

Youth civic engagement and developmental competencies: An examination of age-specific links

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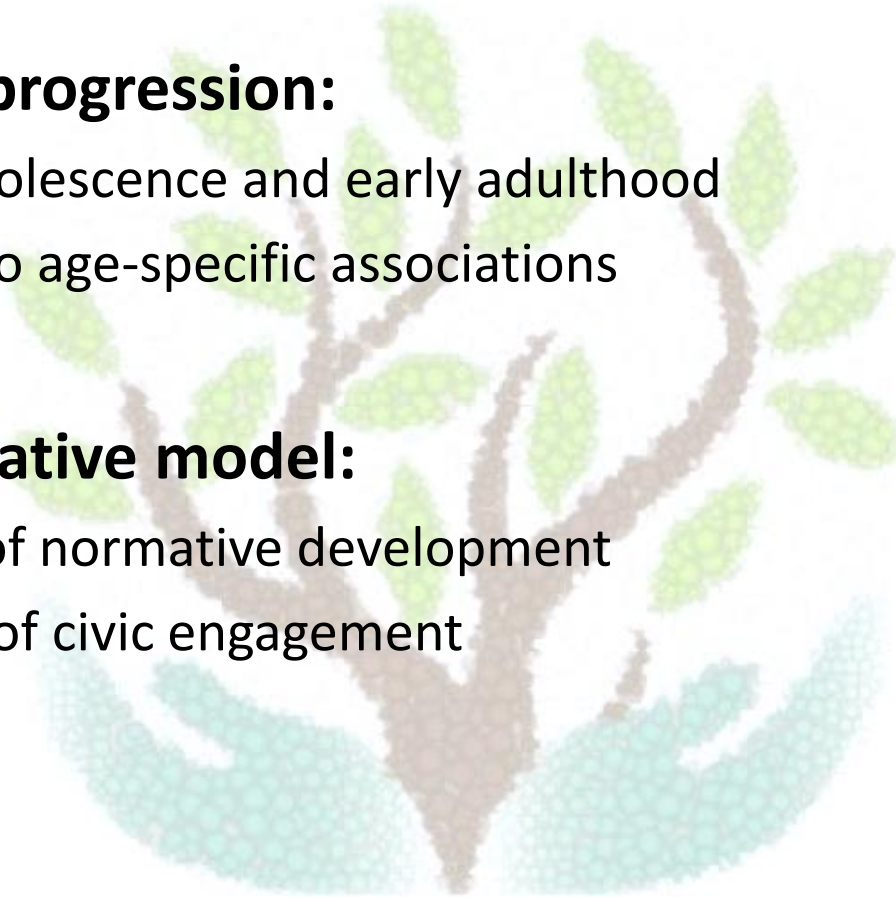
Youth Civic Engagement

- **Vital for community health and democratic process** (Flanagan, 2005; Levine, 2013)
- **An important individual developmental outcome and process** (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009)



Previous Research on Youth Civic Engagement

- **Developmental progression:**
 - Focus on late adolescence and early adulthood
 - Little attention to age-specific associations
- **Lack of an integrative model:**
 - Multiple facets of normative development
 - Diverse aspects of civic engagement



Developmental Competencies

- **Emotional competencies**

- **Emotional understanding, emotion regulation, affective motivation** (Cole et al., 2009; Côté et al., 2011; Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007; Kanacri et al., 2013; Mueller et al., 2011)
- **Empathy** (Bekkers, 2005; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1995)

- **Social-cognitive competencies**

- **Perspective taking, prosocial moral reasoning** (Carlo et al. 2012; Hoffman, 2000; Metzger & Smetana, 2010)

- **Cognitive competencies**

- **Future-mindedness, critical information analysis** (Callina et al., 2014; Finlay, Wray-Lake et al., 2015; Steinberg, 2008)

Developmental Competencies

- Emotional competencies

- Emotional understanding, **emotion regulation**, affective motivation (Cole et al., 2009; Côté et al., 2011; Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007; Kanacri et al., 2013; Mueller et al., 2011)
- **Empathy** (Bekkers, 2005; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1995)

- Social-cognitive competencies

- Perspective taking, **prosocial moral reasoning** (Carlo et al. 2012; Hoffman, 2000; Metzger & Smetana, 2010)

- Cognitive competencies

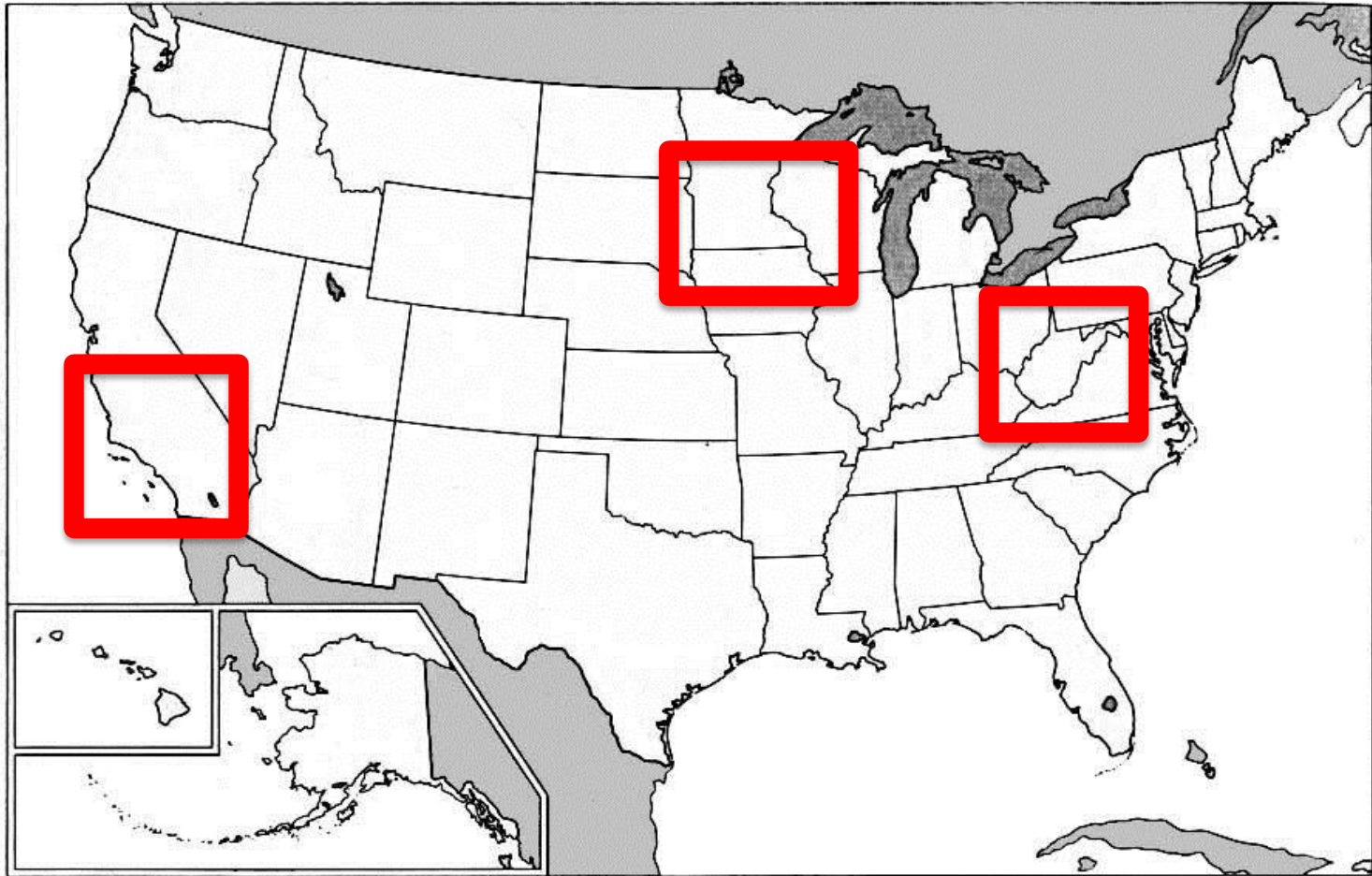
- **Future-mindedness**, critical information analysis (Callina et al., 2014; Finlay, Wray-Lake et al., 2015; Steinberg, 2008)

