

# YOUTH DEVELOPMENT GUIDE 2.0



Engaging young  
people in  
after-school  
programming

## ***Youth Development Guide 2.0***

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Temescal Associates is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. Our clients include leaders of youth serving institutions and organizations, school and youth program practitioners, public and private funders, intermediary organizations, and policy makers. Their work ranges from building large scale youth and community initiatives to providing services to young people on a day-to-day basis.

### **Acknowledgements**

We'd like to acknowledge Temescal Associates staff who contributed to this guide: Rozel Cruz, Stacey Daraio, Leslie Gravino, and Sam Piha. We'd also like to acknowledge Rebecca Fabiano (FAB Youth Philly) for drafting Chapters 3 and 9 and contributing to other chapters. We'd like to thank the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, who provided the resources to complete this project.

Special thanks to Sue Eldredge, Founder of the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), for her permission to use portions of the Youth Development Guide for Afterschool, originally published by CNYD in 2001. We'd also like to acknowledge those who contributed to the CNYD's original YD Guide: Anne Tamar-Mattis, Sam Piha, Amy Adams, Judy Vandegrift, Suzanne West, Joe Sikoryak, Joette Tizzone, Franklin Avery, Joey Watanabe, St. John's Educational Thresholds Center, San Francisco Beacon Initiative, Park Day School, Destiny Arts, Jennifer Barros, Jennifer Fornal, Stacey Daraio, Morva McDonald, and Oren Slozberg.

Thanks to our Advisory Group for their valuable input. They include: Katie Brackenridge (Non-Profit and Philanthropic Consultant), Bill Fennessy (THINK Together), Corey Newhouse (Public Profit), Gil Noam (Harvard University), Pilar O'Cadiz (UCLA), Michelle Perrenoud (Los Angeles County Office of Education), and Charles Smith (Q Turn LLC).

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge those individuals and organizations that provided photographs: Spotlight: Girls; LA's BEST; Temescal Associates; Ever Forward Club; Youth Institute – YMCA of Greater Long Beach; WINGS for Kids; Youth Radio; and NHP Foundation.



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# What Field Leaders are Saying About the Youth Development Guide 2.0

*The principles undergirding this youth development framework are as relevant today as when it was created. It is well aligned with our new learnings from both research and practice -- from the importance of relationships and social emotional learning to considering the kinds of short and longer term outcomes we seek that enhance success in school, work and life. It remains especially important for increasing intentionality around both the program opportunities we create for and with youth and especially the ways communities contribute systematically to ensuring these are available. This is youth development and community development framing at its best.*

**- DR. DALE BLYTH, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

*This framework continues to be an important lens through which to build high-quality youth experiences that promote positive developmental outcomes.*

**- DR. HELEN JANC MALONE, INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

*As part of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Regional Support Team, we used the YD guide as the basis for organizing full training workshops. I have used chapters of the Youth Development Guide when teaching students at UC Irvine as part of an Afterschool course for undergraduates who spent part of their course requirement working in an afterschool program site. I have also used it for training teachers when discussing assets based approaches. I believe that this updated Youth Development Guide 2.0 will be a valuable resource for the field.*

**- DR. PILAR O'CADIZ, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES**

*This updated version of the pioneering and comprehensive youth development guide demonstrates the continued alignment between positive youth development and the latest trends in expanded learning programs; including social and emotional learning, trauma informed practices, and quality standards. As we promote the integration of these trends, we try to emphasize that these promising practices aren't new, even if the language is.*

**- DAREN HOWARD, PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

*The principles highlighted in this youth development framework are at the heart of a high quality afterschool and summer learning experience. Research continues to clearly support what practitioners inherently understand - programs that reflect these principles, can profoundly impact children and youth experiencing risk, promote youth success, and support social emotional learning.*

**- JEFF DAVIS, CALIFORNIA AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK**

*I was trained over twelve years ago along with a handful of others at LACOE by Sam as a trainer of this material. I have cited this work, used it in my own practice, and also shared it with others through my consulting work. The youth development principles cited in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 are as important now as they were in 2001 and the updated version discussing important trends and changes in the afterschool movement make this Youth Development Guide 2.0 even more relevant.*

**- MICHELLE R. PERRENOUD, LOS ANGELES COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

*I used the original guide as the main text for a Foundations of Youth Work course I taught for nearly nine years at the Community College of Philadelphia. While the field has evolved in many ways, with an emphasis on things like core competencies for youth workers and program quality, the core elements of the Positive Youth Development framework is just as relevant today as when this guide was first published. I think this is the right time to update the guide to empower a new generation of youth workers.*

**-REBECCA FABIANO, FAB YOUTH PHILLY**



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## Opening Remarks



I played basketball in college and also coached high school basketball early in my career. What was the one thing I learned from my best coaches and applied to my own approach? Always start with the fundamentals. No matter how long you have played the game, start each season, in fact, each practice with the fundamentals. Golden State Warrior Stephen Curry does amazing things with a basketball that are beyond belief. What you don't often see are the endless hours of practice he puts in each day of the fundamentals of ball handling and the proper form for a jump shot. If it works for him, it works for me!

Temescal Associates' *Youth Development for Afterschool Programs 2.0* is the definitive playbook to coach others in the fundamentals of youth work. In fact, the fundamentals of working with humans! This is a time of unprecedented opportunity for afterschool and summer programs or Expanded Learning as we say in California. With the rising interest in Social Emotional Learning, school climate and culture, and whole child approach in our school system the Expanded Learning field is discovering strategic ways to collaborate with the school day. More so than I have seen at any point in my career. It is exciting. Let's not blow the opportunity!

Start with the fundamentals. Realize that all of the new trends in education share the same "DNA" outlined in this publication. Realize that all of the exciting new developments in neuroscience and, for example, the "generative social field" (*Theory U*, C. Otto Scharmer) also have the same DNA as youth development, which are outlined in this work.

Sam Piha has been a prophetic voice in the field of Expanded Learning since the early 1990's. This, his latest work, will continue to influence the development of high-quality opportunities for our children and youth. I recommend that this Guide be used together with the Learning in Afterschool & Summer principles and the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California.

Let's get back to the fundamentals and win for and with our kids!

**-- MICHAEL FUNK, DIRECTOR OF THE EXPANDED LEARNING DIVISION,  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**



I'm so appreciative of Temescal Associates continuing work to update CNYD's (Community Network for Youth Development) original Youth Development Guide to reflect the current context of youth development practice. It's a tribute to researchers Jim Connell and Michelle Gambone and the multitude of practitioners who created the original Youth Development Framework. The Framework remains as relevant today as it was in 2001, with its unique focus on the youth development experiences we want for young people and the organizational support that enable these practices to thrive.

**- SUE ELDRIDGE, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CNYD**

## About this Guide

### What is the Purpose of this Guide?

This Guide is designed to offer an introduction to youth development principles and practices to the diverse group of people involved in creating and implementing afterschool programs—program directors, school administrators, teachers, staff, volunteers, community partners, and others. We believe that adopting a youth development approach when designing and implementing afterschool programs can help ensure that young people get the most out of these programs.

If you are involved with another kind of youth program, or are a funder, a parent, a policymaker, or someone interested in community development, this book can also serve as a good basic introduction to the field of youth development.

The Guide draws on youth development principles and the underlying research to help afterschool program leaders and staff answer two fundamental questions they face as they design and implement afterschool programs:

1. What experiences can we provide for young people in our afterschool programs that will have the greatest positive impact on their lives and contribute to successful learning?
2. What practices can we use in our afterschool programs to create environments that provide these experiences?

### Why Now?

There are many reasons why we thought that now is a good time to update the original Youth Development Guide. Some of these reasons are discussed below.

- **Socio-political Context:** We currently live in divisive and violent times. This is marked by harsh rhetoric and aggressive policies targeting immigrants, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and Muslims. The news is also filled with reporting on mass shootings targeting music venues and school campuses, as well as escalating gun violence in many of our cities. Thus, it is more important than ever that we intentionally offer positive youth development experiences for our participants.
- **Afterschool Standards, Youth Worker Competencies, and Program Quality Tools:** Many states and afterschool organizations have developed and published standards, youth worker competencies, and quality tools for afterschool programs. These are very useful as reflection and self-assessment tools, and in supporting the work of program improvement. All of these are based on and well aligned with youth development practices.
- **New Concepts, Trends, and Frameworks:** There are many new concepts, trends, and frameworks that are now embraced by the afterschool field. These include social emotional learning, growth mindsets, workforce skills, and others. These are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.



## How this Guide is Structured

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a brief history leading to the youth development approach and offers an overview of youth development. Chapter 3 lists and describes recent trends, concepts, and frameworks in afterschool that align with the youth development approach. Chapters 4-8 offer guidance on how to implement five key youth development practices, which are crucial to promoting young people's healthy development and creating successful learning environments:

- Promoting a sense of physical and emotional safety;
- Encouraging relationship building;
- Fostering meaningful youth participation;
- Providing opportunities for community involvement;
- Creating challenging and engaging learning experiences that help participants build skills.

While the original Youth Development Guide published by CNYD (2001) included an extensive resource section, we have decided to limit this section to include only important websites. This decision is based on:

- There is an abundance of new literature, research, and reports being published nearly every week. Thus, any extensive listing of resources would be quickly outdated.
- Today's internet search engines offer an up to date list of resources by simply entering relevant keywords.
- We have cited a number of organizations and websites within the text of the Youth Development Guide 2.0 and Chapter 9.

This Guide is just an introduction. Ongoing learning and assessment are vital to the success of any after school program. We strongly urge you to utilize this guide as a starting point and to deepen your understanding of the youth development approach while providing your staff with engaging training opportunities.

## What the Guide is Not

This Guide is not meant to present a prescriptive system that tells you exactly how your program must be structured in order to be successful. There are many different routes to success for young people and programs alike; and individual young people in different communities will have different strengths and needs. Rather, regardless of program design or content, this approach helps keep the focus on the developmental outcomes we want for young people and the key experiences we can provide to help them reach those outcomes.





## ABOUT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

A brief history of youth and  
afterschool programs in America  
leading up to the youth  
development approach




# From Child Labor to Youth Programs and the Youth Development Approach

## An Early History of Youth Programs and Afterschool

To understand the history of afterschool and youth programs in America, it is useful to consider the seismic changes in American culture that served as the preconditions for the afterschool movement.

These changes were the result of the industrial revolution between 1880 and 1920. This resulted in heavy migration of families to big cities in search of work in the new factories, a large number of new immigrants that provided a labor pool for the country's growth and the use of child labor.


By 1938, most of the states outlawed child labor and required that children attend school, which resulted in the development of the public school system. This created a new dilemma: the large number of unsupervised young people in the afternoons hours and early evenings.



*At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after school programs weren't called after school programs. They were settlement houses or organizations like the YMCA that were created primarily to help immigrant families, since that was a high time of immigration. They helped immigrant families get socialized and assimilated.*

– Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment

This gave rise to a growing number of youth programs to serve unsupervised youth. It is important to note that the early youth programs emerged as a reaction to a societal challenge. This reactive tendency continued as afterschool programs changed according to the challenges of the day and the pursuit of funding. During the great depression, youth programs focused on hunger. During WWII, as women poured into the workforce, the focus was childcare. In the decades that followed, programs focused on preventing problems such as teen delinquency, teen violence, alcohol and drug use, pregnancy, and later school failure.



*Before there are after school programs, children were pushed into the streets. The negative thing about the streets is that they were not safe. The biggest cause of childhood deaths at this time, 1880 to 1915 were accidents that occurred in the streets.*

– Gordon Alexandre, Historian

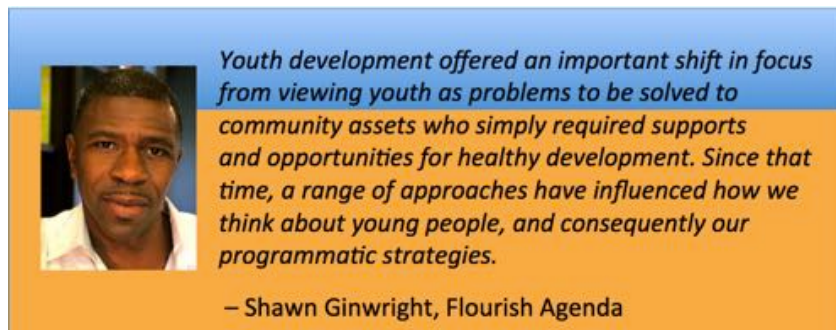
## The Deficit Approach

The deficit approach called for intervening when young people exhibited problems, or for identifying those young people “at risk” for problems and trying to prevent them from engaging in specific negative behaviors. This narrow focus on young people’s deficits and specific problem behaviors led to the creation of a youth services system that was largely fragmented. Categorical funding often dictated that programs be narrowly focused in order to fit within specific funding categories. The result was a system comprised of many single programs focused on isolated problems: one program focused on preventing drug abuse, while another focused on reducing teen pregnancy rates, and yet another sought to reduce violence among adolescents.

## Resiliency

During the early 1990s experts promoted the term “resiliency” which is the capacity to adapt, navigate and bounce back from adverse and challenging life experiences. Researchers and practitioners alike clamored over strategies to build more resilient youth. This marked a move from a deficit approach that focused on preventing youth problems to an asset approach, which focused on the resiliency and young people’s assets. Thus, youth programs shifted their attention to addressing young people’s developmental needs and supported their growth to healthy adulthood. This became known as the youth development approach.

By the mid-1990s, the youth development movement was increasingly influencing policy nationwide. Policymakers began breaking down the barriers of categorical funding and allocating resources to support collaborative efforts between community based organizations and other parts of the youth serving system.



Federal public agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention began embracing the approach and shifted research and program dollars toward community supports for youth development. Even historically risk-focused federal efforts such as the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities responded to the compelling research on resilience and the pressure from practitioners to implement a more positive—and effective approach.



At the state level, agencies began shifting from strictly categorical funding to supporting broader based youth development efforts. Private funders increasingly recognized the value of taking a youth development approach. Public-private funding partnerships worked to support youth and family focused policies and funding strategies. This kind of system-level change not only helped existing neighborhood youth organizations expand their support for young people, but also fostered the creation of numerous broad-based, collaborative youth development efforts in local communities across the country.

## The Growth of School-Based Afterschool Programs

Amid this policy shift, public concern continued to grow about youth violence and other dangers. Added to these concerns was growing public concern over perceived widespread academic under-achievement. These concerns led to a surge of funding from federal, state and local sources for the development of school-based afterschool programs.

At the federal level, in FY 2000, the U.S. Department of Education launched the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) initiative to schools nationwide to improve academic achievement and strengthen community supports for young people. Today, Congress appropriates \$1.2 billion to this initiative, in the form of state block grants, enabling states to create school-based “learning centers”.



*A little history lesson is critical here. At that point in time, when the big growth from 750,000 dollars to 1.1 billion, all happened in four years. It rarely happens.*

– Terry Peterson, CS Mott Foundation and Afterschool Alliance

In California, a voter initiative, Proposition 49 (passed in 2002), required the California Department of Education allocate over \$550 million each year to fund nearly 1,000 school-based afterschool programs across the state. These programs are designed to improve student performance in school and provide safe environments after school for students in grades K-8. Later, legislation required that California allocate ½ of its 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funds for afterschool programs in public high schools.

At the local level, public funds were increasingly devoted to city-wide and community-wide afterschool initiatives. Many cities began establishing protected funding pools, through taxes or other means, specifically designed to support youth development efforts. Cities and school districts began to see the growth of public-private partnerships designed to support young people's healthy development.



*This was about smart government. This was about using underutilized public space that lay empty on the weekends and evenings and after school. It was a smarter way for government to partner with non-profit organizations and to partner with community groups in a new way to serve kids.*

– Sylvia Yee, Formerly of Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund

Youth development theory and practice can serve as a bridge between school and community-based efforts. Because youth development focuses on fundamental experiences that foster both learning and broader healthy development, this approach is well suited to address the twin goals of newly created school-based afterschool programs.

## What Do We Call It?

What do we call the learning time outside of the classroom? This time is known as “afterschool”, or “after-school”, “out-of-school time” (OST), “expanded learning opportunities (ELO)”, or “expanded learning time” (ELT). For many years, the programming that took place outside of the traditional school day was called “afterschool”. In his 2002 essay, *A Different Kind of Child Development Institution: The History of After-School Programs for Low-Income Youth*, Robert Halpern richly describes the historical role that afterschool programs have played and how they emerged as early as the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The term “afterschool” remained common until the 1980s.

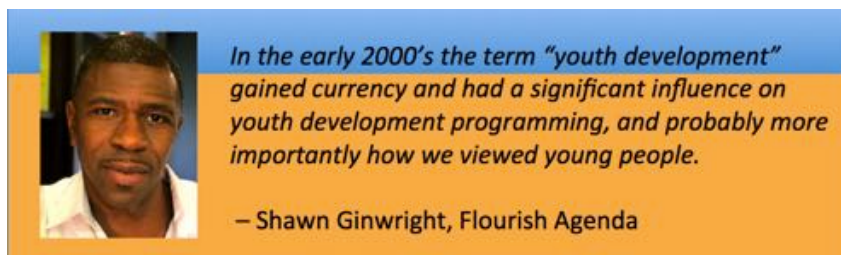


The term “out of school learning” was first coined in the late 1980s by an educational psychologist for whom the term meant “curricular and non-curricular learning that takes place outside of the school environment.” The field of youth development adopted the term in the late 1990s, early 2000s as “out of school time” (OST) around the time of the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which provided funding for creation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC).

The term “expanded learning time” (ELT) took off in the mid-2000s with funding to support the redesign of the school day or school year to provide students, especially those in communities that are impacted by systemic poverty, with more and better learning time. It is often a core element of school turn-around efforts. ELT differs from after-school programs or expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) because ELT requires all students at a given school to attend the longer day and/or year, and the additional time becomes a dependent component of the school’s educational practices and objectives. Youth-serving organizations often supplement the 3-6 hours or summer school with programming and activities that use a positive youth development approach and are based in playful learning or social emotional learning (SEL).

## The Youth Development Approach

To summarize, the youth development approach draws on a substantial body of research about young people’s developmental needs and the role that the environment plays in young people’s lives as they move through childhood and toward adulthood. It also draws on years of evidence from the field about “what works” in creating environments that promote young people’s healthy development and learning. The key youth development principles and practices outlined in this guide can be used to measure program effectiveness, and provide clear standards to which we can hold our programs accountable.



These principles and practices can be applied to all afterschool programs— regardless of the program’s content; they are equally applicable to programs focused on boosting academic achievement, as they are to sports and recreation programs or to programs promoting community service. A youth development approach helps unify all of us around the healthy long term outcomes we want for young people and our contributions along the way.





# INTRODUCING A FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

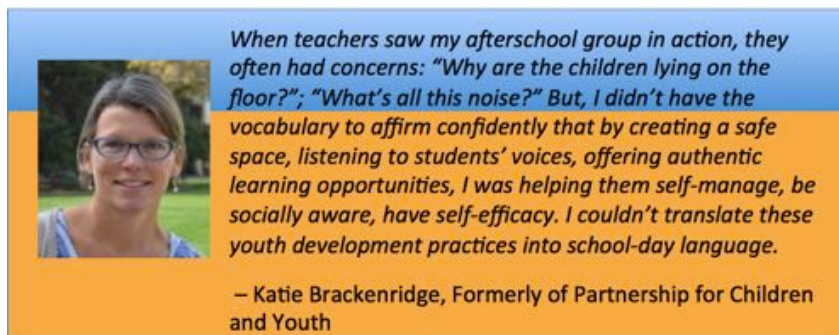


# A Framework for Youth Development

The Youth Development Guide 2.0 is based upon the youth development framework created by researchers, James Connell and Michelle Gambone, which is described in detail below. Drawing on our understanding of the fundamental ideas underlying the youth development approach, we can now begin to look more closely at the kinds of experiences we can offer young people in afterschool programs to help them learn and grow.

## Why a Framework?

There are several ways that a framework is useful. To begin, it summarizes existing knowledge and helps us by creating a common language.




A framework also gives direction and purpose to a program. Knowing the important components of healthy development can help guide staff and volunteers toward programming intended to achieve specific positive outcomes. A framework can help provide direction for program evaluation, as well, to identify items on which an evaluation can focus. Finally, a framework which is validated and accurate can identify more clearly what the long term outcomes are that youth development programs are helping to create.

It is important to note that there are a number of frameworks for youth development. A recent framework is the *Foundations for Young Adult Success*, developed by the UChicago Consortium on School Research, which incorporates many of the recent trends in afterschool and youth development.)

## Early Adult Outcomes

Before we begin thinking specifically about how best to support the young people who participate in afterschool programs, we need to have a vision of what we want all young people to learn and master by the time they reach early adulthood. In other words, we need to know where we want to go in order to know how best to get there.

A traditional deficit approach might define desired outcomes for young people in terms of the avoidance, or reduction of, specific problem behavior: for example, young people don’t drop out of school, don’t commit crimes, or refrain from abusing drugs. As described in the preceding chapter, the youth development approach sets positive outcomes, not only the avoidance of



problems, as our goal for young people. From a youth development approach the overall goal is healthy development, but what does this mean? One way to define healthy development is in terms of what we want young people to be able to do as they enter early adulthood. These desired achievements are grouped in three broad categories:

- **Economic Self-Sufficiency:** all youth should expect as adults to be able to support themselves and their families, and to have some resources beyond basic survival needs. They should have decent jobs and the education or access to education to improve or change jobs.
- **Healthy Family and Social Relationships:** young people should grow up to be physically and mentally healthy, be supportive parents if they have children, and have positive family and friendship networks.
- **Contributing to Community:** This can take many forms, but we hope that our young people will look to do more than be taxpayers and law-abiders—to contribute at a level where they give something back to their community, however they define their community.

In other words, we want young people to have decent jobs, good relationships, and play positive roles in their communities. These are the early adult outcomes we want for young people. This is not an exhaustive list; rather it is one attempt to broadly categorize what, at a minimum, we hope all young people will attain. It is clear that one afterschool program cannot be responsible for young people achieving all these goals. But, knowing where we want to end up—the long term outcomes we ultimately want for young people—can help determine the path we take to get there and help us assess an afterschool program’s contributions along the way. With this in mind, it is important that—early on in the planning process—afterschool partnerships pull together the diverse stakeholders involved and build consensus around the community’s desired outcomes for young people.

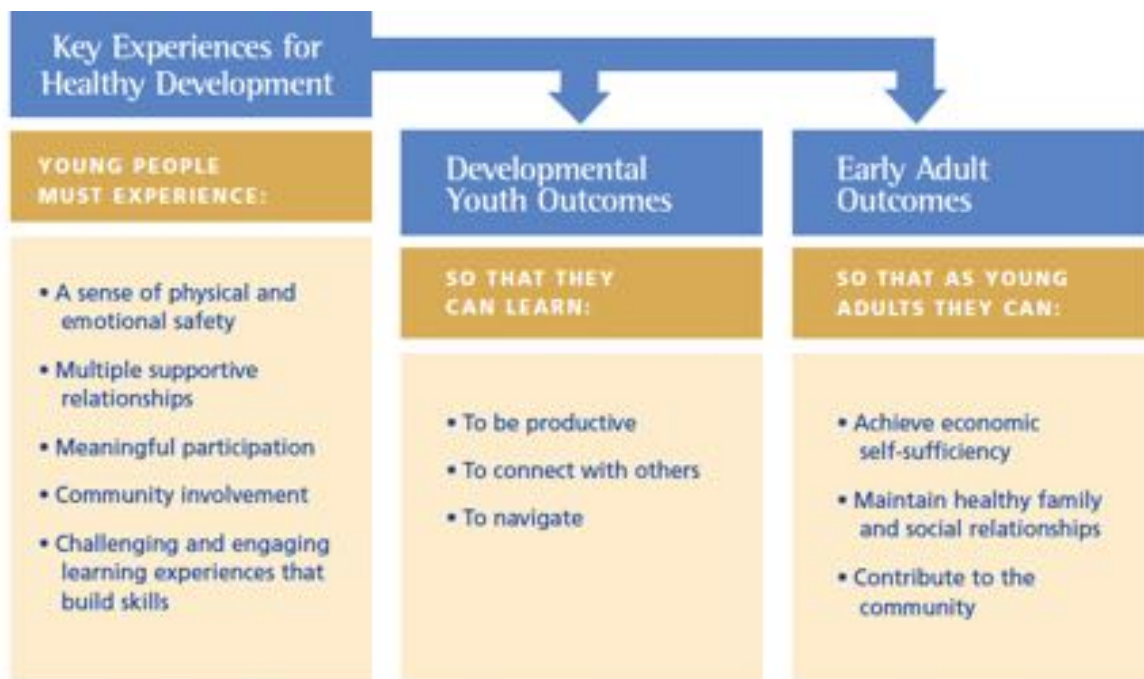
## Developmental Youth Outcomes

One way to understand how afterschool programs can contribute to these long-term outcomes for young people is to consider what young people need to learn at different ages and developmental stages to improve their chances of achieving these long term outcomes. These are developmental outcomes—they measure young people’s developmental progress toward meeting the challenges of adulthood. They include learning to:

- **Be Productive:** to engage positively and do well in school, to use their spare time well and take care of their basic needs;
- **To Be Connected:** to form attachments and have supportive relationships with adults and peers, to identify with a larger community;
- **To Navigate:** through different settings, situations and challenges; this task encompasses learning how to move:
  - Among their multiple worlds —peer groups, families, schools, neighborhoods—each of which may require different behavior and even language; behaving in ways that are appropriate to the setting;

- Around the pressure to engage in unhealthy and risky behaviors;
- Through their own transitions—for example the transition from being taken care of to taking care of others.

