PREPARING YOUTH TO THRIVE

Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning

2.4 Teamwork Practices

Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.

INTRODUCTION

Teamwork skills have always been important and have become increasingly necessary in a crowded, global world where the future depends on people working together successfully. Teamwork skills include many of the same competencies as empathy: mutual respect, active listening, sensitivity to others' feelings, and attentiveness to diverse perspectives. What distinguishes teamwork skills from empathy is the ability to form a cohesive, high-functioning group that works together effectively toward shared goals. Developing these skills can be a powerful experience for youth. As Paul Griffin, Founder and President of The Possibility Project (TPP) put it:

> Once they feel like they belong, that's a big deal. They get a thrill out of creating something over a long period of time.

We know what an effective team looks like: Members trust each other, are collectively invested in shared work and goals, and have shared norms, or an ethos, for how they coordinate their efforts and solve problems that arise. The challenges in learning teamwork skills start with that uncertain process of finding common ground and forming a social contract with people one may not know (or may know and dislike). And then there is the challenge of balancing the human needs for autonomy and self-protection (of one's time, emotional energy, and dignity) with the giving of oneself to the common good. Individuals often differ in what they are able to contribute—ideas, skills, tasks they can do that others can't do—so learning to navigate fairness can be challenging. Youth also need to learn strategies for dealing with different types of difficult team members and avoiding different kinds of unconstructive group dynamics.

Similar to other social and emotional skills sets, teens best learn teamwork skills through doing. However, substantial research shows that, left to themselves, certain groups of youth will teach each other deviant rather than constructive group behavior[47]. In successful programs, staff allow youth to learn from each other, but they ensure that group formation gets off to a good start, often through structured activities. They help youth create and sustain positive group norms for maximum group functioning, and they provide ongoing modeling, coaching, and facilitation of effective group performance.

Table 6. Teamwork Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	YE

TRUST AND COHESION. Youth develop group cohesion and trust.

Youth participate in work teams that (T1) develop cohesion and trusting relationships and (T2) a sense of group identity and purpose.

COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.

(T3) Youth work together toward shared goals.
(T4) Youth practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement).
(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.

TEAM CHALLENGE. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.

(T6) Youth practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

STAFF PRACTICES	SP

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.

(T7) Staff help youth cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work.

MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with youth.

(T8) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-youth and staff-staff interactions.

FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.

e) (T9) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics. This includes:
f) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all youth's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility);
g) intervening only as needed, allowing youth to lead group processes;
h) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity);
i) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

TRUST AND COHESION. Youth develop group cohesion and trust.   YE

Youth participate in work teams that (T1) develop cohesion and trusting relationships and (T2) a sense of group identity and purpose.

People develop the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes of teamwork through membership in well-functioning teams. So the first key experience for youth in SEL Challenge programs is participating in group formation. This begins at the start of each new session as staff promote cohesion and collaboration among the new group of youth. For the SEL Challenge programs, fostering group identity and building trusting relationships is essential to the success of the individual projects, so it is a priority from the start and continues to be a focus for the duration. Trust and cohesion form an important base on which the other social and emotional skills are built.

All of the SEL Challenge programs have an explicit focus on team-building exercises at the start of the year. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) spends 3–4 weeks at the beginning solely focusing on relationship building, team building, and group formation. TPP's Paul Griffin described how team-building activities provide opportunities for youth to practice teamwork skills and debrief and discuss their experiences in a safe atmosphere:

> When it comes to teamwork it's about doing exercises that allow youth to work together as a team and then process out their experience as a team, so that they're understanding the techniques like the craft of being a good team member and how teams work, but also beginning to believe in that as an idea.

Team-building activities can range from initiatives to physical challenges to conversations. Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), described one of their activities where developing trust is essential:

> There is a person who is belaying a climber and if the climber doesn't know the belayer, it is difficult for them to climb a 30-foot rock face and know the belayer is holding that climber's life in their hands. First, it is difficult to trust their peer, who they may not consider very responsible, and ask them to take that risk and step outside of their comfort zone and trust that peer. Second, to have the climb go well is a huge deal for them because it builds trust between the two.

