



Opportunities for Self-Determination

The premise of this element of positive youth development is that youth are encouraged to try new things and learn about themselves. As a result, they discover and practice their individual interests and skills, test their independence and take control of their lives. Self-determination provides youth opportunities to feel they have control in their lives—that they can make a some personal decisions. Using individual likes and dislikes, interests and skills, youth can make choices.

In our youth group.....

- Are youth challenged to attempt new things or learn new skills?
- Do youth have an opportunity to learn something about themselves?
- Do youth have the opportunity to be someone special?
- Are there opportunities for youth to apply skills and knowledge to their everyday lives?
- Do youth set up their own rules and guidelines for behavior within the group?

Some practices your group might want to implement to provide opportunities for self-determination:

- Allow time at meetings and events for youth to share their experiences.
- Provide opportunities for older youth to mentor or be a “Big Friend” to younger youth.
- Provide opportunities for older youth to plan, implement and evaluate an activity for younger youth.
- Encourage youth to participate in decision-making activities at the local level and beyond.
- Make certain that young people are heard and taken seriously.
- Provide opportunities for youth to experience meaningful challenges.
- Provide leadership opportunities for youth.
- When youth are expected to work on projects, allow them to organize their work to fit their style.
- When choosing an activity to do as a group, help them explore different options before making the group decision.
- When choosing a community service project, survey interests and hobbies of group members before helping them design the project.

Why provide opportunities for self-determination? If given opportunities for independent thinking and taking on personal responsibility, youth will develop a sense of who they are. Youth need opportunities to experiment with different choices, evaluate what happens because of them, and consequently learn to improve the quality of their decisions.