Another way to think about these outcomes is as the intermediate milestones or markers that indicate that young people are on the path to successful early adult outcomes. These are obviously very broad categories, which encompass a wide range of accomplishment, but we can identify concrete indicators of young people’s progress toward each of these developmental outcomes at any one point in time. Young people’s progress toward accomplishing these outcomes can be measured at any stage of a young person’s life. For a sixth grader, “learning to be productive” might mean doing his or her math home- work. For an 18 year old, it might mean having a part-time job or doing regular volunteer work. These developmental outcomes are products of multiple experiences in many environments over time—in young people’s homes, schools and communities.



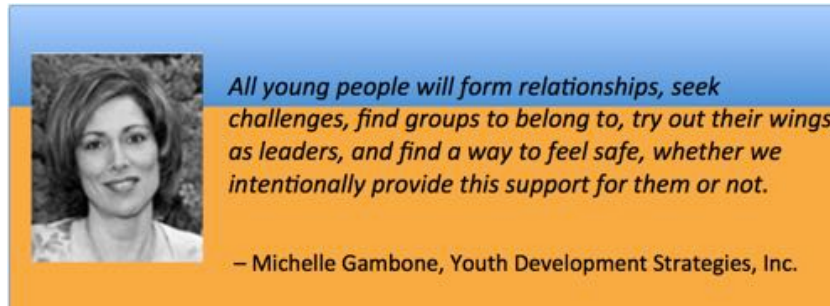
The graphic above identifies the kinds of experiences that support young people in meeting their developmental outcomes.

## Experiences that Promote Positive Youth Development

Now that we have an idea of the outcomes we want for young people, we can begin to examine more specifically how what we do in our afterschool programs can contribute to young people reaching these outcomes. In other words, we can begin to answer the question:

*What experiences can we provide for young people in afterschool programs that will have the greatest positive impact on their lives and contribute to successful learning?*

Resiliency research about young people’s process of development offers important insights. From these research findings, as well as practitioners’ knowledge in the field, we can create a fairly short list of the kinds of key experiences that young people need in all settings in order to develop into healthy adults. In fact, young people’s need for these experiences is so strong that they will seek them out whether we provide them or not.



For young people who do not have access to experiences that promote positive youth development, we may see them seeking these experiences in troubling ways: looking for challenge in ways that put them at risk, belonging to gangs, or seeking safety through violence. Clearly, afterschool programs can provide these positive experiences. They can offer young people the chance to form strong relationships with adults and peers, and provide challenging learning experiences and a variety of opportunities for young people to “test their wings” in a safe setting.

These are the experiences that allow young people to learn and succeed. From a youth development perspective, providing these experiences for young people is critical—regardless of a program’s specific content. In addition, meeting young people’s basic needs for these experiences will help to ensure that they feel invested and engaged in your afterschool program. These experiences are described in the box below.



## Key Experiences for Healthy Development

### Young People Must Experience:

- **PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY:** so that young people feel secure and can take risks that help them grow;
- **MULTIPLE SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS:** where young people receive guidance from adults and emotional and practical support from both adults and peers, so that they learn to connect;
- **MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION:** through which young people experience real involvement and decision-making so that they are able to take on leadership roles and gain a sense of belonging;
- **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** where young people gain an understanding of the greater community so that they feel able to make an impact in and be a productive part of their community;
- **CHALLENGING AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES:** through which young people build a wide array of skills and competencies and experience a sense of growth and progress.

## Organizational Practices That Help Afterschool Programs Support Young People

It is worth thinking about what programs need—at an organizational level—in order to succeed in providing young people with the kinds of experiences we have described. What can we, as program leaders and planners, do to design afterschool programs to ensure that they offer participants the experiences described above? For example, how can we set up programs so that young people have the chance to really get to know adults and vice versa? How can we help ensure that programs offer a range of diverse activities which are interesting to young program participants?



This graphic summarizes the relationship between organizational practices and key experiences that prepare young people for success in their adult lives.

## The Continuum of Support: A Final Reminder

It is important for everyone to remember that afterschool programs, no matter how effective, cannot provide everything that young people need for success. Just as policymakers have begun to recognize that schools cannot “do it all,” so must we acknowledge that neither can afterschool programs. Afterschool programs can make important contributions to young people’s healthy development, but young people have the best chance for success when they experience the supports and opportunities we describe across many different settings: in their families, in schools, afterschool programs and in their communities. The entire community is responsible for preparing young people to succeed in early adulthood.



Source: Foundations for Young Adult Success, UChicagoCCSR



## RECENT ADVANCES IN AFTERSCHOOL THAT ALIGN WITH YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Recent trends, concepts, and frameworks for afterschool programs.



## Recent Trends, Concepts, and Frameworks

In this chapter, we introduce you to some afterschool trends, concepts, and important terms that have emerged since the original Youth Development Guide for Afterschool was published. When reviewing each of these, ask yourself, “how does this trend or concept align with the youth development framework discussed in this guide?”

We also display a number of related frameworks and graphics. Frameworks are designed to provide foundational information about a concept, system or idea. They often serve as a road map, allowing us to intentionally design programming, establish and nurture effective partnerships, hire staff, assess effectiveness and ensure program quality. Frameworks may be developed at the local, state or national level.

## The Developmental Framework for Young Adult Success

While this guide is based on the youth development framework created by researchers, James Connell and Michelle Gambone, a more recent framework (see below) was issued by University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR). It outlines the “ingredients” necessary for young people to succeed. This framework culls from the best of “research evidence, theory, expert opinion, and practice wisdom in the service of identifying the broad range of factors critical for young adult success”.



## Quality Standards for Afterschool

Quality standards have been developed by organizations at the local, state, and national levels. The purpose of quality standards is to describe the attributes of a quality afterschool program. For example, the *California Quality Standards for Expanded*

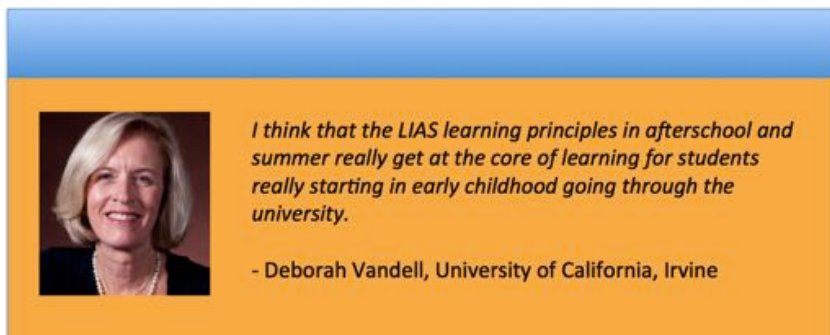
*Learning Programs* (<http://bit.ly/CalQSELP>) is divided into point-of-service and programmatic (or organizational) standards. They align well with youth development frameworks and other program quality standards. The point-of-service standards include safe and supportive environment, active and engaged learning, skill building, youth voice and leadership, healthy choices and behaviors, and diversity, access and equity.

## **Learning in Afterschool & Summer Learning Principles ([www.learninginafterschool.org](http://www.learninginafterschool.org))**

The Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Project is an effort by afterschool advocates and leaders to unify the field of afterschool and focus the movement on promoting young people's learning.

What this project tries to do is focus not on what young people should learn, rather focus on the how - program approaches that promote learning. You will notice that the exemplar afterschool programs - the ones that are the darlings of the afterschool movement - are all exceptional in how they promote young people's excitement in learning. The same is true of those exceptional educators who are named as teachers of the year in local, state, and national ceremonies. What we hear most about these acclaimed classroom teachers are their abilities to motivate and excite young people in learning. But somehow we bypass the principles that they apply in practice.


The LIAS project aims to focus our attention and practice on a few learning principles: Learning activities should be 1) Active; 2) Collaborative; 3) Meaningful; 4) Supports mastery; and 5) Expands horizons.



## **Social Emotional Learning (SEL) ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org))**

One of the things that has often distinguished the field of youth development, out-of-school time and afterschool from the traditional school day, has been the ways programming inherently supports young people's social and emotional development. The SEL framework contains five competencies for the development of SEL. CASEL ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)) defines SEL as: *the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and*

manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The competencies are: Self-awareness, Self-management, Responsible Decision Making, Relationship Skills and Social Awareness.



*Out-of-school settings, such as after-school programs and community organizations, are natural sites for social and emotional learning. Many of the types of skills that SEL interventions target are also implicit or explicit in the missions and objectives of out-of-school programs.*

- Nancy Deutsch, University of Virginia


What has changed in recent years is the ways the school districts and youth programs have begun to organize their strategic planning, budgeting, curriculum and staffing to intentionally integrate SEL curriculum. They have come to realize the competencies in this framework are essential to not only success in school, but in life and in the workplace.



## Employability Skills

The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) developed an employability skills framework designed to outline the skills and qualities required for those entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce. This framework helps out-of-school time professionals design and implement workforce development programming and activities that prepare young adults for various careers.

The framework is divided into three main domains: Applied Knowledge, Workplace Skills and Effective Relationships, with micro categories in each of the domains. Evidence



shows what the programming afterschool and OST programs do to support and develop participants SEL enhances their readiness for the workplace.

When this framework and the CASEL's SEL framework are placed side by side, as was done in a report by Beyond the Bell, American Institute for Research there is a lot of overlap, which builds a strong case for intentionally integrating programming that supports SEL as part of an effective workforce development curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education compiled the Employability Skills Framework has developed related tools, media and resources available to OST programs.

## **Character Building ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org))**

At the heart of a young person's development and education is character building. Essential to the success of a democratic society, "educating for character" builds civic virtue, compliance with laws, respect for the rights of others, and concern for the common good. More broadly explained, character education is about promoting moral virtues (honesty, compassion, empathy, and trustworthiness) and performance virtues (effort, diligence, and perseverance). Character education is about doing the right thing and the best work possible. Afterschool programs are perfectly positioned to promote character building by explicitly communicating and modeling values and offering activities that promote character building.

## **Youth Activism And Civic Engagement**

According to Children International, "youth civic engagement activities and programs are critical for empowering young people to develop their skills and talents; participate in political, economic and social conversations; and become agents of positive change in their communities". We also know that supporting youth in efforts to be active and civically engaged promotes their sense of "agency", are important components of trauma informed practice, and helps them acquire valuable knowledge and experiences. Activities range from helping others within the afterschool program (reading buddies, tutoring and mentoring, etc.) to efforts to improve the local community to organizing activities to advocate for their views on social issues.

## **Expanded Learning: 360°/365 ([www.expandedlearning360-365.com](http://www.expandedlearning360-365.com))**

Expanded learning: 360°/365 is a collaborative project dedicated to promoting the development of critical skills beyond academics that research has identified as essential to young people's success in school, work, and life. The Expanded Learning: 360°/365 project partners have designed a number of supports for educators and leaders of expanded learning programs. This project is based on two strongly held beliefs:

- 360° – In order for children to grow into healthy and productive citizens, they must learn and practice a wide variety of inter-related skills – social-emotional, character as well as academic;

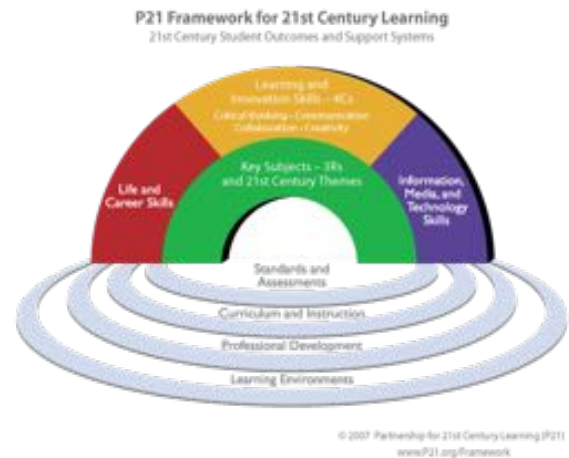


- 365 – Children learn in a variety of settings and year-round. This includes formal settings, such as school, and informal settings, such as afterschool, extracurricular, and summer youth programs.



## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (www.p21.org)


The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills worked with educators, businesses and institutions of higher education to identify the “skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and came up with the framework to the right. It outlines the outcomes desired and the support systems necessary to effectively meet those outcomes. These 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills can, and should be part of any apprenticeship programming and organization that seeks to align with the employability framework.



Afterschool programs are well positioned to help foster the Learning & Innovation skills (which includes critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication) and the Life and Career Skills (such as flexibility, adaptability, initiative, and self-direction, to name a few). Afterschool programs would do well to partner with schools and districts on developing these 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. These skills map back to the other frameworks we’ve discussed, as well as the youth development framework.

## Workforce Development: Apprenticeships

Other efforts have emerged which often align with or can be utilized to address quality standards, support SEL or align with workforce skills development. For example, there is currently a strong interest in, as well as state and federal dollars available to develop pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming. For those working with middle school aged youth, a pre-apprenticeship may focus on exposure to a wide range of careers and workforce-related skills (sometimes called 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills) such as teamwork, collaboration and communication. An apprenticeship often couples on-the-job training with some type of accompanying study (classroom work and reading) and a certificate or credential. For industries looking to diversify their workforce (think Green Energy) an apprenticeship can connect young people to a career path or pipeline to which they may not typically have access. Apprenticeships require strong partnerships, including with credential-bearing entities and may strengthen or complement your current workforce programming.



*We want our young people to be able to know about the world of work. What is it like to be a biologist? What is it like to be a computer programmer? What's it like to be a filmmaker? Nothing like having a chance to be able to work in some of these settings in some real ways that can happen in some of our high-quality afterschool programs.*

- Deborah Vandell, University of California Irvine

## Digital Badges ([www.centerfordigitalbadges.com](http://www.centerfordigitalbadges.com))

Digital badges emerged in the mid-2000s as a way for young people to showcase their accomplishments both in and out of school. While digital badges emerged from the gaming industry to reward/award accomplishments, they are similar in concept to the types of badges youth in the Boy and Girl Scouts earned upon successfully demonstrating a skill or characteristic. Digital badging is sometimes considered a “micro-credential” and can be incorporated into pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and workforce development programming, as well as college preparation programming. It can be a low-cost addition to a program as many of the resources are free. A program can create their own digital badging curriculum or can utilize open-source curriculum. One such platform is Badgr <https://badgr.com>.



Source: Center for Digital Badges

## **Bullying ([www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov))**

Bullying, which often takes place between school-aged children is when someone uses their power over someone else to intimidate or cause emotional or physical harm. Bullying no longer takes place only on the school yard, in the school cafeteria or on the school bus. With more children and youth (at younger and younger ages) having access to online technology, including and especially social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter) we are seeing the emergence and prevalence of cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature. Bullying has a negative impact on one's social and emotional development and can sometimes have dire consequences, including suicide.

Afterschool programs can use a youth development approach to help ensure a safe environment and foster positive relationships between children and their peers and children and adults. They can establish clear, fair and high expectations about how people in the program treat each other. And they can create opportunities where children and youth are learning to navigate and explore their own power; where they are connecting to positive role models and productively working through differences by learning about respect, effective communication, problem solving and conflict resolution. Organizations like *No Bully* provide curriculum and tools for schools, especially, to help staff reduce and address bullying. *Common Sense Media* also provides resources in media literacy, which can help diminish cyber-bullying.

## **Service Learning**

Service Learning takes the idea of community service (think cleaning an abandoned lot or creating a community garden, reading to seniors or children), and adds to it academics, assessment, and reflection typically seen in project-based learning (PBL). The Corporation for National Service Learning is a federal agency that leads service, volunteering, and grant-making efforts in the United States. They oversee many programs you may be familiar with including AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund. Service learning is appropriate for all ages, though mostly seen integrated into middle and high school afterschool and summer programs.

Service Learning effectively addresses all three principles of positive youth development (relationships, expectations and opportunities) as well as the five LIAS principles for quality afterschool programs. Much of the funding is dependent on various political factors and comes with rigorous expectations.

## STEM and STEAM

STEM stands for Science, Technology Engineering and Math. In the mid 2000's an "A" was added for "Arts" to account for the importance of creativity in an interdisciplinary approach. An important premise behind STEM or STEAM is that instead of teaching disciplines in independent subject silos, lessons are well rounded, project and inquiry based, with a focus on interdisciplinary learning. STEM activities support the development of 4 C's that have been identified as key in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Communication. Programs that offer STEM & STEAM programming (in other words, that intentionally seek out and integrate science, technology, engineering and math into their activities, not just offering a robotics club, for example) cultivate students' interest in STEM and STEM-based careers, and build STEM skills and proficiencies. In *STEM in Afterschool: Changing Perspectives. Shaping Lives.*, it is documented that afterschool programs can play a major role in sustaining youths' interests, building real skills, helping youth connect STEM to their lives and communities, and introducing youth to a diverse array of professionals.

STEM can effectively incorporate all five the LIAS learning principles. One of the biggest challenges with integrating STEM is lack of qualified and confident afterschool staff. When considering integrating this trend make sure you've considered staff's skill and interest in STEM/STEAM, and make sure you allocate sufficient time for staff to learn new concepts or skills, to practice and to share among each other. This is an area where partnering with other organizations or hiring part time or temporary experts can be a good way to integrate STEM/STEAM into your afterschool program.



*Well, there's a shift occurring in our afterschool and in our summer programs towards incorporating more hands on learning, discovery, looking at the new STEM; science, technology, math, engineering opportunities.*

– Tom Torlakson, California Superintendent of Public Instruction

## Mindfulness

There is a growing interest in research and practice that shows that mindfulness is a very useful tool in youth program settings. There is new information and growing evidence that confirms that mindfulness exercises within school and afterschool settings are excellent ways to promote the health and well-being of adult staff and increase impulse control and ability to stay focused among youth who participate in the exercises.



*Research lays out many benefits of Mindfulness. The best benefit is that students become more aware of self. I believe self-awareness builds confidence. Confident youth are likely to reach their potential. I need all youth to reach their potential.*

– Allison Haynes, Riverside County Office of Education

## Trauma Informed Practices

Trauma Informed Practices is when an organization or individual applies a framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. It includes policies, practices and protocol that emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both patients and providers, and helps survivors of trauma rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. Many people have experienced some type of trauma in their life. The ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study of more than 17,000 participants showed a direct correlation between adverse childhood experiences and long and short-term health disparities.



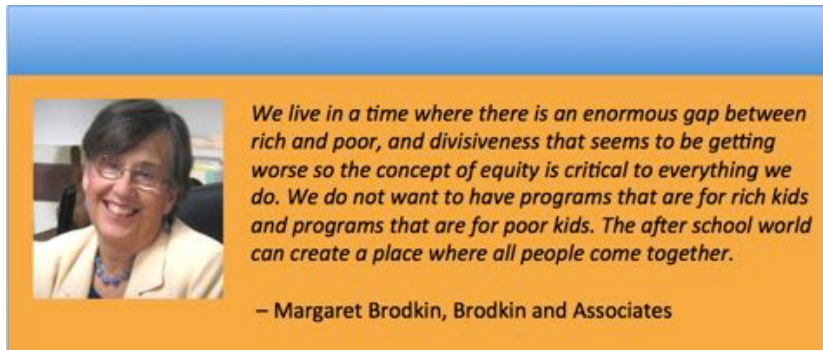
*Practitioners and policy stakeholders have recognized the impact of trauma on learning, and healthy development. Trauma informed care broadly refers to a set of principles that guide and direct how we view the impact of severe harm on young people's mental, physical and emotional health. Trauma informed care encourages support and treatment to the whole person, rather than focus on only treating individual symptoms or specific behaviors.*

- Shawn Ginwright, Flourish Agenda

## Equity and Inclusion

Out-of-school time programs provide benefits to millions of children and teens annually. Research shows that OST programs can help decrease the gap in opportunities between children from resource-rich families and communities and those from under-resourced communities and poor families. Nearly two decades ago our field began looking at issues of equity and inclusion by asking the question: "Is afterschool for all?" While the evidence

points towards positive outcomes for children and teens who participate in high quality afterschool programs, not all children and teens have access to these programs. And not all programs implement a pedagogy that embraces fair treatment of all children. The explosion of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Communities in the early 2000's provided unprecedented funding for afterschool programming. However, children from poor and rural communities didn't always have access to these or other afterschool programs.



Barriers to accessing afterschool programs include: cost, geography/transportation, language (for children of immigrants, lengthy applications that are not in their native language can be off-putting and discourage participation), and schedules to name a few. Another element of equity is the *types* of activities offered within programs. For example, according to the Forum for Youth Investment, “the arts program in a low- income community consists of basic arts and crafts activities, while the arts program in a wealthy community provides opportunities for exploring and developing specific skills in areas such as ceramics, drama or drawing.” Also, there are fewer opportunities for older youth than younger ones.

Once part of these programs, the physical and emotional safety of participants is critical. According to the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, this means ensuring that programs “actively value and respect the identities of the young people we serve, including their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, appearance, and ability.”

These six tips from Jennifer Siaca Curry can be found in her article: Equity and Inclusion an Action Agenda for Youth Development Professionals for the Journal Afterschool Matters:

1. Build a personal understanding of our country's history of oppression
2. Adjust language to ensure inclusivity
3. Work to eliminate implicit bias
4. Use culturally responsive pedagogy
5. Address identity-based bullying
6. Recruit and develop staff who build and maintain a positive environment for all

## **Growth Mindset ([www.mindsetworks.com](http://www.mindsetworks.com))**

Pioneered by Dr. Carol Dweck, the concept “growth mindset” challenges the ways we think about how people learn and intelligence. After years of research Dweck concluded that children who were praised for being smart, tended to have a more ‘fixed’ mindset, whereas children who were praised for hard work and effort resulted in youth being more likely to take on (academic) challenges they may face, therefore increasing their abilities and achievement. So, what does this mean for afterschool? First, it means that staff continue to cultivate strong, trusting relationships with the youth in their program, a core element of positive youth development. Second, it means shifting the way adults interact with youth in learning/teaching environments and training staff to develop practices that encourage a growth mindset.


Using a growth mindset approach fits well as programs are seeking to integrate concepts like S.T.E.M (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) into their afterschool programs. Some children may think they aren’t “good” at science or don’t know how to “do math well”, so they may not see themselves as capable or eligible to participate in S.T.E.M related activities. Staff that promote a growth mindset, which encourages youth to develop strategies for learning, revising, and adapting, may find some youth more willing to take on (greater) challenges and step out of their comfort zone.

To be sure, growth mindset isn’t just “good” for children and youth. Afterschool programs, can also employ a growth mindset among staff. This could include asking questions during an interview that get at their philosophy about learning (others’ and their own); and it means being intentional about providing staff with professional development and training to develop new skills and strategies, allowing room for mistakes, revisions and adjustments as they learn.

