



## An Inclusive Environment

An inclusive environment allows participants to develop a sense of belonging. These environments also encourage and support participants and provide positive feedback. Community groups can provide opportunities for youth to “fit in” and be a part of activities that stress cooperation and shared goals. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members and take pride in the collective efforts of all.

### In our youth group.....

- Do youth and adults feel included rather than excluded?
- Do youth and adults feel a sense of belonging?
- Do youth and adults feel valued and needed?
- Are youth actively involved in planning and implementing programs and activities?
- Are youth and adults sensitive to cultural or physical barriers deterring youth participation?

### Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop an inclusive environment:

- Provide activities where there are no losers.
- Have an induction ceremony for new members.
- Have members bring a "show and tell" representing their cultural heritage.
- Assign new members a mentor or a friendly helper.
- Include all group members in sharing the highlights of a group activity or event. Welcome comments and questions.
- Celebrate important milestones with ceremonies or special occasions.
- Confront cliques or behaviors that exclude someone from group events.
- Include a team building activity in each meeting.
- Develop group t-shirts, buttons, hats, or other items to show members belong to the group.

**Why provide an inclusive environment?** All youth want and need to feel they belong...whether at home, at school, or in other groups. Community groups can give youth opportunities to --fit-in" and engage in activities that stress cooperation and shared goals. When youth feel they fit in, they are more apt to contribute to the group and to engage in positive peer relationships that benefit your community, too.