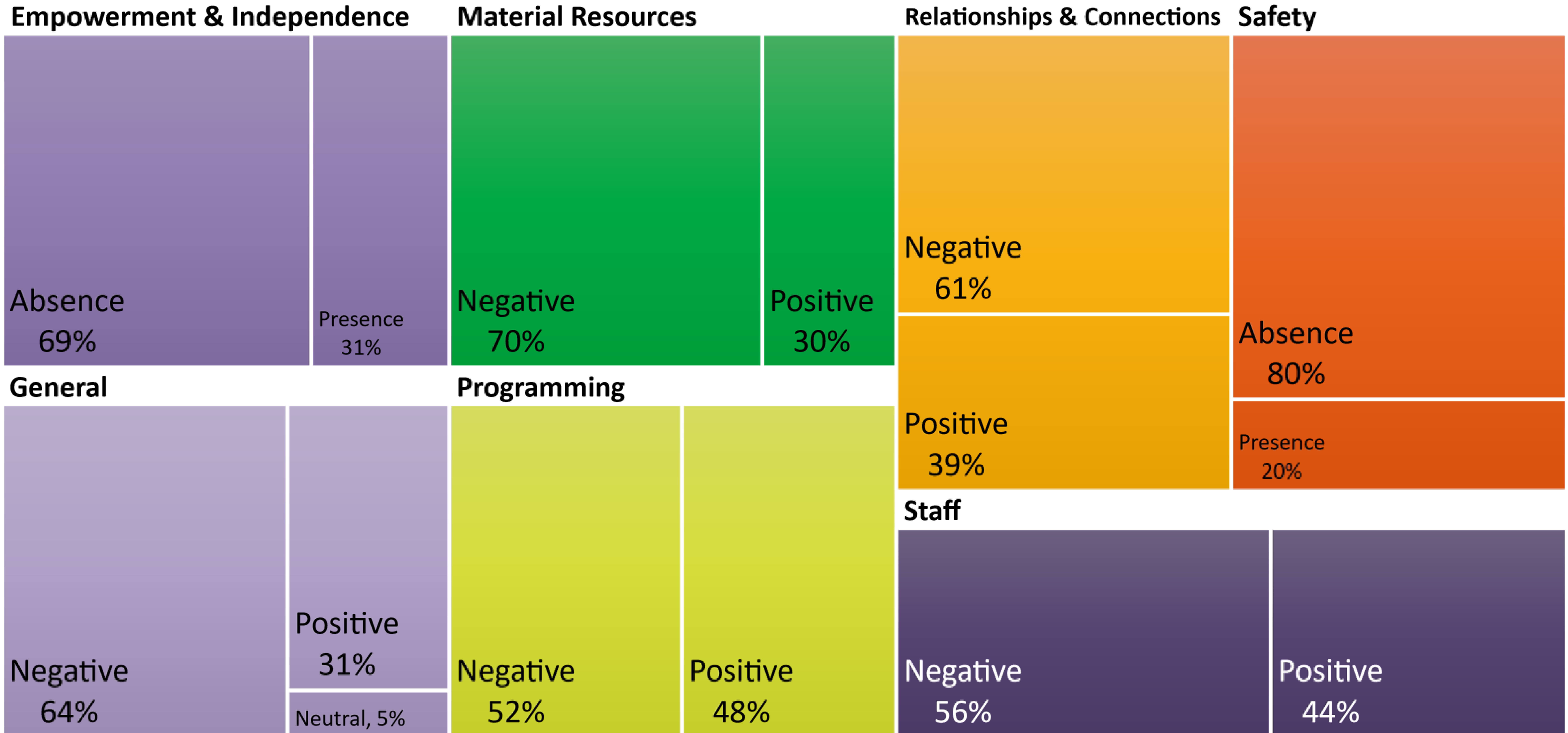
Youth freedom, independence, promotion of strengths, and ability to be active participants in their care



Results: Breakdown of Parent Codes



Results: Breakdown of Parent Codes



Representative Quotes

Programming	Positive	<i>I'm more involved in my treatment and goals, and able to talk and participate in meetings and be an advocate for myself</i>
	Negative	<i>I want art therapy and more art programs and opportunities to do programs in the community like support groups.</i>

Relationships & Connections	Positive	<i>The best thing about [AGENCY] is that staff believe in kids, reaching out and connecting to my family.</i>
	Negative	<i>That the kids and staff would try to understand what I've been through and understand ME!</i>

Representative Quotes

Empowerment & Independence	Presence	<i>The help from transitioning from dependence to independence.</i>
	Absence	<i>I would like to participate in YAB, again. I asked, but they never followed up. I would like more freedom, independence, less structure, more items we can have.</i>
Safety	Presence	<i>Is I am able to talk about my issues and problems with them listening and I am away from the abuse.</i>
	Absence	<i>I do not feel safe here, the staff are verbally abusive and some of my peers are very dangerous and they bully me.</i>

Conclusions

- Youth are eager to give feedback about their experiences in residential care and share meaningful insights when given the opportunity
- Youth identify many aspects of trauma informed care as being important to their experiences
- Youth have more negative than positive feedback about their experiences in residential care
- Programming, relationships, material resources, staff, independence, and safety are critical areas to target in residential care quality improvement efforts

Actionable Feedback

- Youth care about how their days are spent and the programming they receive
 - Invest in activities
 - Youth want passes and visits
 - Food matters
- Relationships are essential
 - Create time and opportunity for relational skill building and connection
- Staff are vital to youths' experiences of care and need to be invested in
- Young people want to be independent and value opportunities to learn these skills

Limitations

- Data are from 2018, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Responses have not yet been linked to youths' demographic characteristics; this is a future direction to this work
- Do not know about the impact youths' responses had on clinical and/or organizational practices
- Data are limited by the broad scope of the questions
- Possibility that youth did not feel comfortable sharing genuine feedback

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