## **Grit**

While Angela Duckworth began shaping her framework that would later influence her research on ‘grit’ in 2007, the term wouldn’t hit the OST field until the early twenty-teens. Duckworth describes grit as the “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” Grit can be considered an element of social and emotional learning and sometimes found in character education. ExtendEd Notes suggests including these four elements in your afterschool program to help fostering grit.

1. Present students with challenges that take them out of their comfort zones and increase their frustration.
2. Observe students’ reactions and help to guide and motivate those who are easily discouraged or defeated.
3. Encourage students to set goals for themselves and demonstrate how to actively work towards achieving those goals.
4. Help students understand the "growth mindset," and as explained by Duckworth in her TED Talk, that "the ability to learn is not fixed; it can change with your effort."



While these are worthwhile elements to include in afterschool programs, this 2016 article from The Washington Post: *The Problem With Teaching ‘Grit’ To Poor Kids? They Already Have It. Here’s What They Really Need* provides a cautionary tale about grit. Since many of our out of school times serve children who are raised in poverty or communities that are under-resourced, we need to consider that they *already have grit*. The author of this article suggests, “An overemphasis on character education means that fewer resources will be spent on teaching disadvantaged students the skills and knowledge they need to actually succeed academically and professionally.”

Like *any* trend, it’s important to consider various perspective and the ways that class, culture, privilege and opportunity may bias our belief about whether a trend is ‘good’ for the people we serve (participants, staff, families, partners, etc.)

## Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is a good fit and practical strategy for afterschool programs because it aligns with positive youth development principles including: fostering positive relationships, upholding clear, fair and high expectations, and supporting opportunities to connect, navigate and be productive. It is also a strengths-based approach to engagement and discipline. According to the Afterschool Alliance, “unlike punitive justice, which focuses on punishing the offender, restorative justice focuses on repairing harm done. The goal is to identify who was harmed, explore why it happened, and solve the issue by considering the needs of all individuals involved—the victims and offenders.

Three important principles within restorative justice include: involving the entire community, encouraging equity, and utilizing a proactive strategy.” Restorative practice also supports the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) by helping develop conflict resolutions skills and competence. Implementing a restorative approach requires a shift in mindset, and probably some policies, too. Staff need training and support throughout the process. There are many resources available at [www.healthiersf.org](http://www.healthiersf.org) to help you get started.

## The Importance of Play

Summer, 2018 the American Academy of Pediatrics released a report on the importance of play entitled, *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children*, in which it suggests that pediatricians should ‘prescribe’ play to their patients because of its known positive benefits. Benefits from play include the development of social and emotional skills as well as cognitive development including problem solving and critical thinking. Play can also help develop language skills, and physical development including fine and gross motor skills. Playful learning is a concept that identifies six key elements in which play facilitates meaningful learning. The six Cs include: Communication, Collaboration, Content, Critical Thinking, Creative Innovation, and Confidence. While we often think about play “as the work of children”, there is ample evidence to show that play benefits teenagers and helps them to develop key workforce

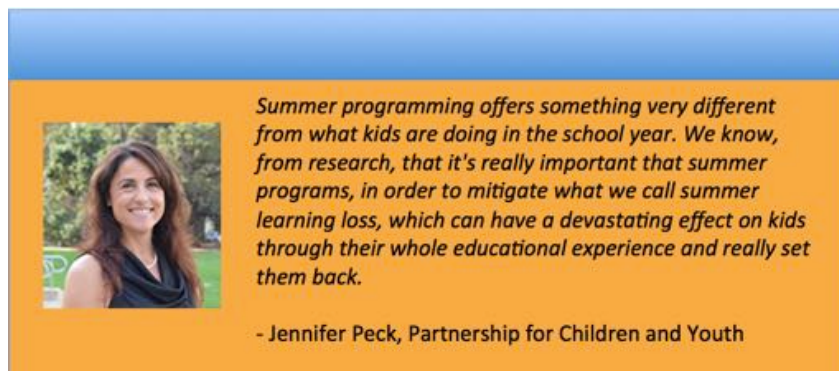


skills, such as teamwork and problem solving. Regardless of age, play aligns with positive youth development by fostering positive relationship and creating opportunities for youth to connect.

## **Summer Learning ([www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org))**

The research on summer learning suggests that children who attend summer programs fair better academically and socially when they return to school in the fall than their peers who do not attend summer programs. During the summer, some children, especially those from under resourced schools and communities are at risk for something called ‘summer slide’. This is when a student loses some of their academic gains over the summer and may return to school in September behind their grade level. On average students from middle-income families experience slight gains in reading performance during summer vacation. Students from low-income families experience about a two-month loss in reading achievement.

According to *Making Summer Count* (Wallace Foundation), “educators and policymakers are increasingly promoting summer learning as a key strategy to improving the achievement of low-performing students.” Utilizing partnership can help with design and implementation of high quality summer programming. Partners can include, school districts, summer learning providers, and other community based organizations or youth-serving programs. This allows for a variety of programming to be offered and for creative ways to finance programming from various types of sources (public, private or state or local funds).




*Summer programming offers something very different from what kids are doing in the school year. We know, from research, that it's really important that summer programs, in order to mitigate what we call summer learning loss, which can have a devastating effect on kids through their whole educational experience and really set them back.*

- Jennifer Peck, Partnership for Children and Youth

## **Incorporating New Trends: A Few Tips**

Every few years (and sometimes more often than that) new trends emerge in the field of afterschool. Many of these trends offer a re-articulation of and are well aligned with youth development principles. They are also often accompanied by funding opportunities, which makes them very enticing to try to adopt each one. Some of these trends stick around for a while until something newer, younger and sexier gets introduced. Some trends seem to come around in cycles every few years.



Depending on the group you serve, some trends may be more relevant to you, but how do you know for sure if it's worth it to make small or whole-scale changes? Here are a few tips for deciding if a trend is for you:

- **Does this trend** (or the money, resources or opportunities that come with it) **support your program mission or goals?** If not, then ask yourself why are you doing it? Is there another goal that it supports? Does it create an opportunity for you to shift or try something you've been wanting to try? And, ask yourself, what will it take to sustain the trend going forward after the initial grant is over?
- **Does this trend align with positive youth development principles?** In other words, does it help to foster relationships? Does it support or align with clear, fair and high expectations? Will it allow you to develop opportunities where participants are connecting, navigating or being productive?
- **Does this trend support the Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) learning principles for high quality programming:** 1. Learning that is active, 2. Learning that is collaborative, 3. Learning that is meaningful, 4. Learning that supports mastery and, 5. Learning that expands horizons.
- **Do you have the right staff to tackle this topic/trend?** Before switching over to STEM programming, assess your staff's ability to lead (and interest in) STEM activities? Do you have the appropriate space and resources to implement STEM programming? Will you be able to sustain the technology or will it quickly become outdated?
- **Can you allocate time for staff to meet and plan how to implement needed changes?** In order to successfully design and implement new program strategies, staff need to meet over time to ensure that they fully understand what they are trying to do, how they will do it, and how they will know if they are successful.
- **What kind of partners might you need to take on this trend?** Do you have the time and capacity to identify, foster and nurture those relationships?

It's easy to feel like you must integrate every trend into your program and worry that you might miss an opportunity! But the clearer you are about what you do, for whom you do it, and the capacity of your staff and partners to do that work well, the easier it will be to say "yes" to the right opportunities and stay focused on your work.



## **PROMOTING A SENSE OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY**

Ensuring that young people feel both physically and emotionally safe.





## What is Safety?

As caretakers, we generally think of safety in terms of the precautions we must take to ensure the physical safety of the young people under our care. This includes minimizing dangers within the surrounding environment, providing adequate adult supervision, and being well prepared to address emergencies, such as fires, earthquakes, and medical crises. There are established local standards addressing these safety issues and excellent resources to guide program leaders in ensuring that program facilities are safe and that adults working with young people can ensure the physical safety of participants in case of emergencies.

However, promoting a sense of safety in a program serving young people goes beyond creating a physically safe environment. A program can provide a safe physical environment and still be experienced by young participants as an unsafe place. For young people to experience a program as safe, they must feel personally safe—both physically and emotionally. The experience of **physical safety** means that young people feel safe from physical harm, confident that the surrounding adults will protect them from harm and assist them if they are feeling threatened—whether by their peers or by other adults. Further, young people know that there are rules that govern behavior and that these rules will be consistently and fairly enforced. The experience of **emotional safety** means that young people feel secure that they will be valued and accepted by the group; that they can participate fully without fear of teasing, harassment, or ostracism; that racial and cultural differences between individuals are embraced. Individual differences, such as body type, or differences in ability or interests are also accepted and young people know that they will be treated with respect. In an environment that promotes emotional safety, young people feel safe to try and sometimes fail because positive risk-taking is supported and “mistakes are OK.”

Safety means that young people feel both physically and emotionally safe.

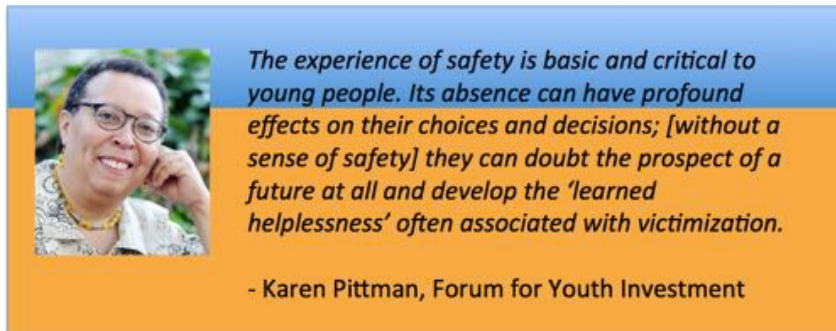
Young people must:

- Feel secure that adults will protect them from harm.
- Know that they are protected by a set of fair and consistently applied rules.
- Feel secure that they will be valued and accepted by the group.



## Why is Safety Important?

The research on child development and resiliency identifies the experience of physical and emotional safety as critical to supporting young people's healthy development. Young people must experience a sense of personal and emotional safety if they are to learn important life skills and competencies they will need in adulthood.



Programs that hold increasing or enhancing young people's learning as an important outcome should be particularly interested in promoting a strong sense of safety. Recent research into brain function reveals that the experience of safety is an important component in a person's readiness to learn. When people feel unsafe, their brain activity actually changes. Higher-level brain functions such as learning, cognition, and language ability are reduced or shut down as attention is diverted to a "fight-or-flight" response. Thus, feeling unsafe can actively interfere with learning and the integration of new information.

Because so much of the learning in afterschool programs occurs in a social environment, a sense of safety is key. If we are expecting young people to take the positive risks needed to practice newly learned skills and take on leadership roles and responsibilities, we must provide them with a setting where they feel safe. Young people are more willing to take the risks necessary for learning and growth when they know that their "falls" will be cushioned by the acceptance of the group. A sense of safety is also a prerequisite for building the kinds of positive relationships with adults and peers that help young people learn (See Chapter 5, *Encouraging Relationship Building*).

Establishing your afterschool program as a safe place in the eyes of your participants brings numerous immediate benefits, both for program participants and for the adults managing the program. When programs are designed to promote a sense of safety, young people feel more secure and trusting of others.

Promoting a sense of safety and acceptance serves to reduce "acting out" behaviors and underlying anxiety. When staff members make it clear that everyone is included in the emotional safety net, young people feel safe sharing their whole selves with the group. As they interact authentically and respectfully with others, they learn acceptance of differences and gain the ability to work and play with people from backgrounds different from their own.

When all the young people in your program feel safe, they are more likely to tell adults what they are really thinking and feeling. As you gain a deeper understanding of their opinions and wants, you can better meet young people's needs. A feeling of safety among participants reduces conflicts among young people; and when conflicts do arise, they are resolved more readily. It also enables adults to reap the rewards of authentic relationships with young people.

## **Promoting a Sense of Safety in Your Afterschool Program**

### **Organizational Practices that Support Safety**

Promoting a sense of safety begins with sound policies and practices of the organization that employs the staff who work with young people directly. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers.

### **Staff Discussions and Planning**


Promoting a sense of safety within your program requires discussion and consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

### **Making Safety a Priority**

For young people to feel safe, they need to know that there is a set of clear rules that govern behavior, and that these rules will be applied consistently by adults who are committed to treating young people fairly. Make safety a priority by making sure everyone is familiar with everyday rules, procedures, and agreements about how staff should respond when young people break the rules. This includes all program staff, security, administration, janitorial staff, volunteers, and any other adults who might come in contact with young people in the program. Plan how you will respectfully develop and review the rules with your young program participants and how you will secure their agreement. (The best way is to invite them to help in creating the rules.)

It is critical that young people in your program know where to turn if someone —whether a peer, staff member, or someone outside the program—is making them feel unsafe. Staff members need to take seriously any reports of bullying, teasing, abuse, harassment or other unsafe behavior and let the young person who feels unsafe know what steps will be taken to ensure his or her safety. It is important to raise this issue in group discussions from time to time by asking, “What would you do if a bully tried to bother you on your way here?” and “Who could you talk to if one of the staff members did something that you thought was unfair?”

Also begin to plan ways to ensure that a wide variety of young people can experience success in your program. One way to do this is to make sure that your program includes a wide range of activities that draw on different skills, knowledge bases, and abilities. It is also important to pay respectful attention to the individual participants, learning what motivates them and better



understanding the context in which they have formed their beliefs.

While it is essential for program leaders to plan how best to promote safety, the policies, procedures and resources of the larger organization (whether a school, school district, or agency) must be in concert with the work of program staff members. There are certain structural features a program needs to have in place if it is going to consistently provide physical and emotional safety.

## **Helping Young People Resist Bias**

Creating emotional safety is about creating a climate that values diversity. The goal is for every child to feel comfortable with and accepted for who he or she is. Children are born loving, curious, and open to the world. They start to notice differences in gender, race, class, and family structure as early as age three, and they turn to the adults around them for clues about what those differences mean. In the absence of positive, affirming cues from their role models about difference, they learn what they can on the playground and from mass culture. Sadly, many of the messages they receive are full of subtle and not-so-subtle biases and stereotyping.

Bias is often subtle, and is communicated thoughtlessly if we are not careful. It is as much about what we don't say as what we do—tolerating loudness from boys but not from girls, making assumptions about a child's interests or skills based on his/her race, or posting images on the walls that leave out some young people. It is important for everyone at the school or agency to have a good understanding of bias and how it works if you are going to work to eliminate it in your program. A good first step is anti-bias training for all program staff.

Learning bias hurts young people, and they try to resist it—they want to remain open, loving, and kind. Help them by modeling acceptance and by addressing all types of slurs and stereotypes whenever they occur. Remember also to be mindful of the young person displaying the bias, striving to respect the context in which they developed their beliefs, while making it clear that behavior and words that hurt others are unacceptable. In an age-appropriate way, you can also help them learn how bias works and how to recognize it.

One of the most challenging, and frequently unacknowledged issues that many adults face is helping young people deal with societal homophobia and heterosexism. The toll intolerance takes can be devastating: it is estimated that gay and lesbian adolescents account for one-third of teens committing suicide. Homophobic environments are especially hurtful to young people who sense that they might be “different” in some way or who have gay or lesbian family members. You can help create a sense of safety for all the young people in your program by using inclusive language and by recognizing and refusing to tolerate homophobic stereotypes and slurs. As one experienced youth worker put it, “challenging heterosexism creates safety not only for young people of these identities and others who are questioning their sexuality, but also for heterosexual young people being pressured to be violent to “prove” their identities.





*Discussions with young people and observations revealed that participants felt unsafe because they were unfamiliar with the culture of the other young people in the program. Once staff recognized that this was at the heart of young people's feelings of insecurity, they could take the necessary steps to address it.*

—Stacey Daraio, Temescal Associates

## Knowing and Involving Your Community

Every community has its own particular issues, history, and cultural heritage. It is important to know what groups are represented in your program, so you can be familiar with the history, issues, and relationships between those groups. This is important for inclusion, so you can be sure that your young people see familiar images on the walls, that they have some role models that come from a similar background, and that cultural celebrations reflect the group.

Knowing your community is also important for reasons of physical safety. For example, is your program located in gang territory? Do young people have to cross territory of rival gangs to get to your site? Do young people in your area sometimes carry weapons to feel safe? Are there current events in local or national news that may have an impact on how students get along at your program? What is the local history of relationships between different groups represented in your program?

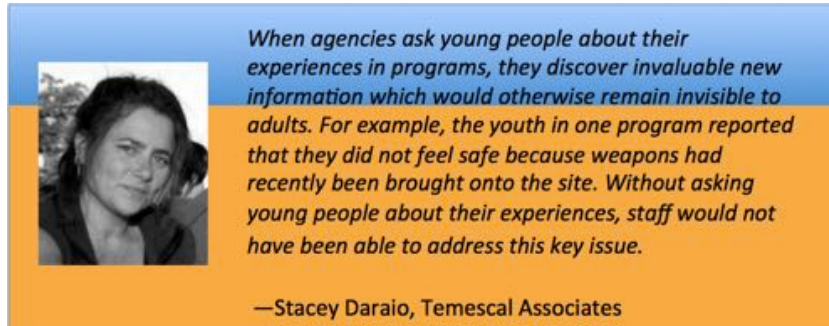
Parents and community members are wonderful resources for identifying bias, providing insight into the historical and cultural background of the community, and creating solutions to a variety of problems. Some programs have formed parent “safety committees” that look at various safety issues and work together to find solutions. Be sure that such working groups contain a balance of the different groups represented in your program.

## A Word About Confidentiality and Referrals

As you get to know young people in the program and they develop trust with you, many may share personal information, assuming it will be kept confidential. Older youth in particular may feel safer knowing that you can and will keep their conversations confidential. However, there are certain times when you will not be able to keep confidentiality—such as when a young person lets you know that someone is hurting them, or that they are going to hurt someone else.

It is important that adult staff understand the legal reporting responsibilities regarding child abuse and endangerment. If your program is addressing personal, sensitive issues with young people, it is important to have a clear policy on confidentiality that you can share openly with participants. It is particularly important with adolescents that they understand you will respect their privacy, and that there are limits in regards to ensuring their safety.

There will be times when a young participant’s issues are beyond the scope of your program practice. It is important that staff members receive guidance on how to handle these situations and have access to their program supervisors to discuss situations where referrals to other professionals may be in order.



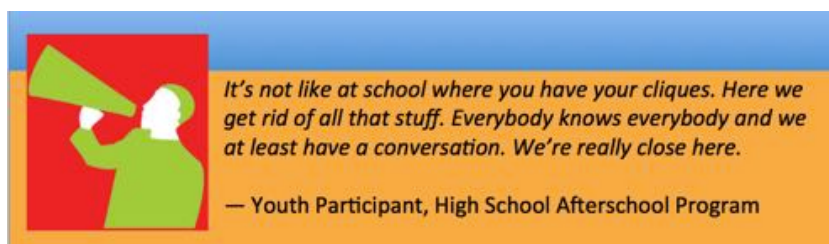
*When agencies ask young people about their experiences in programs, they discover invaluable new information which would otherwise remain invisible to adults. For example, the youth in one program reported that they did not feel safe because weapons had recently been brought onto the site. Without asking young people about their experiences, staff would not have been able to address this key issue.*

—Stacey Daraio, Temescal Associates

## **5** Things You Can Do NOW to Encourage Relationship Building

### **1. Develop group agreements or rules regarding safety and regular group meetings to ensure that everyone feels physically and emotionally safe.**

Conduct a meeting with the program participants early on to express the commitment that in your program “every person has the right to feel safe, included, and accepted.” Ask participants to define what these terms mean to them, and what agreements and rules they want to make to ensure the right of safety. Decide together what happens when the safety agreements are broken. Train young people in a process to resolve differences and decide at what point an adult should be asked to intervene.



*It’s not like at school where you have your cliques. Here we get rid of all that stuff. Everybody knows everybody and we at least have a conversation. We’re really close here.*

— Youth Participant, High School Afterschool Program

### **2. Institute a regular group or “community” check-in meeting.**

If issues of safety and relationship building are important, set aside a regular time for the group to reflect on their experience in the program and to suggest ways in which the peer group can work together even better. “Every year in the first week of school, I gather my students in our book corner, which is a cozy spot covered with a nice thick rug. We sit in a circle so that we can

see each other's faces, and I tell the children that every week we will meet as a group to discuss how well we are getting along, what is working and what's not working, and how to solve our problems" writes Mona Halaby, author of *Belonging: Creating Community in the Classroom*. Make room in the meeting for people to share appreciations for their peers who are contributing to making the program a positive, safe place. The *Tribes* book (Jeanne Gibbs) and Tribes trainings are also excellent resources for how to conduct community-building meetings with young people.

### **3. Include “no put-downs” in your group agreements.**

When developing group agreements with young people, a request for a “no put-down” agreement will usually surface early in the discussion. It is important to discuss with the young people how everyone will support its enforcement. This takes real commitment, as many young people have learned to use “put-downs” as a defense against being hurt themselves. Adult staff members will have to follow through with great consistency, offering reminders that ask members to hold to this agreement, especially in the beginning. Take every slur you hear seriously, even if it is in a teasing tone or participants claim it is okay. It is not okay because slurs hurt. It is helpful to hold group discussions or activities around “put-downs”, why they hurt, and what we can do instead. As young people come to trust that you will enforce this policy, you will see a reduction in the number of “put-downs”, and the sense of safety in the program will grow. Learning the benefits of interacting without this kind of hurtful behavior at an early age teaches young people a profound lesson in the value of tolerance and mutual respect.

### **4. Assess the cultural, gender, ethnic, and family structure background of your group.**


Without asking unnecessarily probing questions, do what you can to learn who is in your program. Do the staff members and volunteers reflect these backgrounds? Do images and books in the classroom? Program activities and celebrations? Are there differences in who comes to program, who participates in which activities, which parents feel welcome at events?

### **5. Expand the group's knowledge of particular groups and cultures.**

Start by educating yourself. Avoid tokenizing young people or others in your program or school by asking them to explain their culture. Instead, go to the library, look on the internet, attend local cultural events, and call or visit organizations promoting equity for the group you are researching. Learn what you can about the history, art, literature, music, food, celebrations, and struggles of a culture or group.

Then help the young people in your program study different cultures and celebrate the contributions of different groups. You might learn about women, people of color, and gay people who have contributed to your neighborhood. Celebrate various holidays as they are celebrated in different countries. Celebrate Black History Month, Women's History Month, Gay Pride Month,

or Cesar Chavez’s Birthday. Young people can present what they’ve learned, and adults may be willing to share food, decorations, or music. Don’t make assumptions about what any particular person might share. Be sure that these celebrations are part of an ongoing process of inclusion and education, and that some groups aren’t just segregated to certain “diversity days.”



*In my program, starting from day one we're put into groups. We all come from different social and financial backgrounds. We have to put all of that aside and just come together and collaborate toward a common goal.*

— Youth Participant, High School Afterschool Program

## How Do You Know?



### **Take Your Program's Temperature: Self-Assess**

You can self-assess your program by using observations and reflection surveys with the afterschool staff and youth participants.

#### **What You See**

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting positive youth development experiences when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive. After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote positive youth development experiences.

#### **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they have positive youth development experiences in the program. The most reliable way to assess for these experiences is to ask the young people directly about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements below?

# SAFETY: How Do You Know?

## Directions

Self assess your program using observations and surveys. You can identify indicators that will allow staff and youth to self assess the degree to which the program promotes a sense of physical and emotional safety. You can use indicators from program quality surveys. Below are a few suggestions of what you would see and what youth would say.

## What You See

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting a sense of safety among its participants when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive, because the environment is clearly a place where all are included and respected:

- Program group agreements and schedules are printed in multiple languages when appropriate, so all young people and parents can read them.
- You might also see signs created by young people that reflect the values of the program, like “RESPECT YOURSELF; RESPECT OTHERS” and “MISTAKES ARE OK.”
- If there are displays celebrating young people’s accomplishments, every young person is represented at one time or another.
- The images on the walls represent the participants’ racial and ethnic diversity, and present diverse role models (in terms of race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, family structure).
- Books on the shelves and other program materials are equally representative of the participants’ diversity.