Study Goals

- **Examine associations among youth developmental competencies and distinct components of civic engagement.**
- **Assess age-specific associations among:**
 - Elementary School
 - Middle School
 - High School

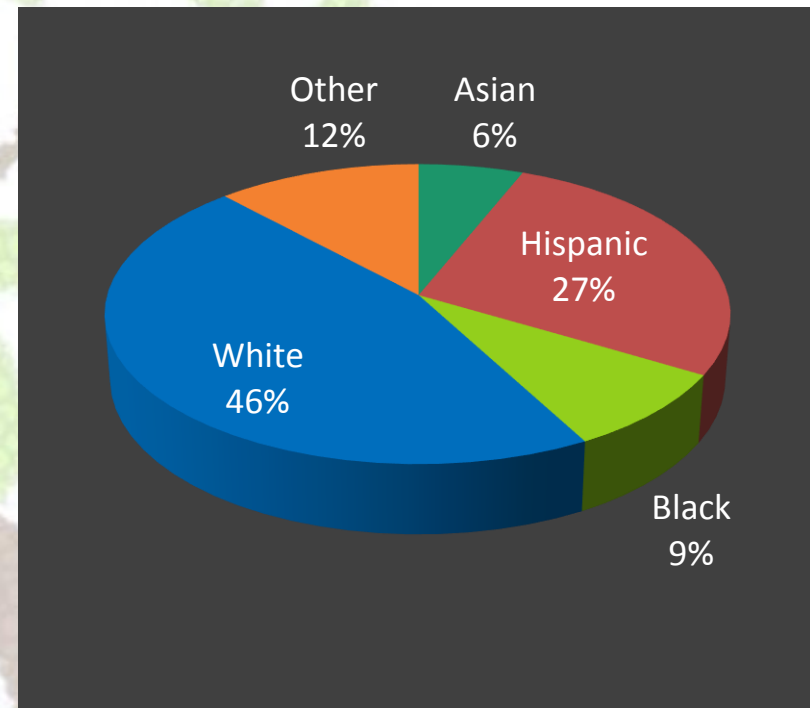


Sample: 3 Geographic Locations



Sample

- 2467 youth (55.7% female)
- Age
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 13.35, SD = 2.66$
 - Range = 10 – 19
- Grades 4 – 12
 - 512 Elementary (grades 4-5)
 - 813 Middle (grades 6-8)
 - 1135 High (grades 9-12)



Measures: Civic Engagement

Social Responsibility Values “It’s important to consider the needs of others.”

4 items, $\alpha = .69$; 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely)

Informal Helping “I helped a neighbor for no pay.”

6 items, $\alpha = .73$, 1 (never) to 5 (very often)

Political Beliefs “People should keep up with current events.”

2 items, $\alpha = .62$; 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Environmental Behavior “I limit how much paper I use.”

3 items, $\alpha = .71$; 1 (never) to 5 (very often)

Civic Skills “Create a plan to address a problem.”

6 items, $\alpha = .88$; 1 (I definitely can’t) to 5 (I definitely can)

Voting Intentions

1 item; 1 (I wouldn’t do this) to 5 (I will or have already done this)

Volunteering

1 item; 1 (0 hours) to 6 (5+ hours)

Measures: Competencies

Emotional Regulation (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2007)

“I have control over my feelings”

3 items, $\alpha = .60$

Empathy (Bekkers, 2005)

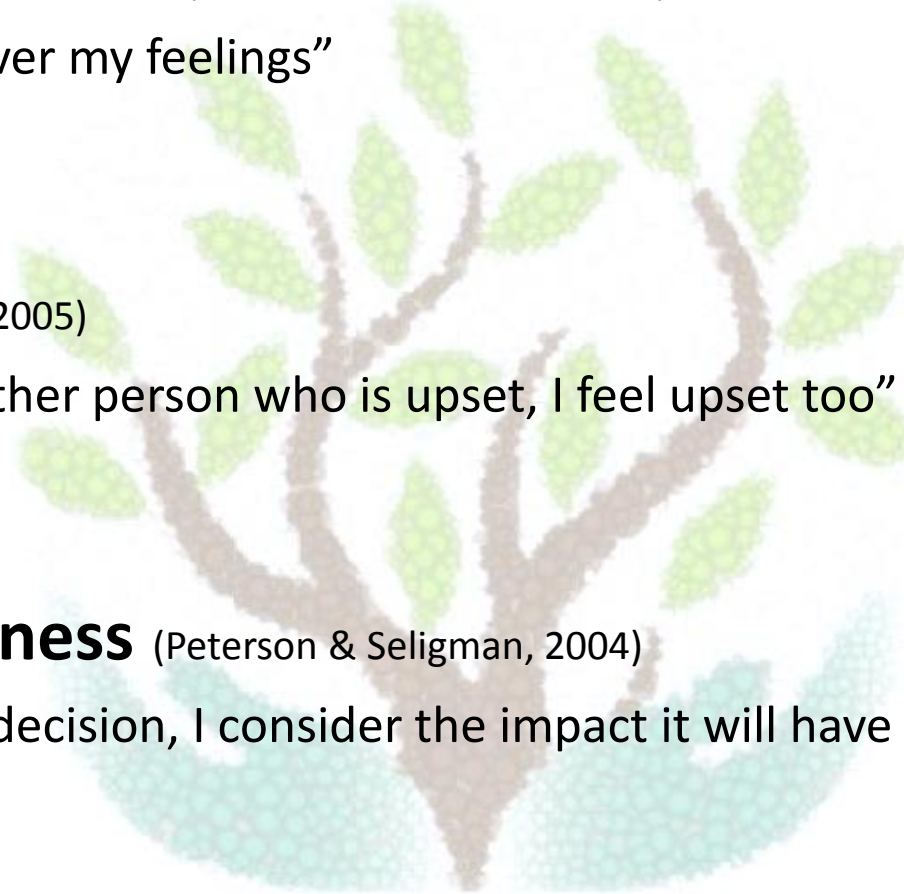
“When I see another person who is upset, I feel upset too”