Physical challenges like this provide good contexts for building trust. Trust is also developed by sharing at a deeper level than what typically happens in the normal course of day-to-day peer interactions. One youth from YWCA Boston (YW Boston) described it in her own words:

> At InIt we're talking more about issues and stuff that affects us, and we share some stories that we might not have shared with some of the friends that we've known our whole lives. I feel like we are like a community, and that we are really close in a way.

As the individual youth get to know each other better and understand the work ahead of them, members develop a shared group identity. They discover and start to care about the "we." This sense of group identity may form in part from developing a connection to a collective purpose, such as a set of goals that is bigger than themselves. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, Director of Operations at VOBS, explained:

> To me [purpose] is greater than goals. Purpose is more mission-driven. It helps create the group culture and gives them an identity. I think of it as the values aspect of what brings the group together for their collaboration. In our work, the group develops a purpose together as they progress through expedition. It may take the shape of a mission statement or a group contract.

To achieve the group purpose or mission, the youth identify common goals. In many programs, veteran youth help carry over some of the culture, identity, and mission from prior years. At Youth on Board (YOB), where campaigns may last several years, alumni re-establish commitment to ongoing campaigns by exploring their

interests and motivations for working on issues that are important to the current group of youth. At BGCGM and TPP, youth ask themselves what message they want the community to hear about the lives of teens. At Wyman, youth identify the service they want to provide to the community. At VOBS, youth may agree to support each other to overcome challenges and to not leave any team members behind. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter said:

> In the fall we are trying to do two things. One is get them to identify what they really want to accomplish and the skills that they need to do that. Second, we hope to build the community so that they have the support that they need and want from each other, so it's a positive support group in helping each other achieve those goals, and to remind themselves and each other when they're falling away from that.

In some groups, this sense of shared mission leads to the experience of having "one voice." It may be a collective voice of the youth in their program, or it might reflect a more universal voice of youth who are also working for a similar cause. Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning at BGCGM, said:

> Then we kind of take the kids on a journey to start exploring things. That exploration may be anything from a group activity to research to exposure. Then the kids have to kind of hone in collaboratively and collectively to identify one voice that will emanate across all the groups. So everybody has a voice, everybody wants to be heard, but for the sake of the project, we have to identify what that unified voice is.

The development of group identity and trusting relationships is seen in reduced defensiveness, increased supportive feedback, strengthening relationships, receiving focused attention, listening, physical affection, holding hands, and sharing. This grows over the course of the program. The following is an example from Paul Griffin at TPP:

> When they're doing paired work in the beginning, you know, just simple mirroring exercises, they can't even stand in front of each other for five minutes without giggling and breaking down and having to walk away. They just can't even be in the same space with another young person for that long. Fast forward nine months, and suddenly they're able to be backstage in a dark theatre for two hours at a time in each other's presence.
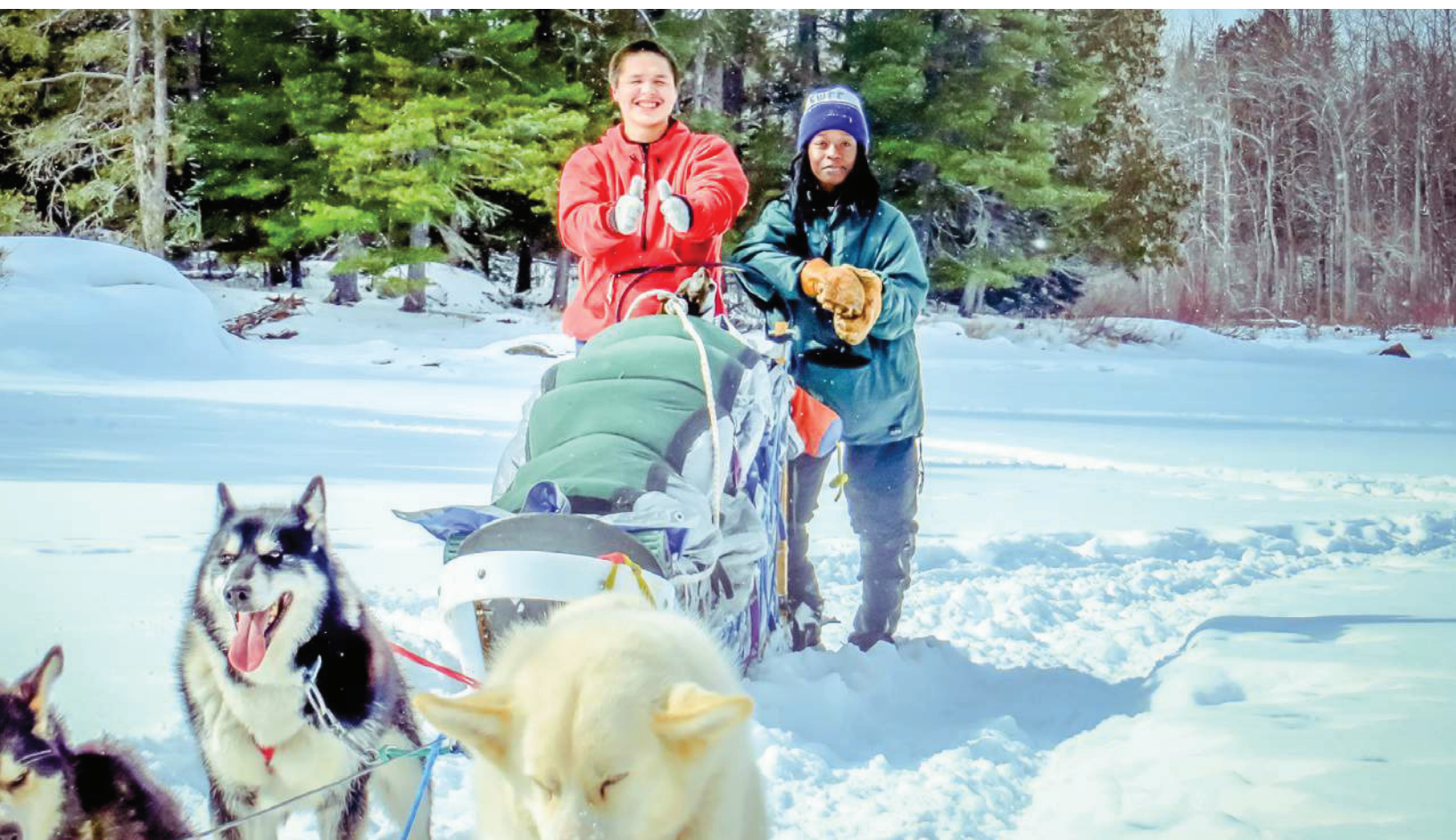
Development of trusting team relationships creates conditions for youth to begin practicing and honing skills and sensibilities for working together.

<div style="background-color:olive">**COLLABORATION.** Youth participate in successful collaboration.</div> YE

Collaborative work is a common element across the SEL Challenge programs and an important key experience to learning teamwork skills. This includes collaborative work building a boat, conducting a community-service project or advocacy campaign, an outdoor excursion, or working on developing relationship wisdom in a group context. The following section contains descriptions of three components of successful collaboration: shared goals, effective communication, and valuing group members' contribution. As youth experience these, their teamwork skills grow.

(T3) Youth work together toward shared goals.

Having goals puts purpose and mission into specific terms. Sharing those goals and the purpose they support is essential to building teamwork. In some programs, the goals are easy to identify. An apprentice at Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF) said:

> We all want the common goal. We just want a boat that can float in water.