After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote a sense of safety in the way everyone interacts.

- As people enter it is clear that they know what to do and where to go and they demonstrate a shared understanding of the behavioral expectations.
- Adult staff members greet youth as they arrive, and regularly use first names in the course of conversation.
- Young people of different backgrounds, ages, and genders, as well as adult staff members, interact comfortably with one another.
- Adults on staff represent the diversity of the young participants.
- Young people and adults speak respectfully to each other even when disagreeing.
- Young people and adults do not use put downs, call one another names, or intentionally embarrass one another.
- Young people are not teased if they struggle to complete a task, but instead receive peer support and encouragement.
- Each participant appears to have a positive role in the group.
- There is a consistent, predictable response from adult staff when ground rules are broken or ignored

- Adult staff respond to conflict calmly, asking those involved for their version of events and suggestions about how to make it right.
- Conflicts are managed with words, and young people help each other or ask for adult help in managing conflict as necessary.

## **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they feel safe in the program. The most reliable way to assess for physical and emotional safety is to ask the young people about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements?

- I feel safe when I am here.
- If someone wanted to hurt me or beat me up here someone would stop him/her.
- Rules about how to treat each other here are enforced.
- It's okay for me to make mistakes here.
- There is at least one thing that I do well in this program.
- I learn things here about people who are different from me.

## **Reflection**

What are some things you see in your program that indicate young people experience safety when they are there? What are some things you would like to see?

## Staff Development Tools and Activities



Promoting the youth development experiences detailed in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 requires consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

Below are some tools for promoting discussion with your staff or others at your agency or school. The following Personal Reflection Exercises are a good way to spark discussion. If there is a local youth serving agency that is known for their emphasis on and success in promoting positive youth development for young people, you may want to invite someone from that agency in as a guest speaker to offer inspiration and share their experience.





## **SAFETY: Personal Reflection**

### **Directions**

This exercise is intended to help people in your program identify the factors that make an environment feel emotionally safe. It is a good opening to focus the group on the importance of safety. Begin by telling participants that you are going to do a personal reflection. Ask them to close their eyes, and spend a few minutes thinking about their own experience. Then read the following:

Imagine a time when you were with a group of people and you felt that you didn't fit in.

- Where were you? Who were you with? Were you familiar with the habits and style of the group?
- Did you share interests and values?
- How did you feel in that situation?
- Where was your attention focused?
- How did you respond?

Now think of a time when you were with a group of people with whom you felt completely at home—where you could let your hair down and be truly yourself.

- Where were you?
- Who were you with?
- Were you familiar with the habits and style of the group?
- Did you share interests and values?

### **Group Discussion**

Before holding a group discussion you might want to give the participants an opportunity to write down some highlights of what they learned in the Personal Reflection Exercise. Then hold a discussion using the following questions to facilitate sharing and learning from each participant's experience.

- What were some differences in your relationships with the two groups?
- How did you think differently in the group you were comfortable with vs. the one in which you were uncomfortable?
- How did you act differently?
- In what ways did you feel safe or unsafe in the two groups?
- What are the qualities of an emotionally safe environment?
- How could a young person's feelings of being safe or unsafe affect their ability to learn?

# SAFETY: Inclusion

## Directions

Use this chart to examine inclusion and representation in your program. Record the percentages of every group represented at various levels of the program. You can add groups as needed to fit the demographics of your community. You can also use a modified version to look at representation in program materials and images on the walls. This is a tool for beginning a discussion and identifying areas for action—you can modify it and use it in the way that makes the most sense for your program.

Inclusion Chart							
PRESENT IN PROGRAM	INDIGENOUS PEOPLE	INDIGENOUS LEADERS	INDIGENOUS ART	INDIGENOUS SUBJECTS	INDIGENOUS CONTACT TIME	INDIGENOUS COLLABORATION	INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT
AFRICAN AMERICAN							
ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER							
CAUCASIAN							
HISPANIC AMERICAN							
MIDDLE EASTERN							
NON-BINARY							
WHITE							
WOMAN							
YOUTH							
ADULT							
INDIGENOUS LIFE PRACTICES/TRANSDISCIPLINARY							

Permission to use granted by Jeanne Gibbs, author of *Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together*. Center Source Systems, Sausalito, CA.

# **SAFETY: Conflict Intervention**

## **Directions**

This exercise will help staff members think ahead about how they might intervene in a conflict or interrupt bias. Divide into teams of five or six. Each team has five minutes to plan a role play in which they are young people from the program involved in a situation that requires staff intervention. The situations can be arguments, fights, teasing, slurs, or any similar situation that might occur among your program's young people.

Do each role play, one at a time, with the staff member played by someone from outside the small group. After each role play, hold a large group discussion to consider these questions:

- What did the staff member do that was helpful in the situation?
- How did the staff member feel before the intervention? During? After?
- How did the "young people" feel before the intervention? During? After?
- What else could the staff member have done to help each of the "young people" feel safer in the program?
- Was this situation realistic for your program?
- Is further staff training or discussion necessary?



## **SAFETY: Staff Training Topics**

### **Directions**

Create a staff development plan that includes training topics that would ensure that the young people in your program are physically and emotionally safe. Together with your staff and program leadership, identify training topics that are related to safety. Below are a few suggestions:

- Resisting bias
- Specific workshops on racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and other topics as needed
- Active listening
- Conflict mediation and de-escalation
- First Aid
- Earthquake preparedness
- Child abuse reporting requirements



## **SAFETY: Checklist for Action**

### **Directions**

Document what steps the program has made to ensure safety. Work with your program staff and leadership to determine what has been done to date to improve program safety. This checklist will help you stay focused and organized as you begin making safety a priority in your program. Have you:

- Assessed your program's organizational practices to see if they promote safety?
- Looked at how your school or agency allocates resources (time, space, and money) to promote a sense of safety for participants?
- Assessed the need for staff development and planned for training?
- Defined specifically how you expect safety-promoting activities to positively impact young people?
- Set aside ongoing staff time to thoroughly prepare for and implement inclusion strategies?
- Assessed the cultural and family backgrounds represented in your program?
- Educated staff about different groups represented in your program?
- Educated all program staff about bias?
- Educated volunteers about bias?
- Instituted a "no put-down" agreement?
- Taken time to have young people really explain what they are thinking when they break program agreements?
- Assessed program materials for inclusion?
- Involved parents and community members in planning to promote and ensure safety?
- Incorporated outcomes related to promoting safety into program evaluation?

## For Organizational Leaders



### Organizational Practices That Promote Youth Development

Successful youth development programs are born out of a culture, policies, resources and structures that are established by the program provider’s parent organization. As anyone who has struggled with too few resources or mismatched organizational priorities knows, the best staff in the world working with the deepest knowledge and understanding cannot create high quality experiences for young people without certain organizational supports in place.

**Organizational Practices That Support Youth Development & Learning**

- Low ratio of youth to staff/volunteers
- Safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces
- Flexibility in allocating available resources
- Continuity and consistency of care
- High, clear and fair standards
- Ongoing, results-based staff & organizational improvement process
- Youth involvement
- Community engagement

Many teachers and youth workers have noted that the kinds of organizational practices described on the left work best when they are applied consistently at all levels of the agency or school. For example, the sponsoring school or agency must commit to holding high, clear, and fair standards for the staff, just as they do for the young participants. In this way, staff experience what they need to succeed, and the functioning of the organization at a macro-level mirrors the functioning at the program level—everyone “walks the talk.”

Putting these organizational practices in place takes time, energy, and resources. In particular, program staff must have the time outside of their program duties to talk to each other, talk informally with young people, get to know the community, plan, evaluate, and learn. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers. The following are suggested organizational practices that are related to youth development practices.

# **Organizational Practices That Support Safety**

## **Low Youth to Staff/Volunteer Ratio**

A low youth to staff/volunteer ratio is necessary for both physical and emotional safety. Activities and spaces need to be adequately supervised and program leaders need to have an adult close so they can be available for situations that require one-to-one interactions. It is also important to have enough trained adults around to address issues of emotional safety when they arise and to form the kinds of trusting relationships that allow young people to feel truly safe.

## **Safe, Reliable, and Accessible Activities and Spaces**

Safe, reliable, and accessible activities and spaces are crucial for young people to have a sense of safety. Are program spaces clean? Does the layout of the space and furniture allow adult staff to keep children in view? Are there places within the programming space for adult staff and young people to have one-to-one discussions? Has your organization worked to ensure that young people are safe when getting both to and from the program?

## **Continuity and Consistency of Care**

Young people feel safest when they have ongoing, trusting relationships with the adults in their program and when there is a sense of routine. Continuity and consistency of care are crucial. Organizations must take steps to minimize staff turnover. Make sure there is a back-up plan when key staff members are absent. When staff members or volunteers leave the program, do all you can to make careful, smooth transitions, including giving young people a chance to say good-bye, when possible.

## **Ongoing, Results-Based Staff and Organizational Improvement Process**

Both physical and emotional safety are complex topics that require a great deal of attention and planning. An ongoing, results-based staff and organizational improvement process is one way to be sure that safety issues don't fall through the cracks. It is also important to have a process for improvement that takes young people's input into account. Does your organization have a process to assess the degree to which participants feel physically and emotionally safe in the program?

## **Community Engagement**

Your community has a great stake in the safety of its young people, and a great deal of expertise and energy to help build a safe environment. As discussed throughout this guide, strong community engagement is vital to creating a program that is inclusive of all young people and helps them feel safe.



## **Providing Opportunities For Safety At All Levels Of The Organization**

Safety is most effective and meaningful when it is modeled at all levels of the school or agency. This means that all staff members, parents, and volunteers have the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe in the program. Adults who don't feel safe will have a hard time helping young people feel safe. This means addressing everything from physical safety on the grounds to making sure there is a way for program staff members to freely share their thoughts and concerns about the program, agency, or school. Fortunately, much of the learning that goes into making a safe program for young people will also make it safer for everyone.

### **Reflection**

Are there other ways your organization could support staff members in promoting a sense of safety in your program?





## ENCOURAGING RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Fostering caring and supportive relationships in your program.





## What is Relationship Building?

Relationship building is the development of caring, supportive relationships between adults and young people, and among young people and their peers. We know relationship building is happening and young people feel supported when they report that they feel “known” and accepted by others in the program, when they experience the program as a place where they receive emotional and practical encouragement and support, and when they can turn to adults for personal guidance and assistance. What does relationship building look like in an effective afterschool program? Staff members spend time with young people, getting to know them and developing trust. Adults respect young people and treat them with courtesy and care. Young people learn to treat each other with respect as well, and develop a group identity that includes all members. Staff members know that building positive, trusting relationships with young people is not a separate part of the work, but rather an integral part of every activity and interaction.

### Relationship building means that young people:


- Experience emotional and practical support from adults and peers.
- Experience guidance from adults.
- Build knowledge of adults and peers.



## Why is Relationship Building Important?

There is overwhelming evidence that the presence of caring, supportive relationships between young people and adults is one of the most critical factors in the healthy development of young people. In research on childhood resiliency, the presence of these relationships is the leading indicator that young people will be healthy and productive adults, regardless of their economic circumstances and other risk factors. By providing opportunities for relationship building, we ensure that our afterschool programs are contributing to the important developmental needs of the young people we serve. It is important to note that relationship building is also a critical factor in whether or not young people experience a sense of physical and emotional safety in their afterschool program, as discussed in Chapter 4, *Promoting A Sense of Safety*.

Can afterschool programs really make a difference? When adults are asked to reflect on the experiences that were most influential in their childhood and adolescence, they almost always cite an important relationship with a caring adult who took the time to know them, and offered



guidance and encouragement. This person was often an individual outside of the home and classroom: a coach or youth worker who took a special interest, a teacher who took time afterschool. (See the “Cookie Lady” exercise in this chapter, *Staff Development Tools and Activities*).

The first challenge in running successful afterschool programs is attracting and retaining participants. This is especially challenging with adolescents who can “vote with their feet” if they do not have a positive experience in the program. When young people feel respected and have caring relationships with adults and peers in an afterschool program, they feel more included and invested in the program. As they develop a sense of group membership, they are more likely to attend regularly and participate more fully in the program.

When young people are engaged in deciding how they want to be treated, they have the chance to reflect on their own behavior and how it impacts others. They become more aware of the needs and feelings of others, and more accepting of difference. Working together to build relationships in a structured environment also gives young people the chance to learn and practice their communication skills.

Most importantly, creating opportunities for relationship building ensures that young people will have somewhere to turn when they need help or are faced with difficult decisions. Relationship building is cited as a critical factor in the effectiveness of prevention programs designed to reduce high-risk behaviors. Supportive relationships with both adults and peers are sources of emotional support, guidance and instrumental help that can contribute to better decision-making, lower levels of stress, higher academic achievement, healthier relationships and lower levels of drug and alcohol use.

Many afterschool programs offer extended learning opportunities for young people with the hope of improving academic skills, which can lead to improved school performance. The experience of emotional safety and supportive relationships are major factors in creating successful learning environments. Recent research on learning reveals that most learning happens in a social context. These experiences serve as turnkeys in young peoples’ willingness to take positive risks, such as accepting help and feedback from others and openly risking failure in order to learn new skills.

As the experience of mutual respect and trust increases between program leaders and young participants, discipline problems diminish. It becomes easier to get young people to voice their ideas and opinions, and easier to facilitate group activities. Program assessment becomes more meaningful as young people are empowered to respond honestly. In addition, when staff members have the time and organizational support necessary to develop relationships with young people, their job satisfaction increases.

# Encouraging Relationship Building in Your Afterschool Program

## Organizational Practices that Encourage Relationship Building

Encouraging relationship building begins with sound policies and practices of the organization that employs the staff who work with young people directly. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers.

### Staff Discussions and Planning

Encouraging relationship building within your program requires discussion and consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

### Making Relationship Building a Priority

Many individual educators and youth workers know intuitively that building strong, positive relationships is one of the most important things they do. But, is there value placed on this at the program and organizational level? Are program leaders and staff aware of its importance in supporting young people's learning and greater development? Is relationship building an explicit program objective? Is it reflected in the design, implementation or evaluation of the afterschool program?

Allocate time in a program staff meeting to consider these questions. If staff members agree that relationship building is important, consider how the program's structure and practices currently support it. For example, does the daily schedule of activities allow for opportunities for relationships to develop? Is there time for participants and adults to get to know one another?

Is there time for small group discussions and for young people to have one-to-one contact with adults? How can you assess your success in achieving this important objective and how are staff evaluated on their contributions to encouraging relationship building?

### Establishing Group Agreements

As noted in Chapter 4, *Promoting a Sense of Safety*, creating group agreements or guidelines for how people in the program will treat one another is an important first step in encouraging relationship building in an afterschool program. Brainstorm ground rules as a group, and be sure everyone in the group feels that the rules are fair. Try to be specific, and discuss what various rules mean. For example, "respect each other" is often offered as a group agreement but what does "respect" mean to the young people in your program? Does it mean no "put-downs"? Something else?

Ask young people to consider whose job it is to remind group members when ground rules are broken, and how to do this in a genuine and respectful way. If appropriate, young people can suggest possible consequences. This process gets them thinking about how they want to treat each other, lets them know ahead of time what the expectations are, and gives them ownership over program guidelines.

Once group agreements are established, post them prominently and refer to them often. Having young people themselves make a ground rules poster will get them more involved. It is crucial that all adults in the program enforce group agreements consistently.

## Getting to Know Each Other as Individuals

If the only way for young people to get individual attention is for them to act out, they will do it! Try to give them opportunities to interact with adults one-on-one in positive ways. Find out what they like to do, who the important people in their lives are, and what they dream for the future. Group members also need time to get to know one another—allow some unstructured time for social interaction.



*After noticing that many of the youth hung out on the steps of the school after the end of the program day, one afterschool program decided to pay their staff to hang out with the youth after the end of the program to enable the staff to get to know the youth and form closer relationships.*

— Sam Piha, Temescal Associates

## Being Genuine

Young people respond very positively to honesty and sincerity. Younger children are excited when they have a glimpse of the real person behind the adult leader role. Young people want to get to know you, and love hearing about your childhood experiences once in a while. Let them know a little bit about your likes and dislikes, funny habits, or hopes for the future. For adolescents, when adults are honest and sincere, it communicates that adults value and respect them. Allow time for real relationships to develop—don't try for instant connections.

## Offering Praise

Everyone appreciates praise. Try to say five words of praise for every word of correction. Don't just save your praise for big accomplishments, but notice all steps along the way, saying things like "Keesha, you're working so hard on that painting!" and "Look, the Red Team got all their equipment on so quickly. Now we're ready to play!" When you praise, make sure your words are true and you are praising a real accomplishment (although it may be a small one). For young children, praise is also an alternative way to refocus negative behavior without scolding and singling out individuals: instead of "Sit *down* Robert!" try "Almost everyone is sitting quietly in the circle. Soon we can begin."

## Understanding the Pace of Group Relationship Building

Trusting relationships between individuals and within groups takes time to develop. This can be supported through the use of activities designed to strengthen relationship building. When deciding on group building activities, make sure that personal revelations and group activities are low risk. Especially with adolescents, it is important to let trust develop before you ask them to do anything that may make them feel “silly” or vulnerable. *Tribes TLC*® has described a process of group evolution that takes place in three stages: Inclusion, Influence, and Community.

## Including Rituals for Recognition and Reflection

Young people respond positively to knowing there will be an early opportunity to “voice” their arrival and presence, especially as they make the transition from one peer setting to another, from the school day to an afterschool setting. This means that individuals do not have to find negative ways to be acknowledged.

Beginning the program with small group circles for “check-in” is a great way to give young people opportunities for voice, recognition and reflection. Just by taking a few minutes to let young people talk about their day or how they are feeling, you can create a calm transition into the day, get a feel for the group, and give each person a chance to feel important and included. Many groups also like to have a check-out at the end of the day to say good-bye and take an opportunity to reflect on how the group worked together that day. Once these rituals are established, carrying them out can be turned over to the young people. (For more information about *Tribes TLC*®, visit [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com)).

## Knowing Your Limits

It is respectful to set appropriate boundaries with young people to let them know what you can and can't do as a staff member of your school or agency. It is also important to recognize when a young person comes to you with a problem that requires professional help. Staff members need to be prepared with a list of resources so they will know what to do when a young person is facing a crisis. This way, when young people reach out for help, they will be met with support and encouragement, rather than being pushed away by an adult who is frightened or unsure.

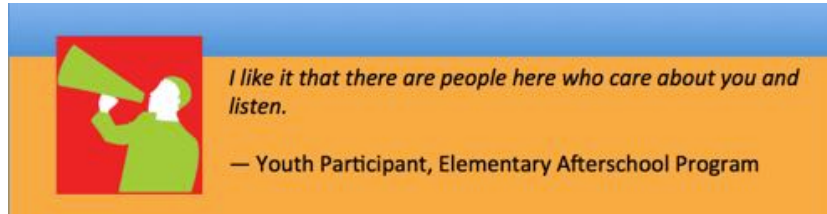
# 5

## Things You Can Do NOW to Encourage Relationship Building

### 1. Make sure that each young person has one adult who knows him or her well.

An ongoing part of encouraging relationship building is making sure that everyone is connected in some way. Young people need to have a positive relationship with an adult if they are to get the most out of the program. At a staff meeting, go over your attendance list. Is there someone on

staff or a volunteer who is connected with each young person? If there are some program participants who have “slipped through the cracks,” decide who will make a special effort to get to know these young people. It’s a good goal to be sure that each young person has one-to-one time each week with an adult.



## 2. Institute a check-in circle.

A check-in circle doesn’t need to take very long and can greatly benefit both young people and program staff. In small groups (20 or fewer), begin the day by sitting quietly in a circle and letting each person speak briefly. Sometimes it helps to have a special item to pass around the group like a talking stick that identifies the one who has the “rapt attention” of the group. When you first start instituting the check-in circle, it helps to plan a safe and interesting check-in question, such as, “What is your favorite thing to do at recess?” or “If you could go anywhere in the world for one day, where would you go?” Later on, after some practice, you might have each person share one thing about their day or say how the group is working together.

## 3. Develop group agreements with young people.

Have the group brainstorm a list of group agreements for how you will treat each other in the program. Ask them to explain why each agreement might be important. Narrow the list to no more than seven items, so that the agreements can be easily remembered. (One way to do this is to give each person three stickers. Ask them to vote by placing their stickers next to the agreements they think are most important.) Ask the group if they all feel they can agree to try to live by these group agreements. Promise that you will help them remember and let them know that they can remind each other as well.

## 4. Hold a conflict resolution training for staff and young people.

When young people have the skills to resolve conflict in healthy and respectful ways, they are kinder and happier, and require less adult intervention. They also feel safer in the afterschool program knowing that they can solve problems together and that they can get help if they need it. You can also train “conflict managers” to help peers or younger children resolve conflict.



## **5. Participate in a Tribes TLC® training or another training in group process and collaborative learning.**

Building high quality, positive relationships in your program takes careful planning and attention. Supporting relationships requires a number of skills. Professional trainers who have studied this process, such as those working at *Tribes TLC®*, can help staff members hone these skills. If not this particular training, be sure your program's ongoing commitment to organizational improvement includes some type of training in group process.

## How Do You Know?



### **Take Your Program's Temperature: Self-Assess**

You can self-assess your program by using observations and reflection surveys with the afterschool staff and youth participants.

#### **What You See**

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting positive youth development experiences when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive. After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote positive youth development experiences.

#### **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they have positive youth development experiences in the program. The most reliable way to assess for these experiences is to ask the young people directly about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements below?

# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: How Do You Know?

## Directions

Self assess your program using observations and surveys. You can identify indicators that will allow staff and youth to self assess the degree to which the program promotes positive relationship building. You can use indicators from program quality surveys. Below are a few suggestions of what you would see and what youth would say.

## What You See

You can tell that a program encourages relationship building when you walk into the program room and see:

- Ground rules or guideline posters citing how young people want to be treated and will treat others are prominently displayed. These displays are clearly hand made by the program participants and sometimes in different languages.
- Pictures on the walls celebrating program participants, their cultures, and the group's accomplishments within the program.
- A schedule of the week's activities including structured time for one-to-one contact between adults and young people, for group discussions, and open time for young people to socialize with one another and have informal contact with adult staff.

After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that your program encourages relationship building by the way they engage with each other:

- Young people and adults are treating others respectfully.
- Adults squat down when interacting with small children, to speak to them at their eye level.
- The program creates ongoing opportunities for youth to get to know one another, not just during the first few weeks of the session.
- Young people remind each other of the ground rules when needed.
- Conflicts are resolved with words, not raised voices or fists. If needed, adults are asked to assist with the situation.
- Young people are able to work together in groups and across differences of age, gender, ethnic background, ability, and social status.
- There is a time in the day to reflect on the group's accomplishments and interactions.
- Adults are available before and after the program, for informal conversation with participants.

## What Young People Say

The most reliable way to judge if your program is encouraging relationship building is to ask the young people about their own experiences of the program. If asked, would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements?

- People here say something nice to me when I do something good.
- There are rules here for how people are supposed to treat each other.
- Rules about how to treat each other are enforced by adults and other kids.
- I get chances here to learn about young people who are different from me.
- I feel respected by staff here.
- I feel respected by other kids here.
- People here pay attention to what is going on in my life.
- There is someone here I could talk to if I was upset or mad about something.
- Someone here would say something to me if something in my life wasn't going right.
- There is someone here who I could go to for help in a crisis, or if I needed to talk about personal problems.

## Reflection

What are some things you see in your program that encourage relationship building? What things would you like to see?

## Staff Development Tools and Activities



Promoting the youth development experiences detailed in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 requires consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

Below are some tools for promoting discussion with your staff or others at your agency or school. The following Personal Reflection Exercises are a good way to spark discussion. If there is a local youth serving agency that is known for their emphasis on and success in promoting positive youth development for young people, you may want to invite someone from that agency in as a guest speaker to offer inspiration and share their experience.