4 items, $\alpha = .73$

Future-mindedness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

“When I make a decision, I consider the impact it will have on my future”

3 items, $\alpha = .73$



Measures: Competencies

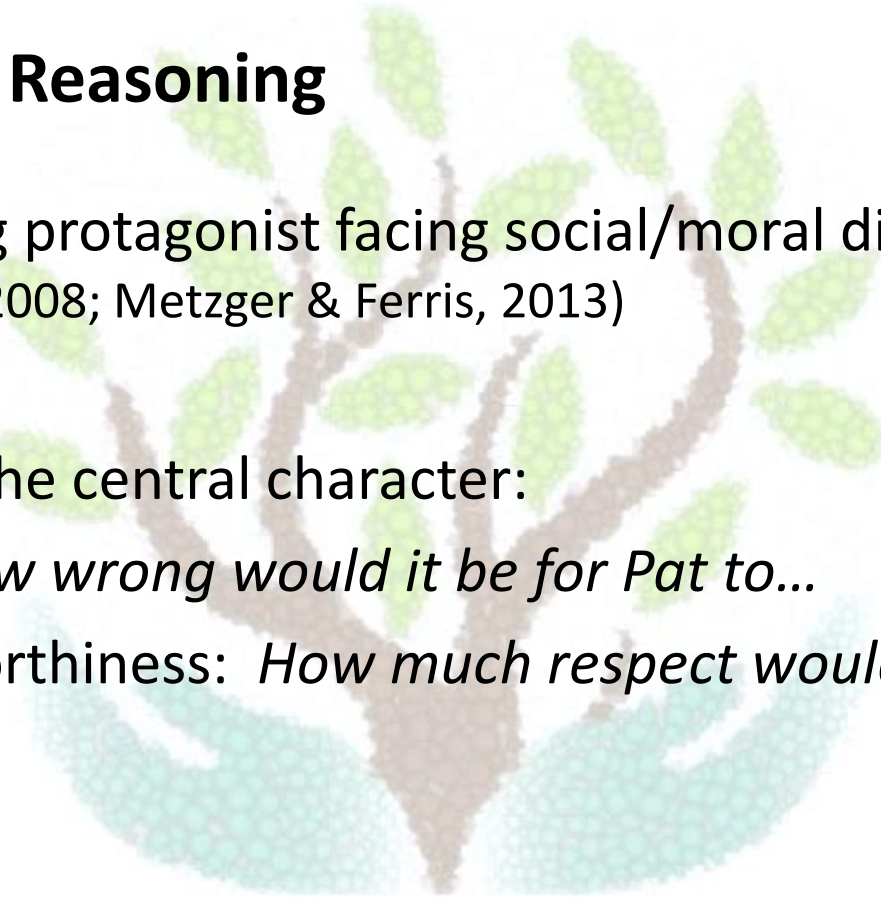
Prosocial Moral Reasoning

Vignette describing protagonist facing social/moral dilemma
(based on Carlo et al. 2008; Metzger & Ferris, 2013)

Judgments about the central character:

Obligation: *How wrong would it be for Pat to...*

Social praiseworthiness: *How much respect would you have for Pat...*



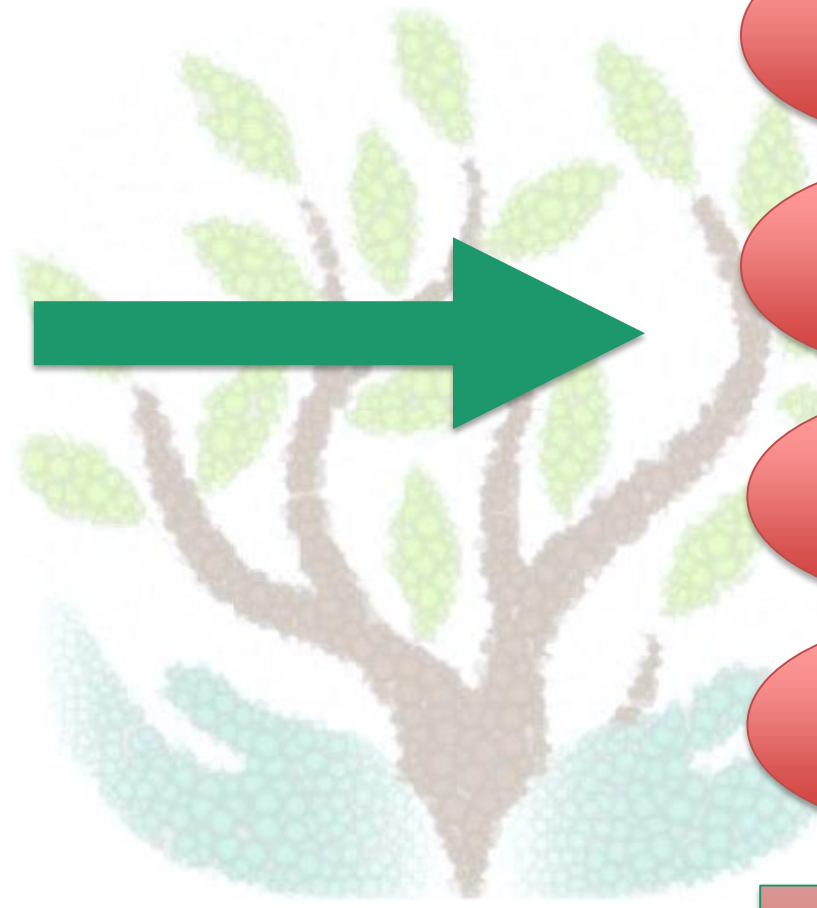
Overall model

Emotional Regulation

Empathy

Prosocial Moral Reasoning

Future-mindedness



Social Responsibility Values

Informal Helping

Political Beliefs

Civic Skills

Environmental Behaviors

Voting

Volunteering

Project Design and Analytic Plan

- Planned missing (3-form) design
- Structural equation modeling using *Mplus* 7.11
 - FIML with principle components as auxiliary variables to handle missing data (Little et al., 2008)
 - MLR to account for school clustering

Multi-group model: three age groups

- Measurement model
 - Measurement invariance
- Structural invariance
 - Comparing constrained vs. unconstrained models
 - CFI difference $> .01$ (Little, 2008)
 - Significant path differences across age groups