At VOBS, the goal may be getting the canoe to move forward rather than sideways. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter added:

> Sometimes people find it very challenging to make a canoe go straight. They know that if they're the person in the back they have the most power in the boat, and it can become very frustrating if they can't get their boat to go straight. I've seen some people say, "We've got to switch roles," and they move around so that they figure out together how to make it go straight, or begin to practice their canoe stroke and the different kinds of strokes they can use to straighten out a canoe until they get it. Then they understand the power and the force of their partner and what they need their partner to do to help them go down the river or across the lake.

In some programs, the youth must decide on the goal for their project. Whatever the goal, the youth learn that a lack of teamwork hinders reaching their goal. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

> If you're working together as a team to actually create something, and that work is being presented in front of everyone else; we're seeing some things work, some don't. They start to have an experience that has a goal that has meaning. You double down on that when you're working on a show where a group will work together over three or four months to create their narrative. As they're going along and doing their run-throughs and looking at their work they're saying, "Wow this sucks!" We're like, "The reason it sucks is because you guys aren't working together very well, so what are we going to do?" And now we're talking about how we're going to deal with that and now they're having to apply all of that. The key is that they have to do it, they have to build their team.

Whether the goal is clear from the start or emerges over time with youth and staff input, having and naming the shared goal helps set the group up for success. As with purpose, common goals provide a shared investment in an outcome that transcends individuals. It provides a rallying point for making shared decisions, navigating disagreements, and deciding who will do what.

(T4) Youth practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement).

Effective teamwork takes a certain set of skills that can broadly be termed communication skills. These skills include turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement, and communicating clearly. For youth to learn healthy teamwork skills, effective and respectful communication needs to be valued and normative. For many programs, establishing group norms and expectations for communicating is a process that typically occurs in the first few meetings and is then reinforced throughout the year. For more on this process, see Empathy.

Collaboration on a project requires that youth learn to communicate with each other. At YW Boston, youth who attend the same school may, for the first time, be working together on a project. Beth Chandler, vice president of programs, explained:

> They aren't necessarily friends before they get here, so there are challenges in learning to work with people who may have different work styles. You have to learn to listen actively because you need to hear where everybody is coming from so you can try to all move in a direction that you all agree on. You have to figure out how to manage time.

For some youth, learning to communicate well may mean training themselves to resist their typical behaviors and reactions. In this example from Elizabeth Howard, artistic director of Afterschool Programs at TPP, a young woman was asked to change her behavior in order to fit with the group expectations:

> I've had cast members who stick with the fight. That's what they do, and in the first three months anyone they don't like, they threaten. They come into this program with that attitude. I had a girl do that and my production team handled it. They kept talking to her, "That's not what we do here. You don't have to do that here." And I even said, "You don't have to do that here. You can let it go. I know it's hard to let go. For some of us it's scary because that's what's keeping us feeling safe, but you really don't have to do it here. And you can't do it here. If you fight we're going to ask you to leave. You don't have to be that person here." And over time, she let it go.

Work on collaborative projects presents many opportunities for youth to communicate with each other, and staff support youth to recognize when their communication is effective and when it's not. Research on the development of teamwork in classrooms indicates explaining how to do things supports skill learning for both the giver and the receiver of the explanation[48]. As youth become better communicators, they become better able to express themselves and interpret messages from those they're working with. Often these skills carry over into other parts of life. A youth from PWBF reinforced this concept:

> In my school, some classes we do a lot more group projects, and originally, like back in eighth grade, I would sit there in the group and just do my work and sit there and not talk at all. But now I take charge. I try and make more friends since most of the time I don't get put in groups with my friends. I learned how to cooperate with people more and learned how to get the job done through the work of other people that I don't really [converse] with.

COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.	YE
(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.	