## **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: Personal Reflection – *My Story***

### **Materials Needed**

- Personal Reflection Exercise I: My Story, 1 copy per person.

### **Directions**

This exercise is intended to help people present themselves and be heard in the group—the first stage of building relationships. It is a good opening to focus the group on the importance of relationship building. Give each participant a copy of the Personal Reflection Exercise I: My Story. Ask the participants to take ten minutes to complete the handout, letting them know in advance that they will have an opportunity to share with a small group. Then break the group into smaller groups of four or five and ask the members of each group to share what they wrote with each other.

HANDOUT

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: *My Story*

**Purpose:** To guide you through thinking about how you work with young people.

1. What brought you to working with young people?

2. What are your guiding principles in working with young people?

3. How do you bring those principles alive with young people in your program?

4. What keeps you working with young people?



## **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: Personal Reflection - Important Events and People**

### **Materials Needed**

- Flip chart
- Markers

### **Directions**

This exercise has the same purpose as the one above, and is useful in groups that include people who don't work with young people on a regular basis. Post sheets from a flip chart on the walls around the room. Label each sheet with an age, one sheet for every age represented in your program (5 years old, 6 years old, and so on). Pass out markers, and ask people to move around the room, writing on the charts important events and people in their lives at the different ages. It is not necessary for every person to write on every chart. After a while, ask people to stop writing and allow a few minutes for them to read what others have written.

### **Group Discussion**

Gather the group together and hold a discussion based on the following questions:

- Did this exercise help you remember anything you had forgotten about being young?
- What was the relationship between important people and important events in your childhood?
- What kinds of people were important to you as you grew up? Did this change as you got older?



# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: Cookie Lady

## Materials Needed

- Flip chart
- Markers

## Directions

This exercise is useful for identifying the factors that make a relationship meaningful to a young person. Read the following to the group:

*Think of a young person you work with in your afterschool program. How old is that person? Now think of yourself when you were that age. Was there an adult who had a positive influence on you? It could be anyone—a teacher, relative, coach, the lady who gave you cookies at the corner store.*

Ask the group to call out the different roles of people they thought of (sister, friend's parent, cookie lady). List these on a flip chart or blackboard and label them "Relationships." Now ask the group to call out what these people did that was supportive, and list these items (listened to me, trusted me with responsibility, pushed me to try harder). Label your second list "Supports."

## Group Discussion

Begin a discussion with the following question: What is so important about the supports you listed? It is interesting to note that this exercise has been done with hundreds of people and it is rare for anyone to say that the important thing about the relationship was the specific skill learned. In other words, it is unusual for someone to say "taught me math" or "taught me to play basketball" when asked how the relationship was supportive to them. You might bring this up with the group and ask them why they think this is true.



## **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:**

### **Staff Training Topics**

#### **Directions**

Create a staff development plan that includes training topics that would ensure that the young people in your program are building positive relationships with staff and peers. Together with your staff and program leaders, identify training topics that are related to relationship building. Below are a few suggestions:

- Agency or program policies, ground rules, and enforcement
- Active listening
- Positive discipline
- Conflict mediation for youth
- Crisis intervention



# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: Checklist for Action

## Directions

Document what steps the program has made to promote positive relationships. Now you are ready to start increasing Relationship Building in your program! This checklist is meant to help you stay organized and focused. Using it will help you ensure the success of your program. Have you:

- Set aside ongoing staff time to thoroughly plan for relationship building, and to spend one-on-one time with young people?
- Assessed your program's organizational practices to see if they support relationship building?
- Looked at how your agency or school allocates resources (time, space, and money) to support relationship building?
- Assessed the need for staff development and planned training?
- Ensured that each young person has at least one adult who knows him/her well?
- Created group agreements with the group?
- Prepared to follow-through consistently in enforcing group agreements?
- Planned ways to manage conflict among young people?
- Scheduled time for recognition and reflection?
- Selected a few promising areas to begin increasing Relationship Building?
- Defined specifically how you expect these activities to positively impact young people?
- Identified skills young people will need to build on their relationships and planned to train young people in these skills?
- Created a plan to cover staff absences?
- Prepared staff to help young people in personal crisis situations?
- Created a plan to keep staff and volunteer turnover low?
- Incorporated measures of how well your program encourages relationship building into program assessment/evaluation?

## For Organizational Leaders



### Organizational Practices That Promote Youth Development

Successful youth development programs are born out of a culture, policies, resources and structures that are established by the program provider’s parent organization. As anyone who has struggled with too few resources or mismatched organizational priorities knows, the best staff in the world working with the deepest knowledge and understanding cannot create high quality experiences for young people without certain organizational supports in place.

**Organizational Practices That Support Youth Development & Learning**

- Low ratio of youth to staff/volunteers
- Safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces
- Flexibility in allocating available resources
- Continuity and consistency of care
- High, clear and fair standards
- Ongoing, results-based staff & organizational improvement process
- Youth involvement
- Community engagement

Many teachers and youth workers have noted that the kinds of organizational practices described on the left work best when they are applied consistently at all levels of the agency or school. For example, the sponsoring school or agency must commit to holding high, clear, and fair standards for the staff, just as they do for the young participants. In this way, staff experience what they need to succeed, and the functioning of the organization at a macro-level mirrors the functioning at the program level—everyone “walks the talk.”

Putting these organizational practices in place takes time, energy, and resources. In particular, program staff must have the time outside of their program duties to talk to each other, talk informally with young people, get to know the community, plan, evaluate, and learn. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers. The following are suggested organizational practices that are related to youth development practices.

# **Organizational Practices That Encourage Relationship Building**

## **Low Youth to Staff/Volunteer Ratio**

It is crucial to have enough adults in the room to encourage relationship building. How many is enough depends on your young people and your program, but there is a limit to how many relationships one staff member can sustain while facilitating program activities and ensuring respectful behavior among program participants. Plan ahead for situations where a young person needs immediate one-on-one attention.

## **Safe, Reliable, and Accessible Activities and Spaces**

Afterschool programs are often relegated to unused and uncared-for spaces that are poorly outfitted and inappropriate for working with young people. Opportunities for relationship building can be greatly affected by the nature of a program's physical space. What is the nature of your space? Is it dependable and reliable each day? Does it communicate respect for program participants and program staff? Is there a comfortable place for program participants to participate in meetings? Is it quiet enough, free enough from interruptions and distractions, for young people to express themselves, feel heard and listened to? Does the space allow for small groups of young people to work on projects, and for adults and young people to talk quietly one-to-one if needed?

## **Continuity and Consistency of Care**


Young people, especially adolescents, need to trust that staff members will be there for them before they can allow relationships to develop. On a day-to-day basis it is important to have a backup plan and sufficient staff to keep the program open in case of illness or other staff absence. The turnover among adult staff can be deeply felt by young people who invest themselves in relationships with adult program leaders. Organizational leaders and program staff should consider how to implement practices and policies that support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and volunteers.

## **High, Clear, and Fair Standards**

Young people need to know what is expected in terms of their behavior toward themselves and others. When adults hold high expectations in terms of young people's behavior and abilities, the young people feel respected and valued. Standards for young people's behavior should be clearly and regularly communicated along with clear, consistent consequences for violations.

Standards are more likely to be perceived as fair if young people have input in creating them, if they are evenly applied to all young people and staff, and if there are grievance procedures for young people who feel unfairly treated.

Clear and fair also means that the adults in and around the programs know and support the program standards and expectations. In an afterschool program, adults in and around the



program include classroom teachers, administrators, and janitors who do not participate in the program directly, but who have contact with program participants in the building. Supporting program expectations means holding young people accountable for their behavior and doing it in a way that models the value of respecting others. It is also important to note that expectations around how adults treat young people are sometimes different in an afterschool program than during the school day.

## **Ongoing, Results-based Staff and Organizational Improvement Process**

Relationship building requires detailed attention to individual and interpersonal dynamics. Staff members need to have time to communicate with each other and with supervisors about what is going on with various young people. Staff members also need training in a range of skills to effectively build relationships. These skills include communication, positive discipline, facilitation, conflict resolution, and active listening. It is also important to have a process for organizational improvement that takes young people's input into account.

## **Providing Opportunities for Relationship Building at all Levels of the Organization**

Efforts to encourage relationship building are most effective and meaningful when they are modeled at all levels of the agency or school. This means that all staff members, parents, and volunteers have opportunities to get to know each other, to receive emotional and practical support, and to receive guidance from more experienced people when necessary. Working with young people in an afterschool program, like parenting, is emotionally draining, and program leaders and volunteers need support from their peers. Staff members who feel isolated in a program or agency will quickly burn out and leave. Many organizations provide opportunities for staff to build supportive relationships through staff and organization-wide social events, regular staff meetings, and group and individual check-ins. Other ways to support staff in building relationships include holding regular supportive supervision meetings, structuring work so that it is done in teams, and sending staff members to outside trainings where they can connect with their professional colleagues.

## **Reflection**

Are there other ways your organization could support staff members in encouraging relationship building?



## **FOSTERING MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

Promoting leadership, decision-making and a sense of belonging.







## What is Meaningful Youth Participation?

When program leaders speak of youth participation, they are usually referring to whether young people show up for the program and the degree to which they become engaged in program activities. However, research tells us that if we hope to make a difference in young people's development, simple participation is not enough—we need to provide opportunities for meaningful youth participation. If young people are engaged in meaningful participation, they are empowered to be self-directed, make responsible choices about how to use their time, and participate as group members in making decisions that influence the larger program.

They are also given the opportunity to learn group leadership skills and to assume leadership roles in planning activities and projects. They have opportunities to “give back” by contributing to the program, to other young people, or to their larger community.

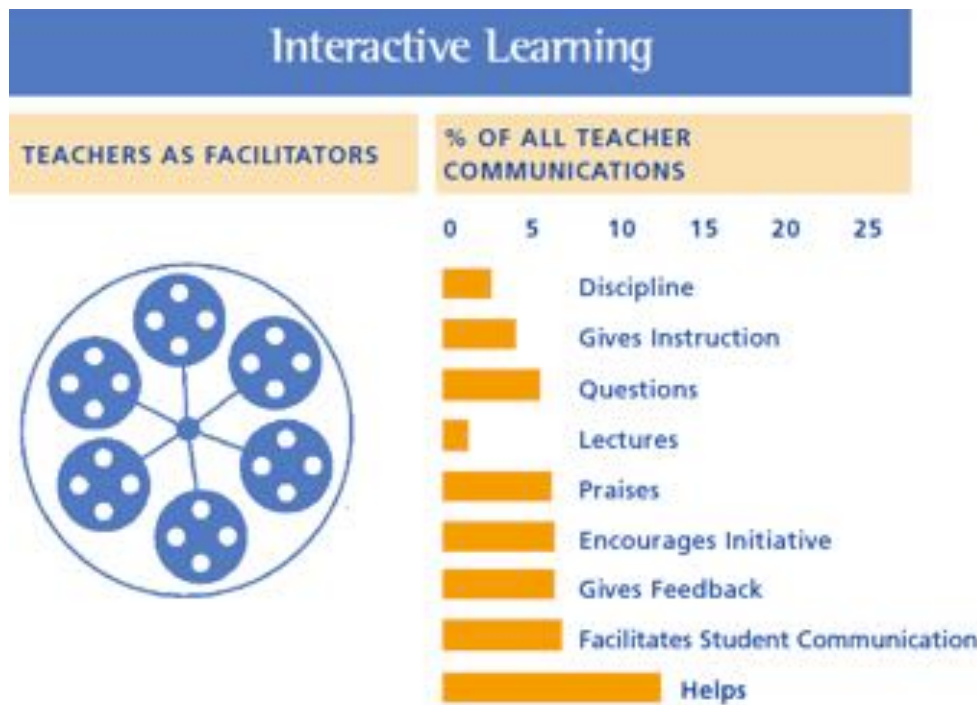
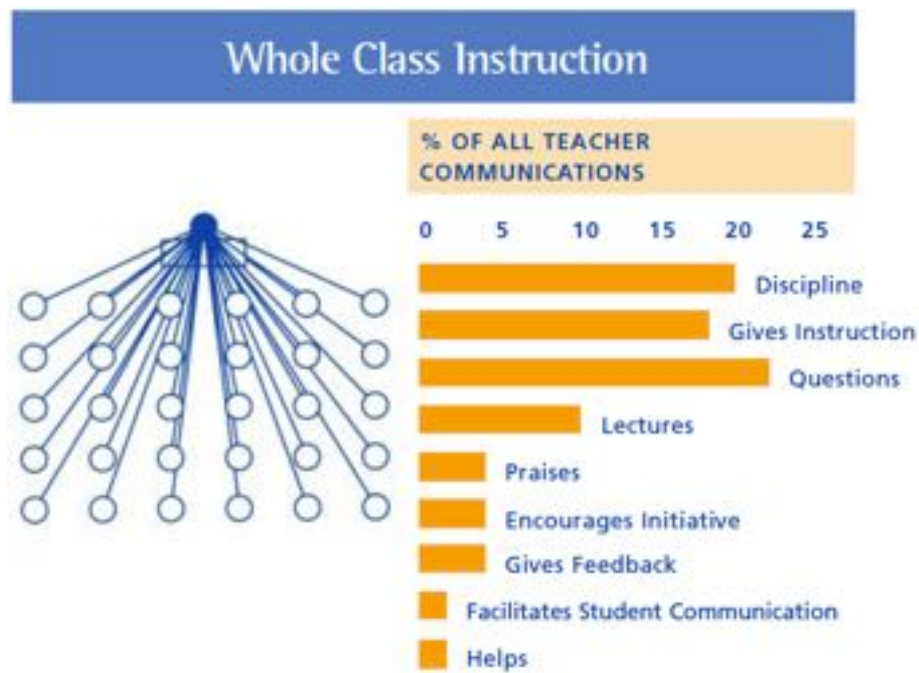
We know that young people experience their participation as meaningful when they report feeling a sense of belonging and ownership in the program. When they are participating in meaningful ways, they feel that their contributions are valued, and, by participating, they “make a difference.” In a program that fosters meaningful youth participation, adults serve as mentors and facilitators to build the skills of the young people.

While this takes different forms depending on the age of the young people involved, the goal of fostering meaningful participation is appropriate for all ages, and especially important if we hope to engage and support adolescents.

### Meaningful Youth Participation means that young people:

- Have opportunities to participate in decision making.
- Have opportunities to develop and practice leadership.
- Experience a sense of belonging.

A study of classroom teachers revealed that when teachers rely on traditional whole-class instruction methods, the teachers are talking more than two-thirds of the time. Of this time, more than 70% is spent disciplining, lecturing, giving instructions, and asking questions. When the classroom shifts to a more participatory student-centered structure, “teacher talk” time is reduced to 25%, and 75% of this time is spent praising, encouraging initiatives, giving feedback, facilitating student communication, and helping students.



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## **Why is Meaningful Youth Participation Important?**

Resiliency research affirms that young people’s meaningful participation serves as a core protective factor for young people. In other words, regardless of their individual circumstances, meaningful participation helps young people overcome risks and obstacles in their lives, increasing their resiliency. Offering young people opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility is part of creating an environment that conveys high expectations. Drawing on their substantial base of research, the Search Institute emphasizes the importance of viewing young people as resources. We can do this by giving them useful roles, involving them in leadership, program planning and other meaningful activities related to program governance.

Increasing meaningful participation in a program takes careful planning and can present challenges for program leaders. However, there are many benefits for the program as well as for individual young people.

When young people participate in planning and implementing their afterschool program, the program becomes more aligned with their interests. Attendance and interest increase, especially among older youth, and the new ideas brought by the young people can result in new and exciting activities. As young people become more involved in articulating what is important to them, program goals and objectives can become more youth-centered. As a result, the process of program assessment and evaluation becomes more meaningful for everyone involved.

As young people take more responsibility for their activities, staff members can reduce the time spent on discipline. Program staff feel rewarded as their role changes from supervisor to facilitator. Young people can begin to take on leadership and teaching roles and work in partnership with adults to maximize the opportunities for learning and growth for all participants. When we give young people the tools to be self-directed and invite them to take part in shaping their programs and helping others, we communicate the message to young people that “what you think and what you do matters.”

## **Fostering Meaningful Youth Participation in Your Afterschool Program**

### **Organizational Practices that Support Meaningful Youth Participation**

Supporting meaningful youth participation begins with sound policies and practices of the organization that employs the staff who work with young people directly. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers.

## Staff Discussions and Planning

Promoting a sense of safety within your program requires discussion and consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

## Readiness for Meaningful Youth Participation

Meaningful participation is dependent on a solid level of trust between adults and young people. Participants must feel secure that differences in opinions and varying levels of skill will be accepted, and that their peer leaders will use their leader status with sensitivity. (See the preceding chapters on *Promoting Safety* and *Encouraging Relationship Building*.) Newly formed groups need to first establish themselves and pace the level of participation with the group's development. (For more information about *Tribes TLC*®, visit [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com)).

The level of participation also depends on the experience and skills of the adult program leaders and young people involved. Important skills for adult leaders include active listening, group facilitation, techniques for building consensus, project planning and conflict resolution. Program strategies will also vary depending on the age of the young people involved. Remember that it is *equally* important for both young children and older youth to learn skills for greater self-reliance and to take on leadership roles in age-appropriate ways. For younger children, this may be as simple as teaching them a skill that will contribute to the program (such as sweeping the floor), or helping them figure out how they can best contribute to the group. Small children spend a lot of time receiving help from others, and they love to know the ways they can be self-sufficient or helpful to others.

## Youth Participation with Adult Support

Teachers and youth workers with less experience may confuse youth empowerment and leadership strategies with the absence of rules and boundaries—"you have to step out of the way, let the young people do what they want and hope they figure it out." This approach may prove—at best—highly frustrating for the adults and the young participants. While it is true that adult staff members must let go of control over some aspects of the group's process, participants will still need the facilitative support of adult staff and the expectation that agreed-upon group rules must continue to be honored.

## Change Over Time

A solid plan for increasing meaningful participation will include fading facilitation and cascading leadership. Fading facilitation happens when strong adult leaders allow their presence to recede into the background as the young people become more prepared to take responsibility. One can think of the youth leaders as apprentices, at times needing more or less support from their adult mentors, depending on their abilities.

Cascading leadership occurs when young people pass their leadership on to others coming up after them. This often happens naturally in a group, as young people look up to those a few years older and picture themselves in the same role in the near future. Staff members can support

cascading leadership by giving younger or less experienced members of the group opportunities to learn leadership skills, and by encouraging older or more experienced members to pass on their skills to others.

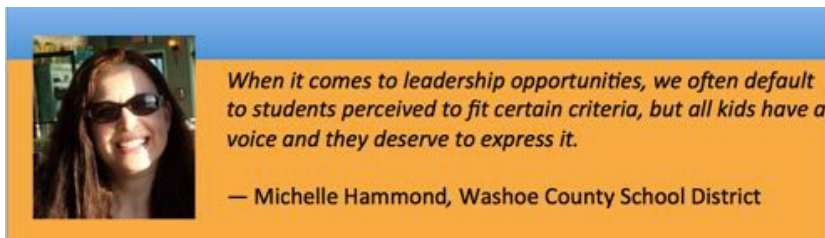
## Styles of Participation

It is worth noting that young people show their participation in different ways and that different cultures define participation differently. Some young people may like to listen and learn before stepping up to take an active role, while others may want to leap right in and start doing. In some cultures, participation is demonstrated through quiet attention.

Young people's style of participation may also vary depending on their learning style and personality. For example, some children are most easily engaged verbally, others physically, others through art or music. It is important to be aware of the different cultures and styles of the individuals in your program when planning opportunities for participation.

## Styles of Leadership

Leadership can also take many forms. Team captains, class presidents, young people on councils, and young people in positions of visibility are often pointed out as leaders. However, not all young people are going to take on such roles. When we restrict our vision of leadership to the person "leading the charge," we automatically limit the number of young people who can be leaders. A more encompassing vision of leadership includes the child who stays after an activity to help clean, the one who intervenes with peers to mediate a disagreement, the committee who plans a party, and the pair who creates a flyer. Groups can exhibit leadership when they plan their own activities or when they work with groups of younger children.



The wise staff member will also make use of the natural leadership ability of the class clown, the leaders of group opinion and fashion, and even the one who regularly voices group resentments. Sometimes young people are labeled "trouble-makers" when they are really just energetic, or expressing a need to practice their independence. When young people lack positive opportunities for leadership, they will take on negative leadership roles. Try giving them a position of responsibility. Let them help a younger group with an activity, put them in charge of the job chart, let them teach a skill or distribute the basketballs.

# 5

## Things You Can Do NOW to Foster

### Meaningful Youth Participation

#### 1. Train Participants in Group Decision Making Skills.

A good place to start is to train young people in the process of brainstorming and group decision-making. (See *Tribes TLC*® for useful guidance on this type of training.) Group decision making skills can be put to use immediately in developing the needed group agreements regarding how people want to be treated, how they will care for their materials and supplies, etc. Make sure adult staff members have skills for leading brainstorming sessions and facilitating group decision-making before you start.

#### 2. Encourage Self-Reliance and Responsibility to the Group.

Allow young people to responsibly address their own needs, whether it is access to the drinking fountain or to art supplies. Design your program space and storage system in a way that allows young people free access to needed project supplies, materials and equipment. The privilege of access comes with responsibilities of caring for and returning things to their proper place. Brainstorm the needed agreements with your group to ensure the respectful use of these materials.

#### 3. Give Young People Choices.

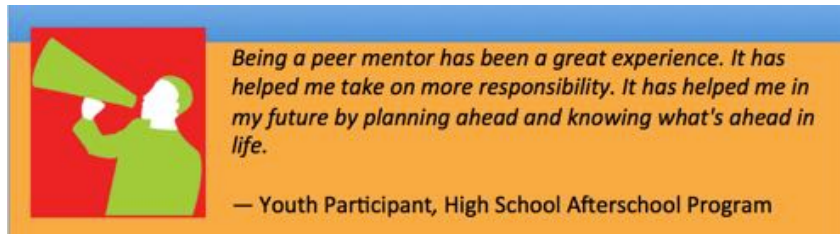
Young people feel more involved in a program when they are given real choices. Schedule program times when the young people can individually choose what they wish to do. Some may prefer group games; others may wish to work alone, drawing or reading, while some may simply want to socialize.

Young people can participate in planning program activities. You may want to start with a small activity or block of time that they are responsible for planning, and then build up. Let them know about any constraints from the beginning. Within those constraints, try to really trust their ideas and enthusiasm. If a planned activity doesn't work, it presents an opportunity for the group to analyze and learn. Once a process for reflection has been established with the young people involved in planning, it can be used regularly.

#### 4. Provide Opportunities for Young People to Help Others.

Everyone feels more involved when they have responsibilities to those around them and are able to use what they know to help others. Allow participants to share responsibilities for the proper care and maintenance of their program assets, making and serving snacks, and assisting peers within their programs. Young people can be trained to effectively assist peers during homework time and during other activities. Try to give every child or young person an opportunity to help another, so that some aren't always in the helper position and others always in the position of

being helped. Newcomers to the program can be assigned buddies to show them around the room, explain ground rules, and help them learn the routine. You can also teach a skill to a small group, and then “deputize” them to teach others.



Older youth are also excellent helpers for younger children, and the helper role often brings out the best in them. Duties can include serving as “reading buddies,” homework helpers, escorts, or making informational presentations to the younger groups. Providing service to the larger community is also an excellent way for young people to apply their planning and leadership skills, while experiencing how their efforts impact others. (See Chapter 7, *Providing Opportunities for Community Involvement*, for more about engaging young people in community service.)

## **5. Involve Young People in Serving on Formal Decision-Making Bodies.**

There are many ways to involve young people in an organization’s decision-making bodies. They can serve on planning, safety, fundraising, hiring or other committees. With experience and support, they can also serve as youth representatives on the organization’s Board of Directors. However, the place to begin is not with the young people, but with the adults within the organization. Are they committed to taking the time and effort to involve young people and do they have the skills to know how to do this effectively?

Before inviting young people to serve on committees or boards, it is important for the adults involved to do their homework. This means gathering information and building their capacity to facilitate the involvement of young people in decision-making and governance. Consider the necessary training to prepare everyone for this work and give yourselves sufficient time to prepare so that you won’t rush the process.