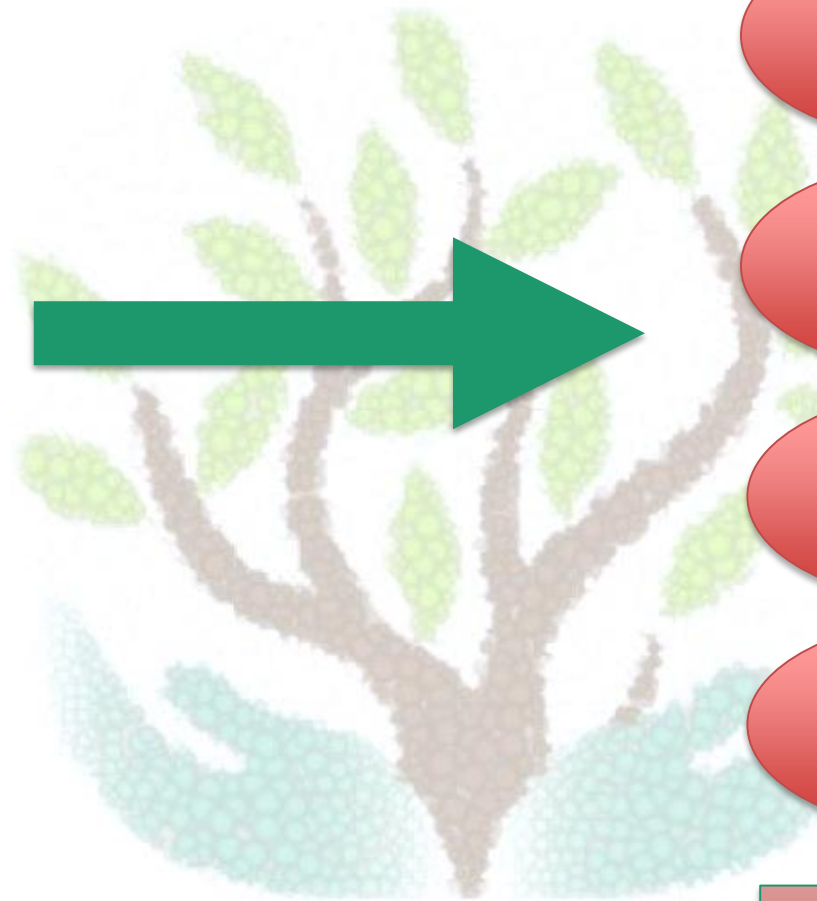
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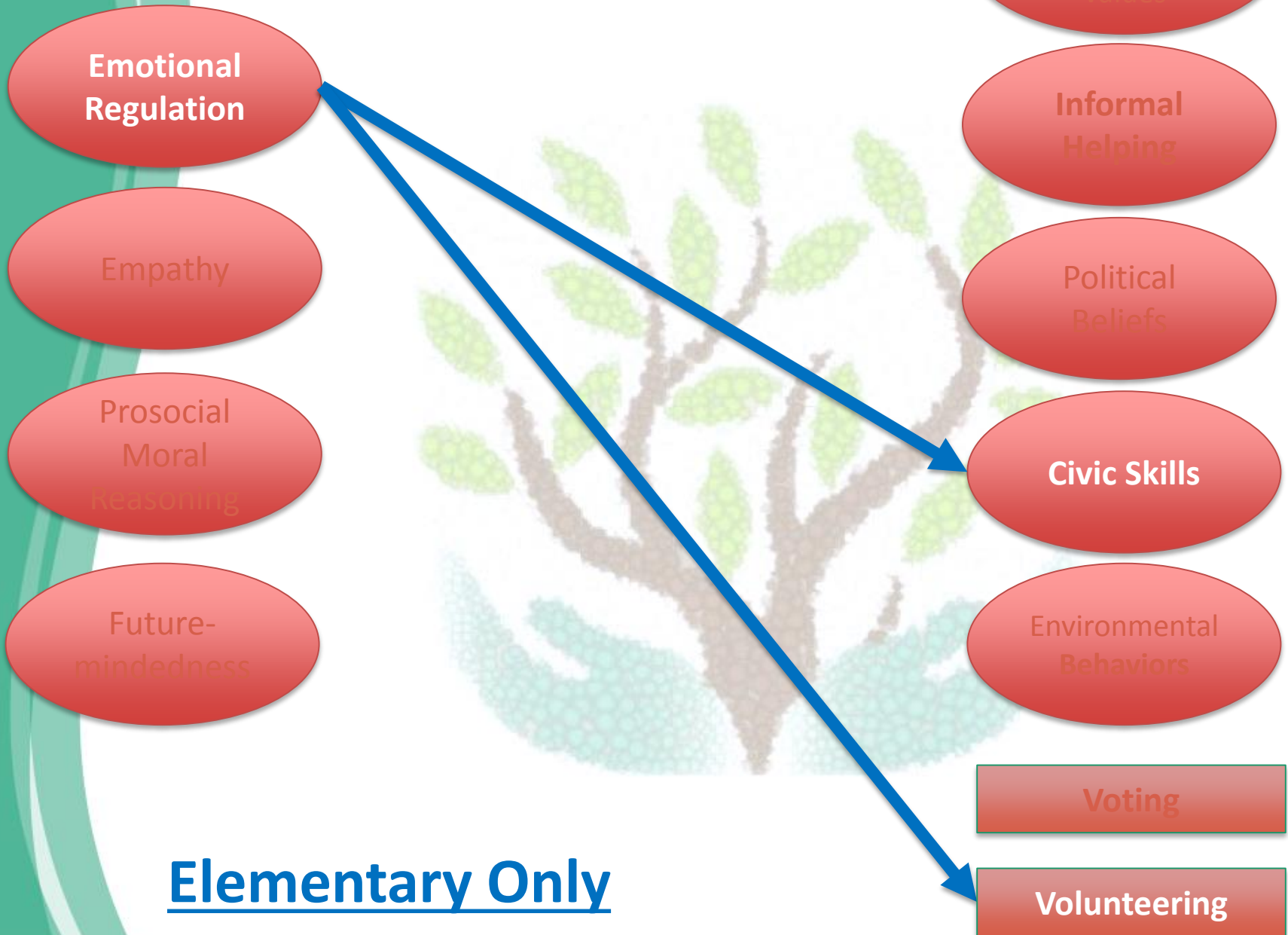
Environmental Behaviors

Voting

Volunteering

CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .026 (.024 - .027)

