

Features of Positive Youth Developmental Settings

Physical and Psychological Safety

Safe and health-promoting facilities; practice that increases safe peer group interaction and decreases unsafe or confrontational peer interactions. Examples:

- The emotional climate of the session is predominantly positive (e.g., mutually respectful, relaxed, supportive; characterized by teamwork, camaraderie, inclusiveness, and an absence of negative behaviors).
- The program space is free of health and safety hazards.
- Written emergency procedures and exits are posted in plain view.
- Access to indoor and outdoor program space is supervised during program hours.

Appropriate Structure

Limit setting; clear and consistent rules and expectations; firm enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries, and age appropriate monitoring. Examples:

- Staff explains all activities clearly (e.g., youth appear to understand directions; sequence of events and purpose are clear).
- There is an appropriate amount of time for all of the activities (e.g., youth do not appear rushed; most youth who are generally on task finish activities; most youth do not finish significantly early with nothing planned to do).
- Staff shares control of most activities with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups, or individually guided activities).
- Staff provides an explanation or reason for every behavioral expectation, guideline or direction given to youth.
- Guidelines for behavior (e.g., attire and standards of respect and cultural awareness) are developed by youth and staff together.
- Rules and behavioral expectations are readily available and the staff reviews them with participants over the course of the program offering (e.g. at the beginning of every session or whenever infractions are likely to occur).

Supportive Relationship

Warmth; closeness; connectedness; good communication; caring; support; guidance; secure attachment, and responsiveness. Examples:

- Staff uses a warm tone of voice and respectful language.
- Staff is actively involved with youth (e.g., they provide directions, answer questions, work as partners or team members, check-in with individuals or small groups).
- Staff provides youth a structured opportunity to talk about (or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about to others.

- New staff participates in pre-service orientation activities which include elements of youth development.

Opportunities to Belong

Opportunities for meaningful inclusion regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement, and integration; opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence. Examples:

- There is no evidence of bias, but rather there is mutual respect for and inclusion of others of a different religion, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, appearance or sexual orientation.
- Youth have structured opportunities to get to know each other (e.g., there are team-building activities, introductions, personal updates, welcomes of new group members, icebreakers, and a variety of groupings for activities).
- Activities include opportunities for all youth to work cooperatively together.

Positive Social Norms

Rules of behavior, expectations, injunctions, ways of doing things, values and morals, and obligations for service. Examples:

- Youth do not exhibit any exclusion or staff successfully intervenes if exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces newcomer to other youth and they then include her, staff successfully suggests including a lone youth in a game).
- Youth strongly identify with the program offering (e.g., hold one another to established guidelines, use ownership language, such as “our program,” engage in shared traditions such as shared jokes, songs, gestures).
- Activities include structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.
- The organization has explicit conflict resolution policy or procedure that consists of several steps that staff uses when addressing conflict including: (1) approaches youth conflicts in a non-threatening manner (i.e. approaches calmly, stops hurtful actions, and acknowledges youth feelings); (2) seeks input from youth to determine cause and solution of conflict; (3) examines relationship between actions and consequences; (4) follows up with those involved afterward.

Support for Efficacy & Mattering

Youth-based; empowerment practices that support autonomy; making a real difference in one's community and being taken seriously. Practices that include enabling, responsibility granting, and meaningful challenge. Practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels. Examples:

- Program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products or performances that reflect ideas or designs of youth.
- Staff provides all youth one or more opportunities to lead a group.

- Staff provides multiple opportunities for youth (individual or group) to make plans for projects and activities.
- Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended choice (content or process) within the content framework of the activities (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic; youth decide roles, order of activities, tools or materials, or how to present results).
- Staff engages all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they are doing or have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress or feelings about the experience).

Opportunities for Skill Building

Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences, opportunities to learn cultural literacy, media literacy, communication skills and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment, and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital. Examples:

- Activities involve youth in engaging with (creating, combining, reforming) materials **or** ideas or improving a skill through guided practice.
- Youth are encouraged to try out skills or attempt higher levels of performance.
- When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results or failure), staff provides learning supports or encouragement.

Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts

Coordination, communication and links between family, school and broader community. Examples:

- Family members are formally welcomed as part of the program (e.g., there is an open-door policy, families are given opportunities to volunteer or participate, there is an orientation on program enrollment).
- Staff has intentional or established ways of communicating with families (e.g., conferences, communicate about youth academic and social or emotional goals, newsletters and phone calls).
- Communication with schools occurs to better coordinate supports and opportunities for youth.
- Communication with other community organizations occurs to better coordinate supports and opportunities for youth.
- The organization actively builds links to the community (e.g. seeks new participants within the community; seeks opportunities for youth to participate in community service; pursues new opportunities for community members to support the program i.e. donation of time, space, materials, financial support, etc.).