## How Do You Know?



### **Take Your Program's Temperature: Self-Assess**

You can self-assess your program by using observations and reflection surveys with the afterschool staff and youth participants.

#### **What You See**

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting positive youth development experiences when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive. After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote positive youth development experiences.

#### **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they have positive youth development experiences in the program. The most reliable way to assess for these experiences is to ask the young people directly about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements below?



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: How Do You Know?

## Directions

Self assess your program using observations and surveys. You can identify indicators that will allow staff and youth to self assess the degree to which the program promotes meaningful youth participation. You can use indicators from program quality surveys. Below are a few suggestions of what you would see and what youth would say.

## What You See

You can tell that a program supports meaningful participation when you walk into a program room, because the environment supports self-directed, purposeful activity. Examples of what you might see:

- Group agreements or guidelines are posted, announcing the young people’s own rules about how they want to be treated and how they will use their program space and materials.
- Everyone is kept informed by a posting of the program’s activity schedule and upcoming events, and any individual or group responsibilities that have been assigned.
- The program schedule allows time for participants to make choices about how they use their time.
- There are different areas for doing different kinds of work, including working individually and in groups.
- Storage areas for supplies and materials are clearly labeled so everyone can find them and put them away when finished.
- Evidence of youth-run projects and artwork are prominently displayed.

After the adults and young people arrive and the program begins, you can see evidence of meaningful participation in how people interact with one another:

- Transitions in and out of the program space and between activities are smooth because young people know what to do without ongoing adult direction.
- Young people are working with interest on activities and there is an acceptance of purposeful noise and energy in the classroom.
- Young people are directing themselves. They know to ask peers and adults for assistance, and how to find and care for the materials and tools they need.
- Young people are taking significant responsibility, helping each other, leading activities, planning projects, and demonstrating leadership skills learned within the program.
- Staff and volunteers are listening to ideas from young people and are willing to incorporate changes in the program accordingly.
- When asked for answers to problems or challenges, staff and volunteers often respond by posing a question that will help the young person find the answer independently or sensitively engage others in identifying possible solutions to the original question.



## What Young People Say

The most reliable way to assess for meaningful participation is to ask the young people about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I help decide what happens here.
- I often get to choose which activities I'm going to do here.
- I feel like my ideas count here.
- I helped set rules for the program.
- I have been the leader of an activity in this program.
- I have been in charge of supplies or equipment in this program.
- I feel like I belong here.
- If I didn't show up here, people would miss me.

## Staff Development Tools and Activities



Promoting the youth development experiences detailed in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 requires consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

Below are some tools for promoting discussion with your staff or others at your agency or school. The following Personal Reflection Exercises are a good way to spark discussion. If there is a local youth serving agency that is known for their emphasis on and success in promoting positive youth development for young people, you may want to invite someone from that agency in as a guest speaker to offer inspiration and share their experience.



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Personal Reflection

## Materials Needed

- Paper and pencils

## Directions

This exercise is intended to help people in your agency or school remember what it was like to be young, and to be faced with choices or the lack of choices. It is a good opening to focus the group on the importance of fostering youth participation. Begin by telling participants that you are going to do a personal reflection. Ask them to close their eyes, and spend a few minutes thinking about their own experience. Then read the following:

Think of one of the children or young people in your program. Now think back to when you were that age, and try to remember your experiences of school. Who was your teacher? What kinds of things did she or he say to you? What did the classroom look like? What did you wear?

Now think for a moment about how you participated in that setting.

- What kinds of choices were available to you?
- What kinds of things were you responsible for in that setting?
- If you needed something, how did you fulfill that need? If you needed a drink or to use the bathroom, or a pencil, how did you go about this?
- What kinds of things could you do without adult direction?
- What kinds of things did you and your peers get to decide?
- Were you encouraged to practice independence? How did you receive guidance when you faltered?
- How were mistakes viewed?
- When you weren't allowed to make decisions, who did? What empowered you to make those decisions? Did you cooperate or resist?
- What did you do when you didn't like what was going on? When did you fully participate?

## Group Discussion

Before holding a group discussion you might want to give the participants an opportunity to write down some highlights of what they learned in the Personal Reflection Exercise. Then hold a discussion using the following questions to facilitate sharing and learning from each participant's experience.

- What are some of the things that you remembered about your own experiences as you were reflecting?
- Why might it be important for young people to have input into decisions that affect them?
- How might they grow if they are allowed to take responsibility for fulfilling some of their own needs and guiding some of their own actions?
- Why might it be important for them to have opportunities for leadership?
- How does this relate to the developmental outcomes we want for all young people (learning to be productive, to be connected, to navigate)? What is the impact on young people when they spend much of their time in institutions that don't reflect their input?

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Locating Opportunities

## Materials Needed

- Flip chart or butcher paper
- Markers

## Directions

This exercise will help your school or agency look for new ways young people can be involved in your programs at every age. Have staff members break into small teams. One team will focus on 5-7 year-olds, one on 8-10 year-olds, and one on 11-14 year-olds. (If your program doesn't serve all of these age groups, focus on the ages you do serve.) Each group brainstorms answers to the following questions:

- What things can children in your age group do?
- How can we build on these skills to develop participation and leadership?

## Group Discussion

Have each group share their answers with the larger group. Discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into program activities.

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Practitioner Assessment and Leadership Development

## Materials Needed

- Practitioner Assessment of Youth Participation and Leadership Development (1 copy per person).
- Continuum of Youth Participation (1 copy per person).

## Directions

This exercise provides an opportunity to explore whether your afterschool program is providing optimal opportunities for meaningful youth participation. As a group, look at the Continuum of Youth Participation on page 108. Consider where your program falls on the scale. Where would you like it to fall? How do adults' roles change as the young people's roles change?

Give each participant a copy of the *Practitioner Assessment of Youth Participation and Leadership Development* on page 104 and 105. Ask each participant to go through the exercise and answer each question.

## Group Discussion

Have a discussion when the participants have finished filling out the questionnaire. You may want to begin the discussion with a general question asking participants what they learned when filling out the questionnaire. This could be followed up with a focus on specific questions.



HANDOUT

## **YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Practitioner Self-Assessment**

**Purpose:** To guide you through thinking about the opportunities that you provide for youth participation and leadership development.

1. How do you motivate young people to join? To take responsibility?

2. Do you get young people's input into activity planning? How?

3. Do you get young people's input into program design? How?

4. Do you get young people's feedback after they have participated in activities? How?



H A N D O U T

YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Practitioner Self-Assessment

5. Do you ensure that young people's input has impact on the program? How?

6. Do you identify potential leaders? How?

7. What training/assistance/support might young people need to take leadership roles in your program? Is this support provided?

8. Do young people get involved in assessment and evaluation development?

9. What leadership roles do young people take in your organization? In your program? (Interns? Staff? Board members? Mentors?, etc.)

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION: *Attitudinal Principles to Maximize Youth Participation*

**Purpose:** This is a useful hand-out summarizing guidelines to help staff and volunteers think about their daily interactions with young people.

- **Never give an order or direction without a reason.**  
Young people will recognize your authority as legitimate when there is a reason behind what you ask of them. “Because I said so” is one of the worst things you can say to a young person.
- **Look for places where young people can take responsibility.**  
Never underestimate the capability of young people. Giving responsibility creates a sense of ownership and pride. Don’t forget the little responsibilities such as taking attendance and cleaning up. Assign roles according to interest and talent, and try to be sure there is a role for everyone.
- **Make processes explicit.**  
Explain how you make decisions and why (better yet, involve the young people in the process). Be ready to answer questions about agency or program policy, budget, and goals.
- **Allow for failure.**  
Of course, we have a responsibility to prevent major accidents. However, it can be disempowering if we step in too quickly to make sure everything works out right. Sometimes the process and the learning experience are more important than reaching your original goal. Be sure to help young people analyze setbacks in such a way that they become learning experiences.
- **Practice common courtesy with young people.**  
Young people deserve the same courteous treatment we would give parents, supervisors, or funders. Listen to the language you use when speaking to participants.
- **Approach the work with humility.**  
This means being willing to let go of our ideas about what the group should be doing, or what the goals should be. It also means not being overly invested in how much young people like our ideas or us. We have to be able to let go of our plans and let relationships develop at their own speed if the young people are to take the lead. On the other hand, it is important to know when to be an adult, stepping in to protect vulnerable members of the group, for example.

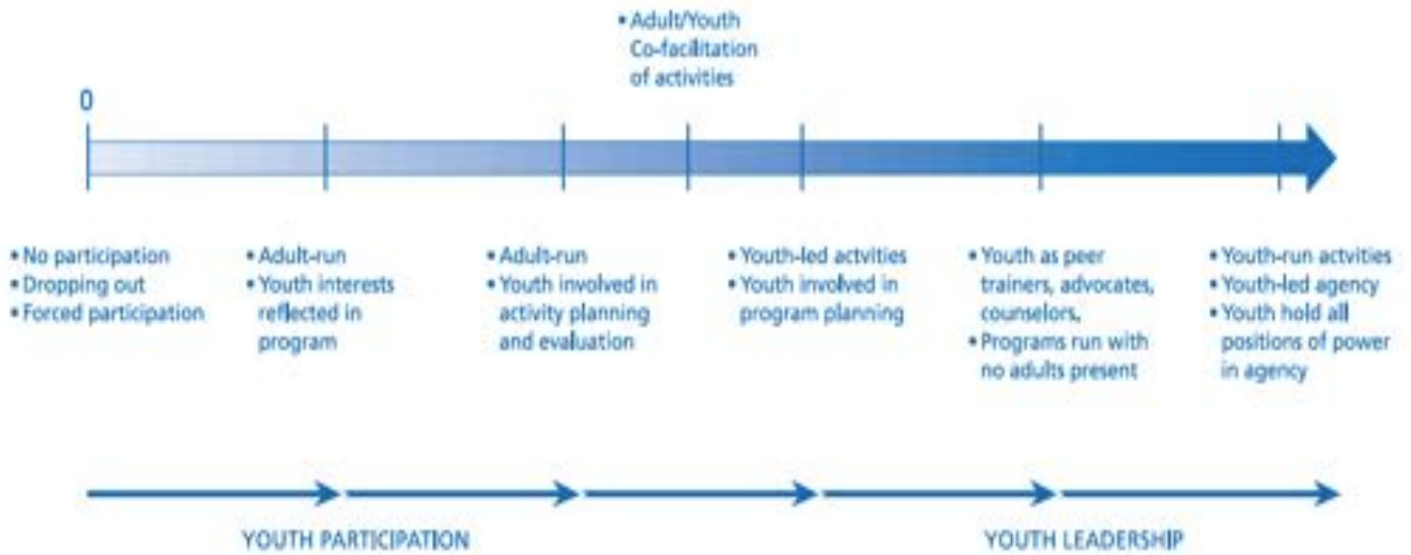
## **YOUTH PARTICIPATION: *Steps Toward Increasing Meaningful Youth Participation***

**Purpose:** You can use this list and assess where your program is on the following continuum:

- Getting young people involved in stating goals/needs
- Getting young people involved in activity planning
- Getting young people involved in program assessment/evaluation
- Identifying leaders in the group
- Training young people in leadership skills (facilitation, conflict resolution, peer counseling, advocacy, activity planning and design)
- Having young people train, recruit and support each other (older youth train and support younger youth)
- Involving young people in program planning/strategic planning, evaluation, development, staff hiring, and/or developing program goals
- Placing young people on the Board of Directors or other governing bodies

HANDOUT

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: *Continuum of Youth Participation*



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Student Survey of Program Preferences

## Directions

This is a survey of young people's interests which you can customize for your program. We need your help! We want to create an afterschool program that is exciting and useful for you. Please answer the following questions to tell us about your opinions and ideas for afterschool activities. If you would like to get even more involved in planning afterschool activities, or being a club officer, ask your teacher for more information about the afterschool program.

### 1. Please check the sentence that best describes your feelings about attending an afterschool program at our school. (check one)

- I already participate in afterschool activities.
- I would definitely be interested in going to an afterschool program at our school.
- I have other responsibilities afterschool and could not go to an afterschool program at our school.
- I am not interested in going to an afterschool program at our school.

### 2. What kind of activities would you like to do afterschool? Feel free to add your own ideas. (check up to four)

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chess                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerleading            | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community service         | <input type="checkbox"/> Gymnastics              | <input type="checkbox"/> Field trips                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Club             | <input type="checkbox"/> Martial arts            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homework help or tutoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer counseling/<br>conflict resolution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Junior Achievement        | <input type="checkbox"/> Softball/baseball       | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodworking                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photography               | <input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball              | <input type="checkbox"/> Your idea:<br>_____                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poetry writing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Your idea:<br>_____                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School newspaper          | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and crafts         | <input type="checkbox"/> Your idea:<br>_____                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science experiments       | <input type="checkbox"/> Card and board<br>games | <input type="checkbox"/> Your idea:<br>_____                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aerobic exercise          | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking                 |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basketball                | <input type="checkbox"/> Dance                   |  |

### 3. What are some ways you would like to get involved in the afterschool program? (check all that apply)

- Deciding what programs to offer
- Planning afterschool activities
- Being a club officer
- Advertising the afterschool program
- Your idea: \_\_\_\_\_
- I am not interested in getting involved.

**4. Which types of “advertisement” would convince you to participate in the afterschool activities? (check all that apply)**

- Student-designed posters
- Flyers mailed home
- Presentations by students who are in the afterschool program
- Articles about the program in the school newspaper
- Daily announcements about the program (read by an adult)
- Daily announcements about the program (read by a student)
- Rewards—such as homework passes, gift certificates, or other treats— for students who regularly attend activities.
- Your idea: \_\_\_\_\_
- Your idea: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank You!**



# **YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Staff Training Topics**

## **Directions**

Create a staff development plan that includes training topics that would ensure that the young people in your program have opportunities for meaningful youth participation. Together with your staff and program leadership, identify training topics that are related to youth participation. Below are a few suggestions:

- Group decision-making processes
- Active listening
- Project Planning
- Group Facilitation
- Teaching conflict resolution to young people
- Teaching facilitation skills to young people
- Child and adolescent development
- Peer education
- Resisting ageism



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: Checklist for Action

## Directions

Document what steps the program has made to promote meaningful youth participation. This checklist will help you stay focused and organized as you begin to make meaningful youth participation a priority in your program.

### Have you:

- Set aside ongoing staff time to thoroughly plan for fostering meaningful youth participation and leadership development?
- Assessed the need for staff development and planned for training?
- Assessed your school or agency's organizational practices to see if they support meaningful youth participation?
- Looked at how your agency or school allocates resources (time, space, money) to support meaningful youth participation?
- Asked the young people about their interests and their ideas for programming?
- Planned ways to ensure that young people's input affects programming?
- Defined specifically how you expect youth participation activities to positively impact young people?
- Planned ways for different styles of leadership to emerge?
- Identified leadership potential in young people of different ages, styles, and personalities?
- Identified skills young people will need to take on leadership roles?
- Scheduled time for recognition and reflection?
- Planned to train youth in these skills?
- Planned for fading facilitation?
- Prepared young people for cascading leadership?
- Created ways for young people to participate in program evaluation?
- Incorporated outcomes related to fostering meaningful youth participation into program evaluation?



## For Organizational Leaders



### Organizational Practices That Promote Youth Development

Successful youth development programs are born out of a culture, policies, resources and structures that are established by the program provider’s parent organization. As anyone who has struggled with too few resources or mismatched organizational priorities knows, the best staff in the world working with the deepest knowledge and understanding cannot create high quality experiences for young people without certain organizational supports in place.

**Organizational Practices That Support Youth Development & Learning**

- Low ratio of youth to staff/volunteers
- Safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces
- Flexibility in allocating available resources
- Continuity and consistency of care
- High, clear and fair standards
- Ongoing, results-based staff & organizational improvement process
- Youth involvement
- Community engagement

Many teachers and youth workers have noted that the kinds of organizational practices described on the left work best when they are applied consistently at all levels of the agency or school. For example, the sponsoring school or agency must commit to holding high, clear, and fair standards for the staff, just as they do for the young participants. In this way, staff experience what they need to succeed, and the functioning of the organization at a macro-level mirrors the functioning at the program level—everyone “walks the talk.”

Putting these organizational practices in place takes time, energy, and resources. In particular, program staff must have the time outside of their program duties to talk to each other, talk informally with young people, get to know the community, plan, evaluate, and learn. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers. The following are suggested organizational practices that are related to youth development practices.

# Organizational Practices that Foster Meaningful Youth Participation

## Youth Involvement at the Organizational Level

It is critical to involve young people in program planning as your school or agency initiates its afterschool program, in on-going implementation activities, and in program assessment. Young people can offer input in brainstorming or group planning sessions, on surveys, or as representatives in agency or program planning sessions. They can plan, co-lead, or lead activities as their interests and skills allow. They can help set goals for the program and participate in program evaluation. When young people are present and involved at every stage, programs are bound to better reflect their interests.

Particular attention should be paid to how you involve young people in planning and decision making settings where the majority of the participants are adults. It is highly recommended that adult planning participants be trained in how to effectively make room for and engage young people in planning and decision-making.

## Providing Opportunities for Meaningful Participation at all Levels of the Organization

Strategies for fostering youth participation are most effective when meaningful participation is modeled at all levels of the sponsoring school or agency. This means that all staff members, parents, and volunteers involved in the afterschool program have opportunities for decision-making, leadership, and belonging. In particular it is important for people to have input into the decisions that will affect them, and for evaluation and planning efforts to consider the expertise and unique perspective of all stakeholders. Organizations can provide these opportunities by ensuring that planning committees include many perspectives and that evaluation efforts receive input from diverse stakeholders. Implementing site-based decision-making, creating parent involvement committees, and holding agency or program-wide social events also offer opportunities for meaningful participation by staff, parents, and others.

## Flexibility in Allocating Resources

Flexibility in allocating resources is clearly important in providing opportunities for meaningful youth participation. If program participants want a DJ club or a hip-hop dance class and you have funding only for a soccer class, it is going to be difficult to engage these young people. When you ask young people about the activities they want, let them know what the financial limitations are upfront. If young people do come up with ideas that can't be implemented, give them honest reasons why their suggestions can't be put into practice.

## Accessible Space

Providing accessible space is fundamental to supporting youth participation. This means preparing the space so young people can use it as independently as possible. There is an important difference for young people when they can get the paints themselves and start

painting, rather than having to ask an adult. (Imagine if the adult staff had to ask their supervisor every time they needed to use the stapler). Preparing the space may mean lowering shelves, teaching young people the proper use of materials, and creating signs or written directions for use. It also means making the space look like a place for young people, where they can laugh, make a mess, put their feet up.

## **Low Youth to Staff/Volunteer Ratio**

An appropriately low youth to staff/volunteer ratio is also important to maintaining meaningful participation. The fact that young people can increase their independence and take on leadership roles does not mean that they don't need adult support. It simply means that the adult role shifts from being the leader to providing the considerable support necessary to maintain youth leadership.

## **Ongoing, Results-Based Staff and Organizational Improvement Process**

The ability of an agency or school to engage young people in meaningful participation depends on the organization allocating time for program planning and reflection, providing training opportunities for adults, and implementing a process for authentic program assessment and evaluation.

Involving young people is critical to assessing the impact of your program. The most accurate way to measure program quality is to ask young people about their experiences within the organization. Young people can also be involved in the design of the assessment or evaluation. Ways to involve young people in assessment include:

- Engaging young people in developing and reviewing the measurable indicators of meaningful youth participation, safety, positive relationships, challenging learning experiences, and opportunities for community involvement. Ask young people what these terms mean to them and what they would look for to measure program quality in these areas. Ask them what they think is important about the programs in which they choose to participate.
- Involving young people in piloting assessment surveys. Feedback from young people will ensure that assessment survey questions carry the same meanings for the young people surveyed as they do for the adults who developed the tool. Piloting surveys with young people will ensure that the language is appropriate for those being surveyed. Also, young people often give excellent feedback on how to make the surveys easier and more interesting to use.





# PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Helping young people connect to  
the community.





## What Is Community Involvement?

Providing opportunities for **community involvement** in afterschool programs means offering young people activities that increase their knowledge of their communities and promote a sense of positive belonging to the community. Community knowledge includes learning about the community's history, its people and the diverse cultures they represent, and its resources. It may also include learning about the real life challenges the community and its residents face. Opportunities for community involvement allow young people to give back to others through community service activities.

For young people this means moving from their more usual role of being helped to being someone who can capably help others and promote change. For program leaders, providing opportunities for community involvement requires finding ways to bring the community into the afterschool program. One way to do this is to recruit community members to introduce young people to their cultural histories and traditions, to share their talents and experiences through presentations, to teach classes, or to serve as volunteer mentors or tutors.

Creating these opportunities also requires taking the afterschool program “beyond the program walls,” out to the community. This means creating opportunities for young people to meet community leaders and residents, to explore the community, and to research the problems faced by the community and identify ways that they can actively be part of the solution.

### Community Involvement means that young people:

- Build knowledge of the community beyond the program.
- Have a chance to give back to the community.
- Experience a sense of connection to a larger community.



## Why is Community Involvement Important?

Research on childhood resiliency and youth development, as well as studies on the prevention of high risk behaviors, affirms the importance of young people feeling a connection to their community. Further, involvement in active and useful roles in service to others is “associated with higher self-esteem, enhanced moral development, increased political activism, and the ability to create and maintain complex social relationships.”

In addition to contributing to young people’s healthy development over time, community involvement can also help programs meet their more immediate outcomes. Community involvement can offer young people the opportunity to learn about topics that are not usually part of the school day curriculum. This can increase young people’s engagement in the afterschool program. This is particularly true when topics are keyed to their own interests.

When young people can see the connections between the program activities and their own lives in the community, their interest and motivation to participate is enhanced. As they meet and learn about people in the community who are different than themselves, they develop a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity. When activities, such as youth-led community service projects, require that young people work together to accomplish their goals, participants have the opportunity to learn and master important life skills. These include specific skills in communication, problem solving, decision-making, and the many collaborative skills necessary for successful teamwork. As their groups experience success, young people form deeper bonds with their peers and their community. Perhaps most importantly, activities that involve service to others allow young people to feel valued for the contributions they make.

Young people are not the only ones who benefit when they engage in a meaningful way with community residents and organizations. When adults and community members have positive exchanges with young people, everyone revisits their stereotypes of the “other.” Adults are more likely to hold a positive view of young people, voice their support for resources dedicated to young people, and even decide to play an active role in supporting the needs of young people.

In many communities, there are significant barriers between the community residents and their public schools. Afterschool programs can break down these barriers by inviting community agencies and residents into their school-based programs, working to “bring the public back into public schools.”

Community members bring specialized knowledge, wisdom, new perspectives and valuable experiences. They serve as resources for program staff, as well as young participants. Finally, when we provide opportunities for community involvement, we affirm that young people are critical assets to the communities in which they live.



# Providing Opportunities for Community Involvement in Your Afterschool Program

## Organizational Practices That Support Community Involvement

Supporting community involvement begins with sound policies and practices of the organization that employs the staff who work with young people directly. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers.

### Staff Discussions and Planning


Promoting a sense of safety within your program requires discussion and consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

### Beliefs About Young People

It is important for the staff to reflect on their underlying beliefs about young people and their readiness and interest in serving the community. In wanting to protect and teach young people, adults often overlook opportunities for young people to assume roles that can bring them a sense of value. These opportunities promote an important “I can do it. I make a difference.” attitude. How do your adult staff view young people? Does staff see young people as problems about to happen, as a resource to be developed for future use, or as a community resource that can make a difference now?


### Considering the Many Worlds Within a Single Community

Begin by working with the young people to create a geographic definition of what you mean by “community.” Once you all agree on a geographic definition, it is important to remember that people’s experience of this geographic community may be very different. For instance, young people who are recent immigrants and who primarily interact with neighbors and business establishments that share their cultural background may have a very different experience of community than young people who are native-born English-speakers. When planning for community involvement in an afterschool program, consider the many different affiliations your young people may have and allow time to explore these differences.