Age-groups model



Age-groups model

Emotional
Regulation

Empathy

Prosocial
Moral
Reasoning

Future-
mindedness

Social
Responsibility
Values

Informal
Helping

Political
Beliefs

Civic Skills

Environmental
Behaviors

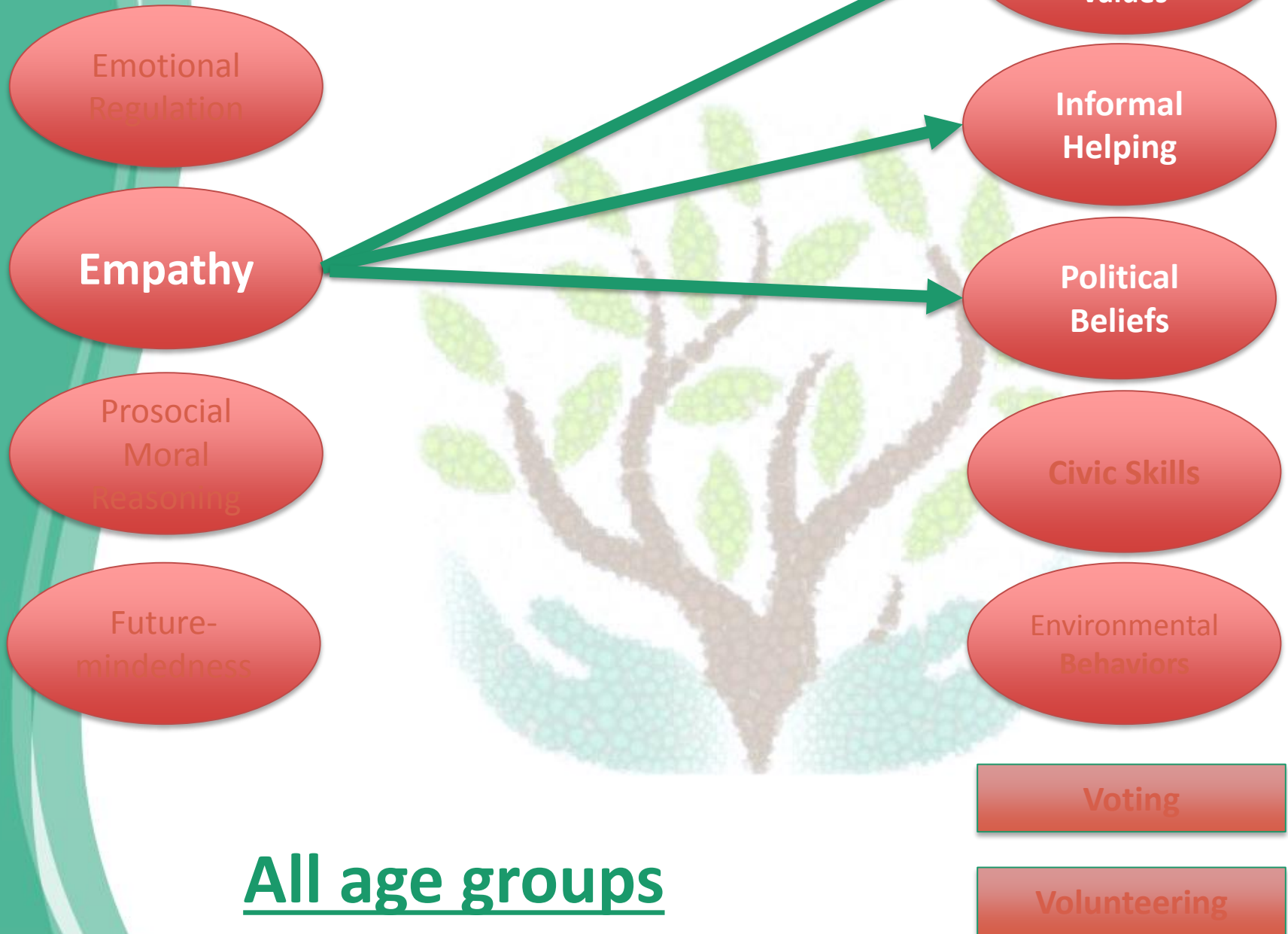
Voting

Volunteering

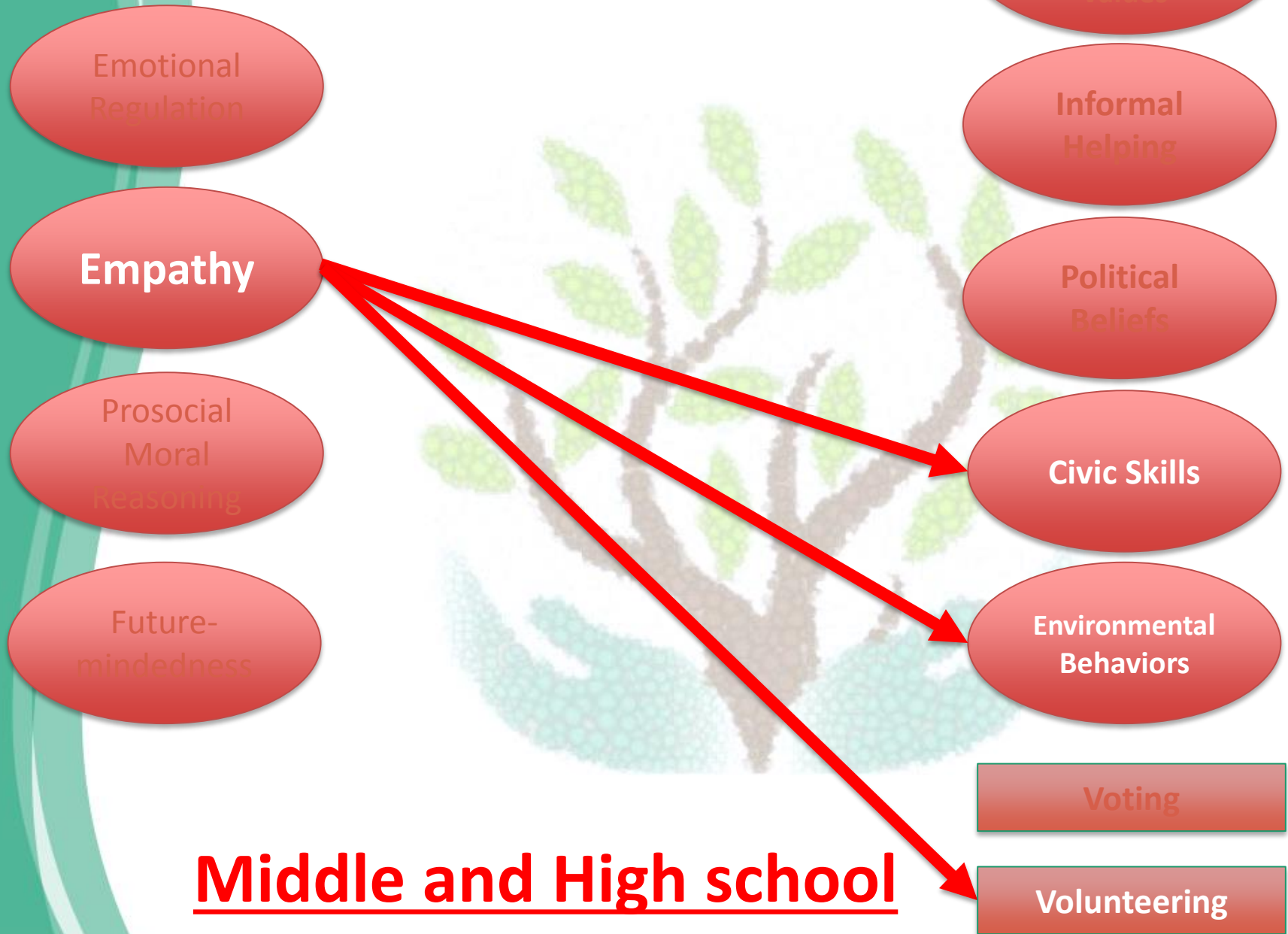


Elementary and High School

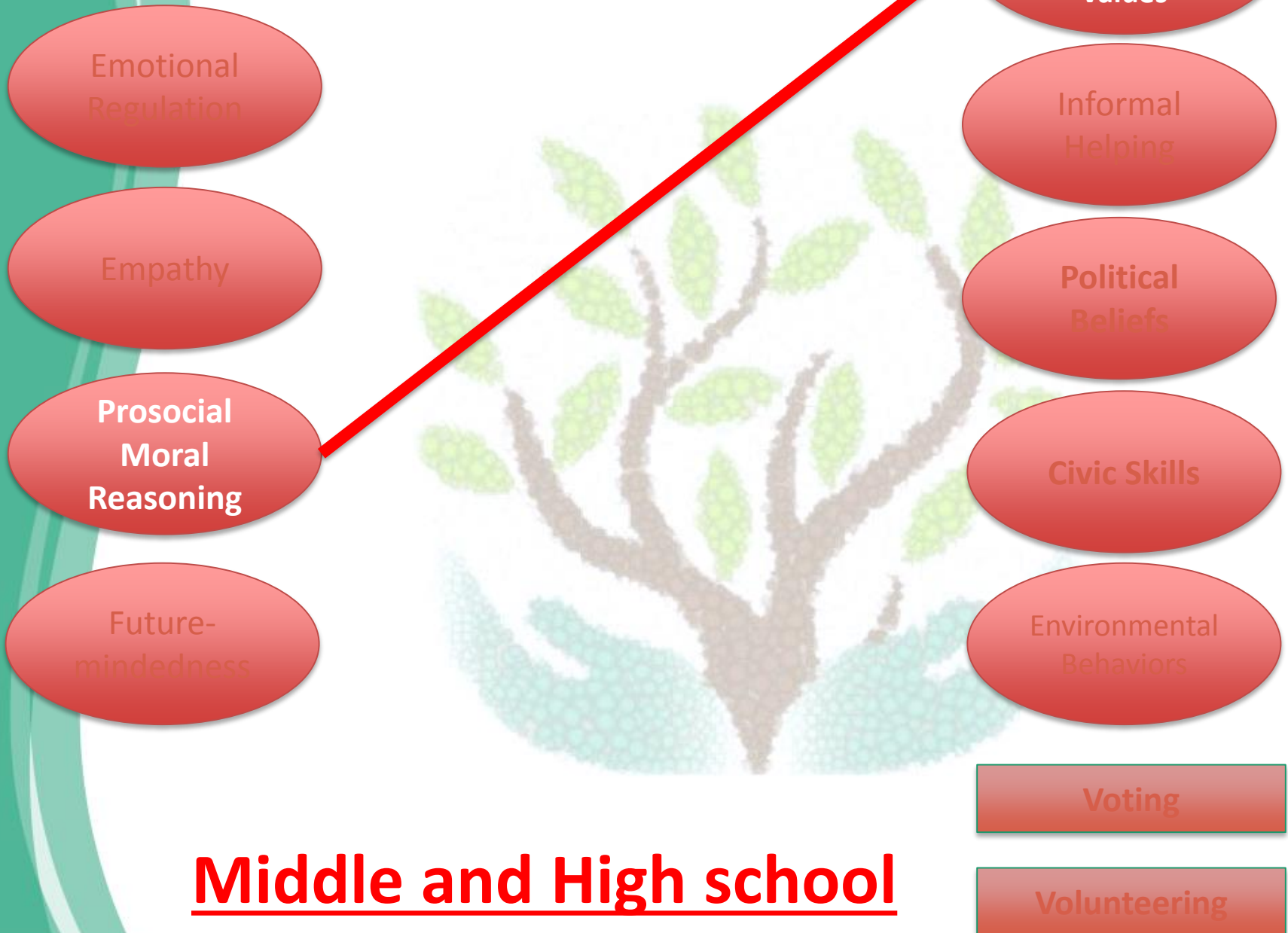
Age-groups model



