



A Safe Environment

Another element in positive youth development is an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for young people. Youth should not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in your group activities. The learning environment with the adults and peers should be supportive and safe for youth. Young people will learn better and participate more fully when they are in an environment that encourages trust, honesty and respect among all youth and adults.

In our youth group.....

- Do youth feel safe at our events and activities?
- Are children teased or ridiculed at our events or activities?
- Are the opinions of each member valued and respected by all participants?
- Is everyone willing to share ideas at meetings?
- Does everyone treat all others—members, parents and volunteers—equally?
- Are we flexible, but consistent?
- Are adults supportive rather than critical?
- Do youth believe their concerns and opinions are welcomed and valued?
- Are places where we meet or conduct activities accessible in terms of location, cost, disabled access?
- Is there an acceptable ratio of adults to youth at group activities?

Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop a safe environment:

- Treat each child as an individual...remember he/she is a unique and special person.
- Make a conscious effort to choose words that “build up” rather than “tear down” youth.
- Train all adults on how to handle emergencies.
- Educate adults on working effectively with youth—child development, behavior, age appropriate activities.
- Establish group goals and activities with youth and adults working as equal partners.
- Pair up experienced and new members to help new members learn the customs and traditions of the group.
- Involve all group members in establishing and enforcing group rules for participation, interacting with others, and discipline.
- Establish agreed upon expectations for follow-through and responsibilities toward group activities.
- Consider family and community situations when dealing with group members having difficulty meeting group norms and expectations.

Why provide a safe environment? In safe environments, youth express their thoughts and ideas without fear of being laughed at and without fear of harm or danger. Youth and adults feel emotionally safe when there are no put-downs or disrespectful behavior. Learning, consistency and structure in youth activities help youth learn what is expected and to feel included.