*In our program, a group of 20 children participate in a cooking class afterschool where they study the origins of their recipes, including geographic regions and cultures from which they come. They are also addressing the issues of hunger in the community as they prepare and serve 60-100 dinners each evening to their peers, ages 5-16, who may have otherwise skipped dinner.*

— Afterschool Worker, Middle School Afterschool Program



Before considering ways to increase young people’s involvement with the surrounding community, it is a good idea to conduct some group discussions about how different people experience their community. What are the different affiliations your young people have? Young people’s communities may be organized around music scenes, sports teams, clubs, or the recreational activities they feel help define them. What are the different affiliations your young people have? How does this differ from those of your adult staff?

Remember that people of different ages will also define community and community needs differently. It is not surprising that when a group of young people in Alameda, California mounted a successful public support campaign to build a new kind of public park, it was an outdoor skateboard park that they envisioned. *(Imagine how different the outcome would have been if senior citizens or parents of new infants were given the charge of designing a new park for the community.)*

You might use a large wall map to identify the areas of the community that your participants are most and least familiar with. Perhaps you can identify the areas about which the young people would like to learn more. Is everyone familiar with the larger community’s “mainstream” resources, such as the museums, art centers, parks, and senior citizen centers? What about the resources that “insiders” of different groups can share with young people, such as small cultural arts theatres focused on preserving a group’s culture and traditions or groups working on a particular community issue? Are there ways to introduce young people to other informal resources, such as the specialty stores and delicious restaurants in particular ethnic areas of the community? Are there local residents who have amazing experiences and stories to tell or special talents about which few know?

## **Involving Young People in Designing Service Projects**

Program leaders often view community service as projects that adults plan and young people do. However, this approach fails to draw upon the perspectives and interests of young people. When the project ideas come from the program participants, they are more interested in the project and this helps build a natural momentum for project activities. Keeping in mind that how you gather young people’s input will depend on the age, interests, and structure of the group, here are a few suggestions:

- Begin with a conversation about community. Ask the young people in your program how they define community.
- Be alert to the interests of the young people in your program. Are there ways to connect to the community through these interests?
- Involve families in discussions about community, in planning for community involvement, and in the actual activities you plan. They are an important resource, and can keep the idea of community alive at home.

- Young people may be inspired if you let them know that their help is needed in the community. Let your enthusiasm show and point out frequently the contributions they are making, whether big or small. Ensure that others outside of the program know of their work and recognize their efforts publicly.

## **Start Small**

As you prepare for increasing opportunities for community, it is a good idea to start small, and build on your successes with larger efforts. This is true for involving community members or groups in your program. It is a good idea to give new community partners, whether individuals or groups, relatively small responsibilities until you find out how they work with your program. Ensure that they are recognized and appreciated for their contributions. It is also true in beginning service projects. Young people can be discouraged if their first project is too big in scope and they don't see results quickly enough.

## **Do the Necessary Homework**

When community involvement activities include community service projects, it is important that young people have a chance to understand the underlying issues their service is meant to address. For example, if students plan to help clean up a local playground, they could spend some time exploring questions such as: "What is the impact of litter on our community?" "Where are the safe places for children to play in this neighborhood?" and "Why was this playground allowed to become so dirty?" This process teaches young people to think critically and exercise problem-solving skills even as they become part of the solution.

Young people, like adults, will bring their own set of beliefs and assumptions, along with concrete knowledge of the particular issue, to any service project. Allow the young people to do research so they can test their assumptions. In considering solutions, find out what existing community groups are already doing to tackle these problems. What other strategies have already been tried? How can the young people imagine contributing to the effort?

For example, by interviewing people at a homeless shelter, young people from one afterschool program learned that their original idea of collecting canned food wasn't what was most needed. Shelter residents told them that their more pressing need was warm clothing, especially coats and gloves, for the coming winter—something that had not occurred to the program's young people or adult staff. With this new information, the young people enthusiastically changed their project accordingly. When young people learn to take a thoughtful approach to addressing problems, they become prepared to function as leaders in creating effective community solutions.

# 5

## Things You Can Do NOW to Increase Community Involvement

### 1. Invite a speaker from the community to come to your program.

This can be most effective when the topic is linked to something the students are studying in school, or to a project they are working on in the program. For example, if they are learning about the Civil Rights movement, you might invite neighbors who lived through those days to talk about what it was like. If they are studying butterflies, you might find a local entomologist to visit. Firefighters and other people with exciting jobs are always welcome speakers. Community colleges, museums, parks, volunteer centers, community centers, and even the phone book are all good places to start looking for speakers.

### 2. Encourage parents, older siblings, and neighbors of the school to become involved in the program.

Parents can provide wonderful support for cultural activities. Members of the community might volunteer as tutors, mentors, or for snack preparation or story reading. Older siblings and recent program graduates can serve as tutors or helpers, and this can provide a link between the high schools and middle school-aged youth. These volunteers will require training and support, but the investment pays off in a decreased youth/adult ratio and in increased relationship building opportunities for the young people.

### 3. Invite the community into your program to celebrate the talents of your young people.

Stage an open house or performance at your program space. Share young people's art, theater, dance, music, or other performance with the community. Publish a newsletter, 'zine, or collection of poetry. Invite parents and neighbors to see how your program works. This is one way to let your young people shine and give back to the community at the same time.

### 4. Get out of the building!

Any time you leave familiar space you are allowing young people to expand their horizons. Take a field trip to a regional park or museum. Visit a local establishment, service, or branch of government to learn how it works. Attend a program or activity at a local non-profit organization such as the Red Cross, Sierra Club, a social justice or civil rights organization, or a local arts center or library. Practice using public transportation, and let young people help figure out how to get where you are going.

## **5. Plan a project that will benefit the community.**

Clean up or plant trees or flowers at a local park, speak out at a public forum on a youth or community issue, visit elders at the senior center, serve snacks at a neighborhood fair, design and paint a mural... the possibilities are endless! Try to match projects to the interests of the young people, and look for existing programs that can help you prepare young people for a meaningful experience.

## How Do You Know?



### **Take Your Program's Temperature: Self-Assess**

You can self-assess your program by using observations and reflection surveys with the afterschool staff and youth participants.

#### **What You See**

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting positive youth development experiences when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive. After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote positive youth development experiences.

#### **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they have positive youth development experiences in the program. The most reliable way to assess for these experiences is to ask the young people directly about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements below?

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: How Do You Know?

## Directions

Self assess your program using observations and surveys. You can identify indicators that will allow staff and youth to self assess the degree to which the program promotes community involvement. You can use indicators from program quality surveys. Below are a few suggestions of what you would see and what youth would say.

## What You See

You can see that your program offers young people opportunities for community involvement by looking at who is in the room and what is happening.

Examples of what you might see:

- There are objects and wall displays that reflect the program's interest in the surrounding neighborhood and community: neighborhood maps, items reflecting the cultural diversity of the community, listings of community resources.
- There are a variety of community residents, family members and agency workers who participate in the program as presenters, instructors, volunteer tutors and mentors, and in other ways.
- Program participants are traveling beyond the program site, out to the community to meet people and learn about the community's resources and needs.
- Program activities incorporate opportunities for young people to learn about cultures and communities different from their own.
- Young people are actively involved in researching the challenges faced by their community, and how best they can contribute to addressing the issues.
- Young people are engaging in projects that make their communities safer, more beautiful, fun, caring, and just.
- Young people are thinking critically about problems in their community, and acting to participate in solutions.

## What Young People Say

The most reliable way to assess whether your community involvement efforts are successful is to ask the young people about their own experience of the program. When asked, young people in an afterschool program that makes community involvement a priority might say:

- I've had a chance to do things to help people in my community.
- In this program I get to go places that I don't usually go.
- In this program, I've learned about things that young people can do in my community.
- I know more about what is going on in my community.
- I know more about how to get things I need in my community.
- I've learned about ways I can make things better in my community.

## Staff Development Tools and Activities



Promoting the youth development experiences detailed in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 requires consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

Below are some tools for promoting discussion with your staff or others at your agency or school. The following Personal Reflection Exercises are a good way to spark discussion. If there is a local youth serving agency that is known for their emphasis on and success in promoting positive youth development for young people, you may want to invite someone from that agency in as a guest speaker to offer inspiration and share their experience.





# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Personal Reflection

## Directions

This exercise is intended to help people identify what makes community involvement relevant. It is a good opening to focus the group on the importance of community involvement. Begin by telling participants that you are going to do a personal reflection. Ask them to close their eyes, and spend a few minutes thinking about their own experience. Then read the following:

Take a moment to think about a group or community where you feel you belong. It could be a geographic area, a cultural or ethnic group, a group that shares an activity or set of beliefs, or any other group that feels like a community to you.

- Think of something you contributed to the community that had an impact on it.
- Why did you contribute to that community?
- What would happen if you were not there?
- What makes it feel like community to you?

## Group Discussion

Before holding a group discussion you might want to give the participants an opportunity to write down some highlights of what they learned in the Personal Reflection Exercise. Then hold a discussion using the following questions to facilitate sharing and learning from each participant's experience.

- What are some of the things that you remembered about your own experience as you were reflecting?
- Why might it be important for young people to have a connection to community?
- How does this relate to the desired outcomes of an effective afterschool program (learning to be productive, to be connected, to navigate)?
- What is the impact on young people when they don't have a positive connection to the community?

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

## Introducing Our Communities

### Materials Needed

- Instant camera and film
- Cutout stick figures of people in many colors, about 5" tall, one per person (make in advance of exercise)
- Tape
- Fine-point markers

### Directions

This is another useful exercise to get a group of adults or young people talking about what community means to them. Ask the group to reflect silently on the following questions:

- What communities do you serve through your job?
- What communities do you identify with or feel a part of?
- What communities do the young people you work with come from?

After a few minutes to reflect, have the group get into pairs, preferably pairs who don't know each other well. Partners get a few minutes to talk about community and what it means to them, speaking in turns. Partners take instant pictures of each other's faces and attach the pictures of their faces to the paper figures. On the body of the stick person, they write down the words that define community for them and which they are willing to share with the rest of the group. When everyone is finished, partners go around the circle, introducing each other to the group. Afterwards, post the figures on the wall for everyone to see.

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Brainstorm Opportunities

## Materials Needed

- Flip Chart
- Markers
- Tape

## Directions

Divide the participants into five groups for brainstorm. If you have different programs, age levels, or management levels represented, try to mix them up in your groups. Each group takes one topic to brainstorm.

Topics are:

- Possible community partners (Include agencies that are members of your collaborative, agencies where your staff members have connections, agencies that may have areas of program overlap, community service agencies, and sources for individual volunteers.)
- Community service activities (Be sure to think of activities for younger as well as older children if you serve multiple age groups.)
- Young people's interests that could be connected to the community (i.e., A group interested in dance might enjoy a visit by a local dance troupe, which might lead to other activities.)
- Other community issues/programs/activities that might interest your young participants.
- Ways to let the broader community know who you are and what you do, so that you can strengthen your relationship with the community.

Remember, this is a brainstorm, so try not to rule anything out right away. Make your brainstorms as broad as possible. The idea is to get everyone thinking of your program as an integrated part of the community, with information and knowledge constantly flowing into and out of your program.

After the small groups have completed their brainstorms, step back and give everyone time to circulate around the room, looking at each other's charts. Make additions to other groups' charts. Circle topics that come up on several lists or seem especially promising.



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

### Staff Training Topics

#### Directions

Create a staff development plan that includes training topics that would ensure that the young people in your program have opportunities for community involvement. Together with your staff and program leadership, identify training topics that are related to community involvement. Below are a few suggestions:

- Specific training on cultures represented in the student population
- Volunteer management/appreciation
- Speaking to the media and generating publicity
- Young people as volunteers
- Specific topics related to potential projects
- Programs offered at school and by agencies



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Checklist for Action

## Directions

This checklist is meant to help you stay organized and focused as you begin increasing opportunities for community involvement in your afterschool program. It will help you stay focused and organized as you begin to make community involvement a priority in your program.

### Have you:

- Had a staff discussion about the importance of community involvement and how they view young people?
- Do they view young people as a community resource that can make a difference?
- Set aside staff time to thoroughly plan the incorporation of community involvement activities?
- Assessed the need for staff development and planned for training?
- Looked at how your school or agency allocates resources (time, space, and money) to support community involvement?
- Familiarized program staff with local culture(s) and communities, including the immediate neighborhood?
- Familiarized program staff with offerings of collaborating agencies and other community groups?
- Considered both opportunities for young people to be involved in the community and for the community to be involved with young people?
- Asked young people what they consider to be their community or communities?
- Gathered youth input and ideas about community involvement?
- Made connections with other local community groups?
- Checked that potential community service activities are grounded in a solid understanding of the issues you are addressing?
- Involved families in planning and implementation?
- Selected the most promising areas to begin community involvement?
- Defined specifically how you expect these activities to positively impact young people and the community?
- Trained someone on staff in volunteer management, if you are planning to use outside volunteers?
- Met with possible community partners, agreed on responsibilities, and outlined a plan? (It's a good idea to have this in writing.)
- Incorporated outcomes related to community involvement into program evaluation?

## For Organizational Leaders



### Organizational Practices That Promote Youth Development

Successful youth development programs are born out of a culture, policies, resources and structures that are established by the program provider’s parent organization. As anyone who has struggled with too few resources or mismatched organizational priorities knows, the best staff in the world working with the deepest knowledge and understanding cannot create high quality experiences for young people without certain organizational supports in place.

**Organizational Practices That Support Youth Development & Learning**

- Low ratio of youth to staff/volunteers
- Safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces
- Flexibility in allocating available resources
- Continuity and consistency of care
- High, clear and fair standards
- Ongoing, results-based staff & organizational improvement process
- Youth involvement
- Community engagement

Many teachers and youth workers have noted that the kinds of organizational practices described on the left work best when they are applied consistently at all levels of the agency or school. For example, the sponsoring school or agency must commit to holding high, clear, and fair standards for the staff, just as they do for the young participants. In this way, staff experience what they need to succeed, and the functioning of the organization at a macro-level mirrors the functioning at the program level—everyone “walks the talk.”

Putting these organizational practices in place takes time, energy, and resources. In particular, program staff must have the time outside of their program duties to talk to each other, talk informally with young people, get to know the community, plan, evaluate, and learn. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers. The following are suggested organizational practices that are related to youth development practices.

# **Organizational Practices That Support Community Involvement**

## **Low Youth to Staff/Volunteer Ratio**

Maintaining a low ratio of young people to adults will help community involvement activities run more smoothly. More actively engaging the community can also help programs lower their ratio of young people to staff. It does take time outside of the program to recruit and prepare volunteers, but there can be many benefits as young people get more one-on-one attention, and have the opportunity to form relationships with many different adults.

## **Flexibility in Allocating Available Resources**

As young people get caught up in a community project, it may take a direction that staff never anticipated. It is important to have the ability to change plans and reallocate resources when this happens. Activities that involve the community can also take on a life of their own, bringing new resources into the program.

## **Continuity and Consistency of Care**

Meaningful community involvement projects take time to develop. Young people need time to understand and explore the issues, plan an activity, learn any needed skills to carry it out, and reflect afterwards. They also need consistent staff support throughout this process. In addition, it takes time and effort to build trusting relationships in the community. When there is high staff turnover, these relationships are damaged. It is important to take appropriate measures to retain qualified staff.

## **Ongoing, Results-Based Staff and Organizational Improvement Process**

Prioritizing community involvement opportunities means ensuring that these activities really engage young people and help them build knowledge, feel connected, and give back to the community. To ensure that your program is being effective in offering these kinds of opportunities, you need to include evaluation of community involvement efforts in your ongoing program assessment. Do young people report that they find community involvement projects meaningful and rewarding? How many connections does your program have with other community organizations? How close are these connections? Also examine the quantity and quality of the relationships between young people in the program and community volunteers.

## **Youth Involvement**

Community involvement activities are most powerful when they are meaningful to the young people who participate in them. Their involvement in planning and implementation ensures that projects will be relevant to them.



## **Community Engagement**

Community involvement activities work best when the community is engaged with the afterschool program at a deeper program or organizational level. For example, it is most helpful when stakeholders in the community are engaged in early planning and goal setting, and have on-going input. In this way, providing opportunities for community involvement can be an integral part of the program, and not an add-on.

## **Providing Opportunities For Community Involvement At All Levels Of The Organization**

Programs are most effective at linking young people and the community when the community is engaged at all levels of the organization. This means that all those involved in the program have knowledge of the community where they are located, have connections with the community, and have opportunities to give back to the community. This may mean giving staff members time to attend community meetings and events and involving parents, volunteers, and non-program staff in holding events for the community.





## **CHALLENGING AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT BUILD SKILLS**

Providing opportunities for young people to expand their skills and knowledge.





## What is Meant by Challenging and Engaging Learning Experiences that Build Skills?

Learning experiences provide young people with opportunities to expand their understanding and knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live and to master specific new concepts and skills. These experiences are challenging when they require participants to stretch beyond their current range of knowledge and skills and offer opportunities to test and master their skills in the real world. You know that young people are being challenged when, upon succeeding, they express a genuine sense of pride and accomplishment, and a readiness to share their learning with others. Learning experiences are engaging when they tap into the young participants' natural curiosity and interest in discovery, and when they serve to motivate, rather than discourage, their eagerness to try new activities.

How can you ensure that you are creating activities that tap into young people's natural desire to learn, giving them opportunities to stretch themselves and gain new knowledge and skills? To do this we must consciously integrate learning opportunities into the full range of activities we offer. And we must draw on all of the youth development practices discussed in this Guide. Promoting safety, building positive relationships, fostering meaningful youth participation and offering opportunities for community involvement are all part of creating successful learning environments.

### Challenging and Engaging Learning Experiences Mean that Young People:

- are motivated to learn because activities interest them.
- have the chance to stretch their skills, knowledge, and abilities.
- internalize a sense of mastery and competence.



## Why is it Important that Learning Experiences are Challenging and Engaging?

To prepare young people for adulthood, we must provide them with multiple opportunities to broaden their knowledge of the world, develop new skills, and increase their competencies in a number of realms. We recognize that young people are around-the-clock learners, making the afterschool hours a perfect time for youth to access rich and varied opportunities for new learning. Our challenge, as program leaders, is to create challenging and engaging learning experiences that will both attract and retain young peoples' participation, and support them in acquiring new skills.

When young people are both challenged and engaged, they become attentive and receptive to learning. When these learning opportunities are coupled with the support they need to succeed, their accomplishments take on an importance larger than the particular skill they have learned—these experiences contribute to their perceptions of themselves as able learners and promote an “I can do it” attitude. This internalized sense of competence and mastery serves to fuel their desire and motivation for future success and to assume active responsibility for their own learning.

Research also tells us that feelings of competence and access to engaging opportunities are critical factors in youth's avoidance of high risk behaviors, such as the use of alcohol and other drugs. As researchers James Connell and Michelle Gambone note, young people “are more likely to avoid these dangers if they have healthier options in their lives that contain the appropriate blend of challenge and accomplishment.”



*What we're really looking for within our afterschool program is providing young people with a chance to do, ask questions, to look at materials in a new way, to innovate, and to discover.*

— Deborah Vandell, University of California, Irvine

Afterschool programs that offer diverse and engaging learning opportunities allow young people to explore new subjects and disciplines, which they might not be able to explore elsewhere. For some, this will be a chance to showcase talents that were not previously seen or appreciated in other settings.

Providing learning experiences that both challenge and engage young people is also the best way to attract and sustain their participation in afterschool programs. This is particularly true in the case of adolescents, who typically have a higher level of choice over their participation and can “vote with their feet” if they don't find programs engaging.

Using a range of approaches to reach young people with diverse learning styles will also help your program attract and sustain the participation of young people who have not had success in traditional classroom settings. As all participants feel more interested and successful as learners, their confidence, enthusiasm and interest in participating will grow and misbehavior will diminish.

## **Providing Challenging and Engaging Learning Experiences that Build Skills**

### **Organizational Practices**

Providing challenging and engaging learning experiences that build skills begins with sound policies and practices of the organization that employs the staff who work with young people directly. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers.

### **Staff Discussions and Planning**

Promoting a sense of safety within your program requires discussion and consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.


### **Building a Safe and Learning Friendly Community**

Being supportive and inclusive of participants' different learning styles and intelligences. Young people must feel safe in order to take the risks necessary to learn new things. You can create an environment that supports learning by:

- Building strong and trusting relationships with young people and fostering positive relationships between young people and their peers (see *Encouraging Relationship Building*);
- Promoting the exploration of ideas and the practice of new skills— without censuring young people for their errors or mistakes;
- Explicitly placing a high value on the search for answers, discovery and learning together, including asking for and giving help to others;

### **Incorporating the Interests of Young People**

Regardless of the teaching and learning methods you employ, it is important to incorporate young people's interests in your program. You may want to survey the young people in your program about their interests, and then work to incorporate opportunities to learn academic and life skills into activities that reflect these interests.




*At first I went there and I didn't like it. They didn't have anything there for me. Then they came to me. They asked me what I liked. I told them and they started bringing in the programs that I liked. And I went to join.*

— Youth Participant, Middle School Afterschool Program

You can also build on learners' existing knowledge and skills. When introducing a new topic or project, begin by allowing young people to show what they already know. There may be some true "experts" among them. By building off the momentum of their knowledge and prior experiences, you can help them both test and deepen their present understanding. Equally as important to designing programs with young people's interests in mind, is ensuring that programs are relevant to the learners.

It is crucial that staff understand young people's *life contexts*, including their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and have the flexibility to design programs that are relevant to participants. Hiring workers from the community, involving community volunteers and parents, and drawing on their expertise will help you shape a more sensitive and effective program.



*I worked with the music group and he had told us we could set up a mini recording studio for one day if we wanted to and he knew somebody who had equipment we could borrow...He taught us how to use the mixing board and make recordings and all kinds of stuff. That was really good for me personally because one of my career choices might be to be a producer engineer.*

— Youth Participant, High School Afterschool Program

## Getting To Know the Young People In Your Program

Promoting successful learning experiences begins with focusing on the *learners*— their interests, needs, and abilities—then incorporating this knowledge into decisions about how best to engage them in activities that will achieve the learning goals of the program.

Choosing learning strategies and activities that are age appropriate based on young people's needs and interests and their stage of development is an important component of creating challenging and engaging learning environments. Take time in a staff meeting to consider the young people's stage of development and varied learning styles, and the implications for your program. Failing to take young people's developmental level into account when designing activities can lead to experiences of boredom or failure, which can undermine their confidence in their own learning abilities.

## Learning Styles and Intelligences

In order to connect with a variety of learners in your afterschool program you will need to be knowledgeable about the different ways people learn. This is crucial when planning skill building activities. Some people are *visual learners*, learning best from reading books, written instructions, and visual demonstrations. Others are *auditory learners*, processing information best from oral explanations. And still other people are *kinesthetic learners*, learning best from physical experience. Most of us learn best through a combination of these approaches, and from repeated encounters. According to Howard Gardner and other scientists, there are nine distinct forms of intelligence, which each individual possesses in varying degrees.

As you understand these concepts more fully, you can design activities that draw on the many different kinds of intelligences and talents of your young people in different areas. By doing this you can challenge and engage a diverse range of young people and create opportunities for each to shine.

## Integrating Learning Into All Activities

Researcher Milbrey McLaughlin has spent over a decade studying community- based youth programs. McLaughlin found that youth programs which are highly effective tend to create environments where young people are almost always “engaged in activities that deliberately teach a number of lessons...and build a range of academic competencies and life skills.”

In many cases, leaders of these programs built on already existing programs that had captured the interest of young people and expanded learning activities to include other content areas. McLaughlin cites examples of an arts program that asks young people to research their cultural history and then work together to create a mural expressing the themes they discovered; a dance class where participants keep journals and begin rehearsals by reading aloud from their writings; and sports programs that incorporate lessons on personal responsibility and teamwork.

To maximize learning in your afterschool program, begin by intentionally integrating multiple learning opportunities into all programs and activities and setting learning goals for each. As you plan each activity, identify how you will weave opportunities for learning into the activity and identify the specific strategies you will use to help young people meet the learning goals.