Age-groups model

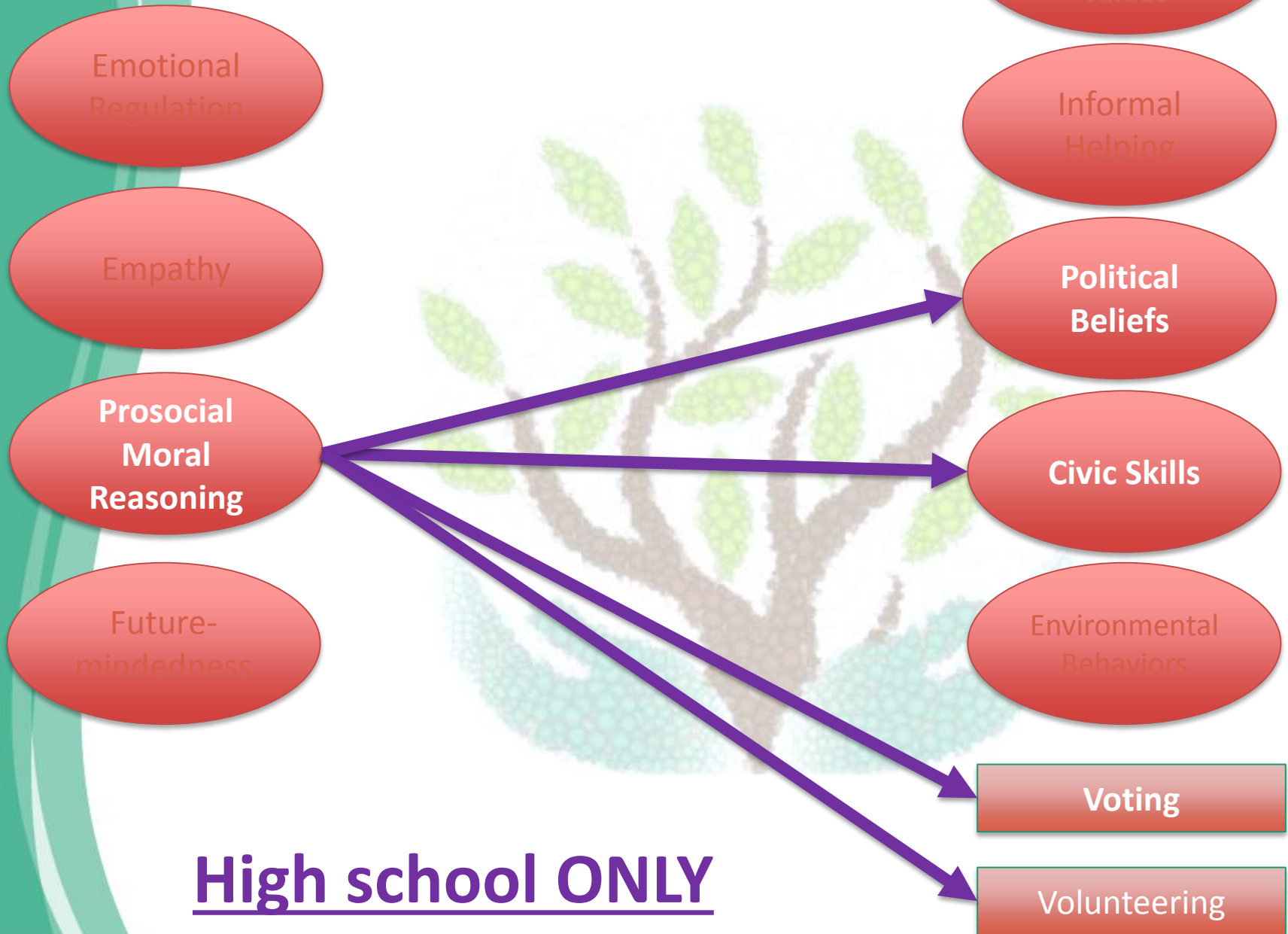


Age-groups model

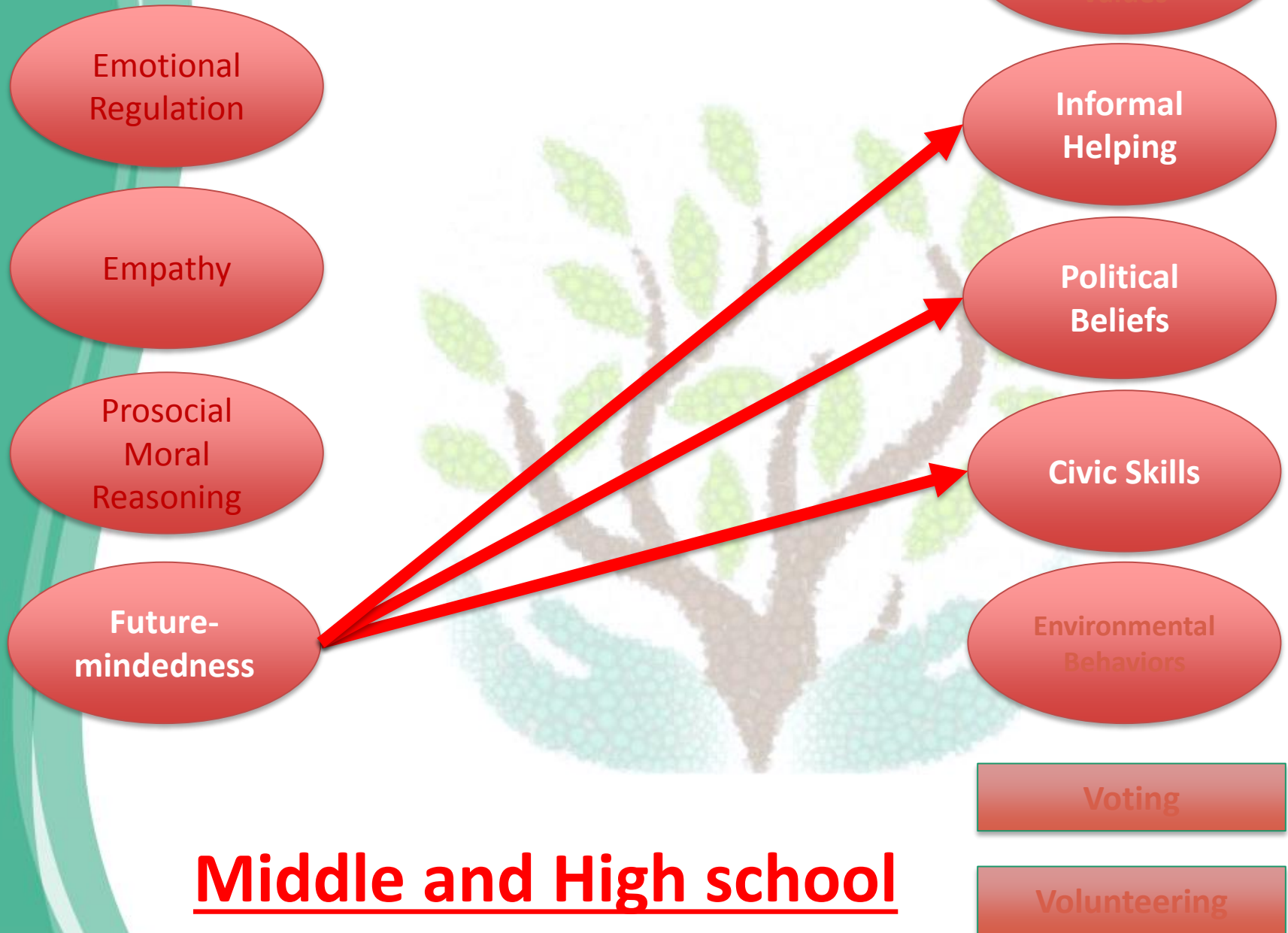


Middle and High school

Age-groups model



Age-groups model



Age-groups model

Emotional Regulation

Empathy

Prosocial Moral Reasoning

Future-mindedness

Social Responsibility Values

Informal Helping

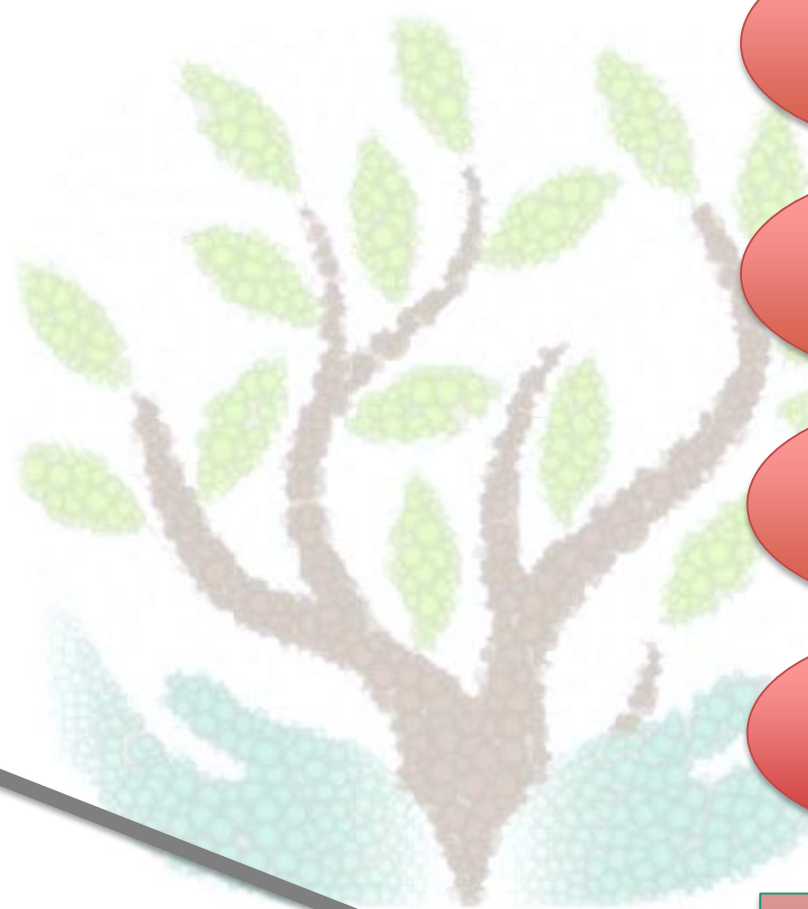
Political Beliefs

Civic Skills

Environmental Behaviors