Allow enough time for staff to plan interesting and meaningful learning experiences that incorporate a variety of learning styles and intelligences. It is often a good idea to try out a new activity on a smaller group of youth, and ask for their feedback. Staff should also have opportunities to discuss what skills and knowledge they believe youth in the program need and together determine how these skills can be incorporated across all program activities. Some of the exercises at the end of this chapter may be useful in beginning this discussion. Ultimately, youth, parents, and community members should also be included in this planning.

## Instructional Strategies that Engage Young People

Afterschool programs can draw on a number of instructional strategies and learning models from the field of education that serve to actively engage learners. Both cooperative learning and project based-learning provide opportunities for young people to be engaged, to work and learn together, and to spend time not only learning new things, but acquiring a better understanding of how they learn. (For more information, see Chapter 6, *Fostering Meaningful Youth Participation*.)

### Cooperative Learning

Young people's learning in school is typically structured by each working individually or in competition with one another. Afterschool settings, however, offer the flexibility for young people to learn in alternative ways. Cooperative learning is an instructional method in which young people work together in small teams to promote their own learning as well as the learning of their peers; and where students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals.

Cooperative learning has been shown to be a highly effective way for young people to achieve their learning goals. They are able to engage with a diverse group of participants with different views, backgrounds, ideas and questions providing rich learning opportunities. According to the California Department of Education and others, cooperative learning is also viewed as a "powerful educational approach for helping all students attain content standards and develop the interpersonal skills needed for succeeding in a multicultural world."

Program leaders may engage young people in cooperative learning for moments at a time to share their thoughts and experiences or participate in a group decision. Cooperative learning can also be more formalized, lasting for an entire activity period or for several weeks. In an afterschool setting, young people can engage in cooperative learning groups to complete homework, make group decisions or do problem solving, research the answers to questions, conduct a survey or experiment, or complete complex projects together. (For more information on group projects, see Project-Based Learning, below.).

It is important to note, however, that cooperative learning requires that the group members are able to engage in activities in a teamwork setting. Also important is establishing an environment where participants feel safe, but challenged and keeping the groups small enough so that all can contribute.

"Social skills for effective cooperative work do not magically appear when cooperative lessons are employed. Instead, social skills must be taught to students just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills. Leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills empower students to manage both teamwork and task work successfully."





*If you talk to business people, they'll often talk about one of the first things that they're looking for in their employees is learning to work together. We want young people to be able to learn to work together. Their learning is better, ultimately product is better, and they're going to be able to be more productive, successful, contributing citizens.*

— Deborah Vandell, University of California, Irvine


## **Project-Based Learning (PBL) ([www.bie.org](http://www.bie.org))**

Project-Based Learning is a teaching and learning method that actively engages the participation and excitement of young people, and is well suited to afterschool settings. In project-based learning, young people work collaboratively over a period of time to investigate a topic area, focus on the development of a product or performance, or solve a problem related to real world issues. In tackling their projects, young people are provided with a guiding framework in which to work, but also the freedom to organize the process and activities necessary to reach a solution. This usually involves their organizing their activities, conducting research, solving problems, and synthesizing information across disciplines.

Project-based learning requires that young people have strong communication and teamwork skills, and are able to consider different points of view, and make decisions without conflict. It also requires sound planning on the part of program leaders.

You can solicit ideas for projects through "brainstorming" activities with program participants or build off of earlier projects and interests. When selecting project ideas, keep in mind that the topic should be closely related to a young person's everyday experiences or interests, so that they will be able to raise relevant questions and therefore actively engage with the subject matter. Project-based learning in afterschool settings can also promote a link with formal learning topics during the school day. Leaders should anticipate requests by participants to gather information or materials outside of the program facilities. Project-based learning offers great opportunities to connect with the greater community.

At the conclusion of a project, participants will often develop a group report, exhibition or performance, which will serve to motivate participants to achieve a high quality product, and offers them an opportunity for recognition and celebration.



*We are especially encouraged by the promise of project-based learning, which provides fertile ground for further developing social and emotional competencies with an equity frame. Projects are guided by youth, based on their own experiences, with the teacher as a facilitator and co-learner. As a result, students are more engaged and collaborative and issues of identity, justice, and fairness inevitably come up.*

- Robert Jagers, CASEL

## Connecting School Day Learning to Afterschool Activities

Increasingly, afterschool program leaders are being asked to support school day learning. This can be accomplished without losing your “youth friendly” afterschool environment or duplicating the learning methods of traditional classrooms. Begin by becoming knowledgeable about the curriculum content that will be covered in the classrooms of your participants. Are there themes, projects or activities you can incorporate to enrich young people’s interest and understanding of their classroom content? Teachers are wonderful resources for brainstorming ideas and program planning resources and materials.

Published academic standards are also a great resource to help you incorporate classroom learning with afterschool learning goals. Each school district and state department of education publishes standards that describe the destinations at which students should arrive at the end of a unit or term in reading, writing, math, fine arts, performing arts, fitness, and many other areas. Not only will your knowledge of these standards provide ideas on how to enrich your program activities, but they will provide you with a common language and framework that school day personnel will understand as you describe and promote your program.

## Providing Opportunities for Assessment, Feedback and Recognition

Young people are intrinsically invested in making progress and achieving their goals. Program leaders can support young people’s learning by establishing program learning objectives in advance of activities and helping young people to set their own personal learning objectives. Young people then need opportunities to measure their own progress and refine and improve their work, as well as receive on-going feedback from adults and recognition for their accomplishments.

- Assessment and feedback can take a variety of forms, including:
- Informal coaching and feedback between young people and adults;
- On-going structured opportunities where young people write about or describe their view of their own progress;

- The use of individual portfolios that demonstrate improvement over time;
- Peer review and group reflections on joint projects.

Opportunities for public recognition are also vital to building young people’s sense of confidence and accomplishment. These might include youth presentations, public celebrations of accomplishments, and events and performances that showcase the new skills and talents that young people have gained through their experiences in the program. Remember that the ability of young people to accept and make use of candid feedback from adults and peers is dependent on the trust and sense of safety young people feel in the program and the explicit value program leaders place on learning and self-improvement.

## **Taking Advantage of the Strengths of Afterschool Programs**

Afterschool programs have some unique features that make them different from school settings. By focusing on these characteristics, we can “play to our strengths” in designing our programs to be rich learning environments that also support young people’s healthy development.

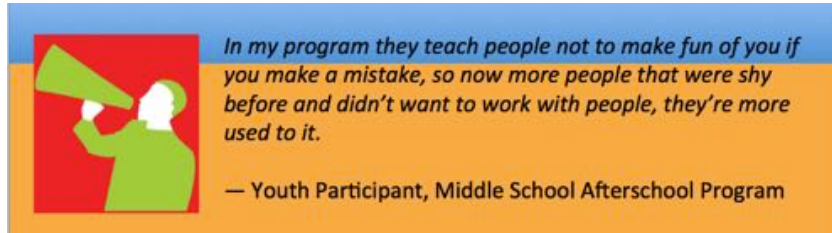
As we design our programs, we need to bear these features in mind so that we can take advantage of the unique opportunities that afterschool settings offer, and use these strengths to compliment and expand what goes on in the classroom, not merely replicate it.



## **5 Things You Can Do NOW to Create Challenging and Engaging Learning Experiences**

### **1. Create a safe place to learn.**

What makes a program a safe place to learn? Who better to ask than your young participants? What do the young people you work with think about mistakes? To get discussion started, read a book on famous mistakes that resulted in amazing inventions. Using this information, develop agreements and rules with the young people in your group to ensure the right of safety. Decide together what to do when agreements are broken. Post any agreements on the wall and refer to them often. And what about program staff? How do they respond to young people when mistakes are made? Consider how you can establish a program "culture" where everyone’s mistakes are seen as opportunities for new learning and the process of inquiry and discovery is more important than always having the correct answers.



## **2. Plan for the skills and knowledge you want your participants to acquire in your program.**

Often when planning programs, staff people go straight to lining up activities to fill a determined stretch of time, without thinking through what the learning goals are for a project or the overall program. Instead of identifying activities, work with staff to determine what kinds of knowledge and skills you want your young people to acquire over time through their participation in your program. They might be academic skills, study skills, leadership or team skills. Now, consider what kinds of experiences and activities you can provide over time that will meet your learning agenda. Don't feel like you have to do it alone! You can use or adapt curriculum materials to align with your participants' interests and needs, and draw on teachers and others around you who may have more experience in planning against learning outcomes.

## **3. Use portfolios to help participants reflect on their progress and accomplishments.**

If your participants have consistent enrollment over time or if participants engage in long term projects where they increase their skills ongoing, consider how you might collect their work over time. You can create a portfolio or personal file with your young participants to serve as an on-going record of their work. After several months or at the end of a project sit down with them to review their record of accomplishments. What do they think about it? What does their portfolio reflect back to them?

What kinds of records can be stored? For younger children, it might be a portfolio of self portraits that were done monthly, or simply their own file they use over time to store things they have done of which they are proud. For older youth who might be developing a set of skills over time, say in the arts or technology, communicate your project learning goals and ask them to develop personal learning goals, if appropriate. Assist them in assessing which goals they have met over time.

## **4. Increase independent access to diverse learning materials.**

Within your program, provide access to learning materials that young people can independently access. This allows young people to pursue their own interests or engage in their own inquiry without the need for adult-led structure, and is perfect for young people who finish their work ahead of schedule or who want to disengage for a period of time from group activities.

These may take the form of reading materials (books, magazines) or websites that are related to their interests or topics of study within your program. They can also be in the form of learning kits that have instructions and experiments with which they can involve themselves.

It is important that the materials are diverse and representative of the culture, gender, and abilities of your young people.

## **5. Recognize the accomplishments of your young people.**

Put in place opportunities for young people to be recognized for their accomplishments by others outside of the program. This can take place through performances, exhibits/presentations of completed projects, or celebrations where each child is acknowledged for his or her special accomplishments and contributions.

Sharing accomplishments with outsiders raises everyone's sense of accountability for deadlines and excellence. After a successful event, the positive effect on a group's sense of community and the individuals' experience of accomplishment can be quite profound.

## How Do You Know?



### **Take Your Program's Temperature: Self-Assess**

You can self-assess your program by using observations and reflection surveys with the afterschool staff and youth participants.

#### **What You See**

You can tell that a program has placed importance on promoting positive youth development experiences when you walk into the room, even before the participants arrive. After the adults and young people arrive, you can see that staff have worked to promote positive youth development experiences.

#### **What Young People Say**

Young people can tell you if they have positive youth development experiences in the program. The most reliable way to assess for these experiences is to ask the young people directly about their own experience of the program. Would young people in your program agree or disagree with these statements below?

# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS: How Do You Know?

## Directions

Self assess your program using observations and surveys. You can identify indicators that will allow staff and youth to self assess the degree to which the program helps young people to build new skills. You can use indicators from program quality surveys. Below are a few suggestions of what you would see and what youth would say.

## What You See


You can tell that a program has placed importance on creating challenging and interesting learning experiences for its participants when you walk into the room and see:

- Program materials selected based on the ages, abilities and backgrounds of the participants.
- Activities organized to include young people with a wide range of skills.
- Activities organized using SAFE features – Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit.
- Activities provide opportunities for young people to work on their own and in small groups; the size of the group is linked to the purpose of the activity.
- Opportunities to learn academic and life skills through program activities that appeal to young people.
- Young people trying a variety of problem-solving strategies, including asking for help from adults and peers, when facing challenges in activities.
- Young people demonstrating new abilities and applying their skills to new tasks.
- The program draws on the talents of many different kinds of “teachers” who support the participants’ learning: community workers, parents, older or “expert” peers, as well as classroom teachers.
- Young people receiving recognition for their accomplishments informally and through celebrations and performances.
- Young people receiving on-going feedback from adults and reflecting on their own progress; and young people regularly sharing *their* feedback on the program with program leaders, including whether or not they feel challenged by activities.

## What Young People Say

The best way to assess whether young people are learning new skills and feel challenged and engaged in the process is to ask them. How would young people in your program respond to the statements below? Would they agree or disagree?

- I learn how to do new things here.
- The activities here are fun.
- In this program, I learn things that I have a personal interest in.
  
- I get to do things here that I don’t get to do anywhere else.

- 
- In this program, I get to learn how to do things I did not think I could do.
  - Staff here challenge me to do my best.
  - In this program, I am getting better at doing things I care about.
  - I am able to set my own goals around the things I learn here.

## **Reflection**

What are some things you see in your program that indicate challenging and engaging learning experiences are being offered? What are some things you would like to see?



## Staff Development Tools and Activities



Promoting the youth development experiences detailed in the Youth Development Guide 2.0 requires consensus among staff to make this a program priority and to develop strategies to make it happen.

Below are some tools for promoting discussion with your staff or others at your agency or school. The following Personal Reflection Exercises are a good way to spark discussion. If there is a local youth serving agency that is known for their emphasis on and success in promoting positive youth development for young people, you may want to invite someone from that agency in as a guest speaker to offer inspiration and share their experience.



# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS:

## Personal Reflection

### Directions

This exercise is intended to help program staff think about what goes into a high quality learning experience. It can serve as a good opening to focus the group on the importance of learning in an afterschool context.

Begin by telling participants that you are going to do a personal reflection. Ask them to close their eyes. Read the following aloud:

*Take a moment to think about an engaging learning experience you have had—a time when you were fully involved in what you were doing and the rest of the world seemed to fall away. Think about what you were learning, who was there, and how you felt.*

- What do you think led you to be so deeply engaged in this experience?
- What was interesting to you about what you were learning?
- How did you become interested in what you were learning?
- Were you in a group or alone? Did you have a teacher? What was his/her style?
- If you had a teacher, did you trust that person? Why did you trust or not trust that person?
- What modes of learning were you using (visual, auditory, physical)?
- What else stands out for you about the experience?

### Group Discussion

Before holding a group discussion you might want to give the participants an opportunity to write down some highlights of what they learned in the Personal Reflection Exercise. Then hold a discussion using the following questions to facilitate sharing and learning from each participant's experience.

- Why might it be important for young people to have challenging and engaging learning opportunities out of school?
- Why might it be important to account for different styles and modes of learning?
- How does this relate to the outcomes of your afterschool program?
- What is the impact on young people when they don't have engaging learning opportunities out of school?

# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS: Brainstorm for Integrating Learning Opportunities

## Materials needed

- Flip chart
- Markers

## Directions

This exercise is intended to help staff understand how to make learning more intentional in your program, and to begin developing program goals that are related to creating challenging and engaging learning experiences that build skills. Once staff have begun to understand how program activities provide young people with learning experiences, they will be able to talk with parents, funders, and community members about the important role non-academic programming can play in fostering learning.

As a group, brainstorm for five minutes about the most fundamental things young people in your program need to know in order to lead happy and productive lives. Label these “Learning Goals.” Try to be specific: If you think that young people need to learn “responsibility,” does this mean cleaning up after themselves, time management, money management, or all of the above? Don’t try to come up with a complete list, just a broad list of the different kinds of things young people need to learn.

Post the brainstormed list on the wall and then choose one of your program activities to highlight in a group brainstorming session. For example, homework club, athletic programs or a cooking class. For five minutes, ask group members to try to list all of the things that a young person can learn through the selected activity. If the activity chosen is designed to teach a specific skill or concept, think beyond it to the other lessons and skills young people can learn through the activity. For example, if the activity is a sport, what might the activity teach young people beyond the particular rules of the game and the physical skills required? Label these “Learning Opportunities.”

## Group discussion

Compare the two lists. Is there overlap? Are there ways that the activity could be structured to help young people learn more of the things on your “Learning Goals” list? Are there “additional learning opportunities available in the activity that you could highlight or reinforce more effectively? How? What signs would indicate that young people are learning these lessons through this activity? Can you build time into the activity for young people to plan, practice and perform these skills? Is there time for young people to reflect, receive feedback, and be recognized for their accomplishments?

# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS:

## Practice Teaching

### Directions

This exercise offers a chance for staff working in your afterschool program to learn new teaching strategies from each other and to get feedback on their teaching styles.

Break into teams of two or three. Give each team 15 minutes to plan a three-minute lesson for the rest of the group. It doesn't matter what they are teaching—it can be something simple or silly like the words to a new song or how to pass notes without being caught. You can even teach something the group already knows, such as how a seed grows into a plant or how to cross the street safely. Try to create your lesson so that it addresses a range of learning styles and intelligences.

After each lesson take time for group feedback. What worked well about the lesson? What learning styles and intelligences were addressed? (Unless the group has developed a high level of trust, focus only on positive comments). If there had been more time, how could you have engaged other learning styles and intelligences in this lesson?

### Variations

1. If you don't have time for the entire group to present, have one team present at each of several meetings.
2. If a staff member has had a particularly successful teaching experience with the young person, have them present that lesson to the entire group, and analyze what made it work.
3. Do a practice lesson in which participants are unable to use their eyes, ears, hands, or voices, etc. to force the "teacher" to consider how to reach them through other means.



# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS: Staff Training Topics

## Directions

Create a staff development plan that includes training topics that would ensure that the young people in your program have opportunities for building skills. Together with your staff and program leadership, identify training topics that are related to building skills. Below are a few suggestions:

- Creating a lesson plan
- Engaging multiple intelligences and learning styles
- Cooperative learning strategies
- Project based learning strategies
- Teaching literacy and math skills
- Training in specific skills to share with young people



# ENGAGING LEARNING THAT BUILDS SKILLS: Checklist for Action

## Directions

Now you are ready to start increasing the learning opportunities in your program! This checklist is meant to help you stay organized and focused. Using it will help you ensure the success of your program. This checklist will help you stay focused and organized as you begin to make building skills a priority in your program.

### Have You:

- Set aside staff time to thoroughly plan how to integrate challenging and engaging learning experiences into your program?
- Learned about different learning styles and how to teach in a variety of ways?
- Asked the young people what they want to learn, what their interests are, and what they think young people in their particular age group need to know?
- Learned about the cultural backgrounds of the young people in your program and about their daily lives outside of the program?
- Learned about the developmental needs of the age group(s) your program serves?
- Assessed the different learning styles of your group, and discovered what they are already doing in the classroom?
- Looked for ways to intentionally embed learning opportunities into your program activities?
- Included learning goals in your program goals and outcomes?
- Considered ways to include cycles of planning, practicing and performing in different program activities?
- Established opportunities for young people to reflect and assess their own progress in activities?
- Discussed your challenges with co-workers and classroom teachers?
- Incorporated ongoing evaluation of the extent to which program activities offer challenging and engaging learning experiences and their outcomes?

## For Organizational Leaders



### Organizational Practices That Promote Youth Development

Successful youth development programs are born out of a culture, policies, resources and structures that are established by the program provider’s parent organization. As anyone who has struggled with too few resources or mismatched organizational priorities knows, the best staff in the world working with the deepest knowledge and understanding cannot create high quality experiences for young people without certain organizational supports in place.

**Organizational Practices That Support Youth Development & Learning**

- Low ratio of youth to staff/volunteers
- Safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces
- Flexibility in allocating available resources
- Continuity and consistency of care
- High, clear and fair standards
- Ongoing, results-based staff & organizational improvement process
- Youth involvement
- Community engagement

Many teachers and youth workers have noted that the kinds of organizational practices described on the left work best when they are applied consistently at all levels of the agency or school. For example, the sponsoring school or agency must commit to holding high, clear, and fair standards for the staff, just as they do for the young participants. In this way, staff experience what they need to succeed, and the functioning of the organization at a macro-level mirrors the functioning at the program level—everyone “walks the talk.”

Putting these organizational practices in place takes time, energy, and resources. In particular, program staff must have the time outside of their program duties to talk to each other, talk informally with young people, get to know the community, plan, evaluate, and learn. These organizational practices require the commitment of everyone at the agency or school, from the administration to the janitorial staff to the volunteers. The following are suggested organizational practices that are related to youth development practices.

# Organizational Practices that Support Engaging Learning and the Building of Skills

## Low Youth to Staff/Volunteer Ratio

The more staff and volunteers in the room, the more learning experiences can be tailored to the needs of individual learners. Low ratios of youth to adults are also vital to promoting a sense of safety and encouraging relationship building, both of which are crucial prerequisites to high-quality learning.

## Safe, Reliable, and Accessible Activities and Spaces

It is not unusual for afterschool programs to be assigned meeting spaces that are inadequate, due to surrounding noise or distractions, the lack of table space or running water, or other problems. To prevent frustration on the part of all parties, ensure that your meeting space supports the learning objectives and activities you have planned. If it doesn't, consider reorganizing your activities where possible and/or having your organizational leader negotiate for better space. Young people, especially adolescents who are going to be practicing new skills, often prefer spaces that offer some privacy from peers who may not be part of their program.

## Range of Diverse, Interesting Learning Activities

When there are many opportunities to engage in different areas of learning, young people can focus on the learning that seems most relevant to them, and on modes of learning that work best for them. Like adults, they are most likely to take on the work and the risk of learning a new skill when it is interesting and when they feel it will help them in their lives.

## Flexibility in Allocating Resources

The more flexibility your program has in allocating resources, the more you will be able to take advantage of unexpected teaching and learning opportunities when they arise. Could your staff and program change the focus of activities for five minutes, one day, or the rest of the year if young people's interests or needs indicated that this would increase learning within your program?

## Continuity and Consistency of Care

It takes time to become familiar with the learning style of an individual, and to develop the trust necessary to foster learning. It is helpful to remember that, unfortunately, many young people have had negative experiences with adults in teaching roles who have not supported their learning. Once a young person has had a successful learning experience with an adult, they are more likely to give that person their best effort in the future. It is important for that adult to remain available consistently for that young person. Organizational leaders and program staff need to consider how to implement practices and policies that support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and volunteers.



## **High, Clear, and Fair Standards**

Once young people have had success as learners, it is important to keep inspiring them to grow in their skills. When we lay out standards clearly, young people can see their intermediate successes on the way to larger goals. Success can also be defined in terms of individual growth, rather than adopting one standard against which all are measured. Many programs use individual goal-setting as a way to help young people measure their own progress.

## **Providing Opportunities for Learning at All Levels of the Organization**

When the entire agency is a learning community, everyone is engaged in a process of setting goals, learning skills, and evaluating progress. Learning becomes a fully integrated part of programming. Additionally, when program leaders view themselves as learners and learning as a constant process, they model lifelong learning for young people. In particular, it is important for organizations to provide staff with opportunities for on-going training to strengthen their teaching skills.





# AFTERWORD AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## Afterword

This version of the Youth Development Guide is possible thanks to the effort of many individuals representing various perspectives of the field of youth development.

We hope this Guide challenges some old assumptions or habits and replaces them with concrete information, strategies and tools. Each chapter is meant to build on the previous one to create a strong foundational knowledge of the field of youth development. The work of youth development professionals is critical to society.

Don't stop here at this Guide! The field continues to evolve, which requires us to pause and reflect on both from where we've come and where do we want to go? Take the time for yourself, or with your team or your organization or school to continue to deepen and expand your learning. The resources are out there. Whether it's another book or a certificate program at the local community college or online courses-even Masters and Doctoral degree programs. The work of supporting young people through their moral, social, cognitive, emotional and physical development requires skilled, thoughtful, knowledgeable and innovative individuals, like you!

## Useful Websites

Below are a handful of websites that are worth checking out. They are often excellent sources of the latest research, evaluation, and field reports.

- Afterschool Alliance <https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>
- Aspen Institute <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/>
- Buck Institute for Education (Project-based learning) <http://www.bie.org/>
- Character.org <http://character.org/>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>
- Expanded Learning 360°/365 <http://www.expandedlearning360-365.com/>
- Forum For Youth Investment <http://forumfyi.org/>
- Greater Good Science Center <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>
- Inner Explorer (Mindfulness) <https://innerexplorer.org/>
- Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Project <http://learninginafterschool.org>
- National AfterSchool Association (NAA) <https://naaweb.org/>
- Partnership for Children and Youth <https://www.partnerforchildren.org/>
- Temescal Associates <http://temescalassociates.com>
- Tribes TLC® [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com)
- Wallace Foundation <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/>
- Youth Development Strategies, Inc. <http://www.ydsi.org>