Voting

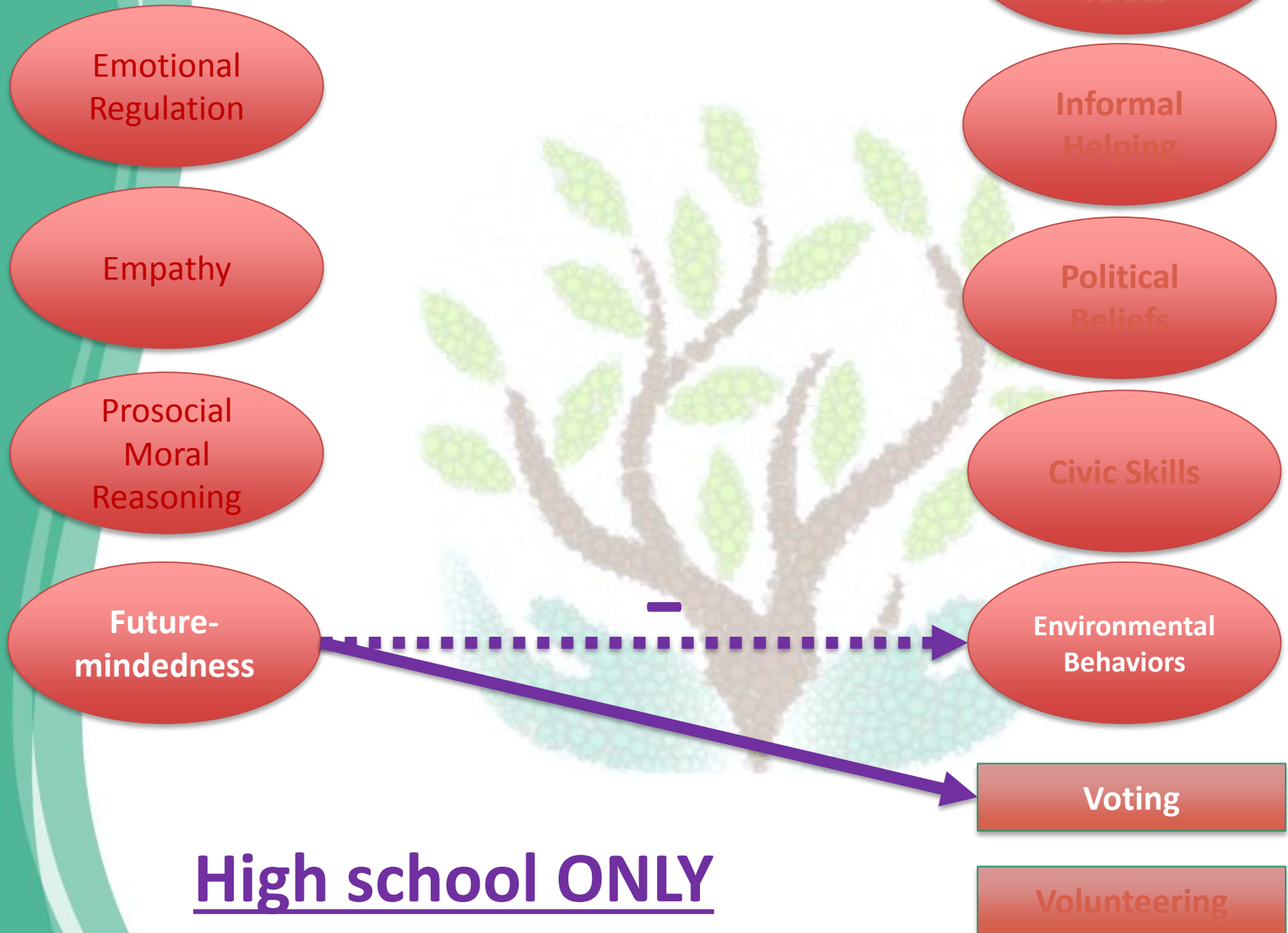
Volunteering



Middle school ONLY



Age-groups model

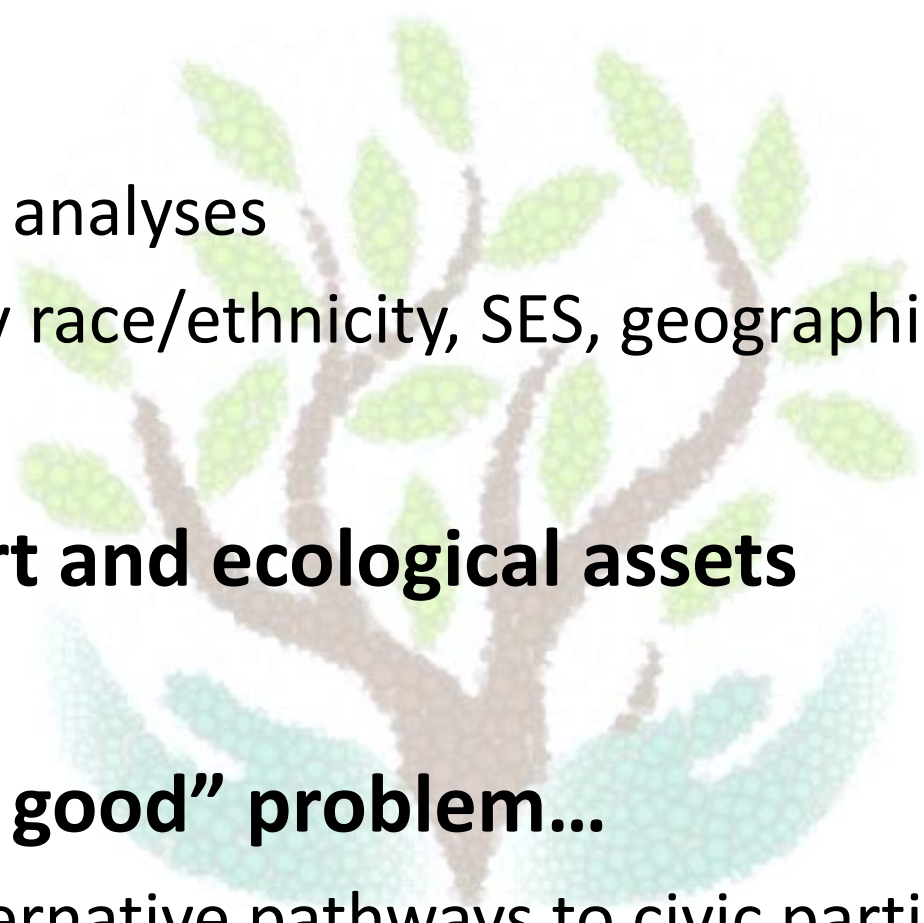


Brief Discussion

- **Links between core emotional, cognitive, and social-cognitive competencies varied by age**
 - Younger youth: emotion regulation
 - With increasing age: empathy
 - Oldest youth: prosocial moral reasoning and future-mindedness
- **Associations varied by category of civic involvement**

Limitations and future directions

- **Design**
 - Longitudinal analyses
 - Variations by race/ethnicity, SES, geographic location
- **Social support and ecological assets**
- **The “good to good” problem...**
 - Consider alternative pathways to civic participation





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www.civicroots.org

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