Teamwork that engages and depends on the involvement of all members of the group has been shown to be an effective mode of learning. Research shows that youth are most likely to learn teamwork skills when activities are structured so that success can only be achieved through collaboration[49]. Staff at successful out-of-school programs must identify the strengths, challenges, and working styles of the youth participants and work with rather than against these factors. Youth may have different roles in the project, and deciding on these roles so that each person's contribution is valued and affirmed is part of the process in some programs. Here are two examples from SEL Challenge programs:

> Julie Thayer at YW Boston: To accomplish their projects, students must work together to apply the skills and knowledge they have learned throughout the program to a specific project. Using their knowledge of communication and leadership styles, delegates identify their respective skills and talents to inform their action plans. They assign themselves tasks and hold themselves accountable for completion.

Natalie Cooper at BGCGM: Through the process of that group work, somebody's always going to step up to be a leader; somebody is always going to step up to take charge. The kids have kind of been able to identify ways to give different people opportunities to do that. So it kind of forces them to come to the forefront and to act as a glue, if that makes sense, within their individual groups.

The SEL Challenge programs also work to create a culture of recognizing the contributions of individuals to the team. Often, this is done by rituals or practices of expressing gratitude or affirmation. As Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB put it:

They create a culture of listening and understanding and empathy and respect and appreciation for one another.

As the year progresses, youth learn to express sincere, substantive, and specific affirmations, which is noteworthy, as substantive and specific praise has been shown in research to be associated with improved learning[50]. Teena-Marie Johnson, education organizer at YOB, said:

We do a lot of appreciation in our work. As the year progresses we'll notice differences in what people appreciate. In the beginning of the year they were like, "I appreciate Faja for always hanging out with me and being there for me." And then at the end of the year, the kids are like, "I appreciate Faja for always pushing me to do the work and always believing in me." It gets deeper and a lot more personal.

A similar ritual of appreciations occurs at the PWBF, as described by Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail:

We wrap it up at the end of the night, and this is where we have questions and students reflect on the day and on their work and where students might want to recognize someone for help. We really try to model that, like, "Hey, you know, I just want to recognize Javon for really helping me out to get this longboard scarfed. It was heavy and your help really made it a lot easier for me and thank you for setting down your work that time when I was in need."

Stating appreciations aloud to the group affirms youth's contributions, provides instructive feedback on skills they demonstrated, and strengthens the youth's sense of belonging and importance to the group.

TEAM CHALLENGE. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships. YE

(T6) Youth practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

Creating and maintaining effective working relationships is an advanced skill. There are many challenges that can thwart or undermine effective teamwork, including poor communication skills or group dynamics, disagreements, everyday work frustrations, negative energy or problem behaviors of individuals, and social conflicts. These challenges must be overcome in order to work effectively together. Jennifer Freed, co-executive director at AHA!, described different roles and patterns that tend to play out in group dynamics:

Somebody talking way too much, somebody going and goofing around, somebody hardly talks or looks at anybody, somebody's always trying to bring somebody out and rescue them. I mean, they're just human. They just do it. Somebody is always telling facts [rather than] sharing their feelings—that's the know-it-all. So these things just happen, and they happen very reliably, but we're not our roles or our acts and so we really facilitate the group to help people move out of their regimented roles.

Differences of opinion and personality occur and need to be worked through by the group, whether the end product is a theatrical production, a community service project, or a boat. Natalie Cooper at BGCGM, said:

The process for getting kids to agree on anything is very tedious. There's a lot of arguing. When the kids are forced to bring together 22 ideas and formulate one, there's a battle. You definitely can see the strong personalities taking surface, but what's even more powerful is when one of those strong voices can see that

> there's a sister or brother in the room who has a thought like them, they want to say something, but they're scared to say something, and instead of using their voice to share their ideas, they share the idea of the person who isn't yet comfortable to speak. That's powerful.

Beth Chandler at YW Boston said:

> One of the other things that we work on over the course of the year is being able to give and receive constructive feedback. It's important particularly when you have to work in a team of people. So sometimes youth might be very good at giving constructive feedback, but not always good at receiving it. We work on being able to have conversations where youth are able to share their perspective, but then also hear somebody else's perspective and be able to respect what that person is saying even if it may be different from what they believe, and also be able to think about, "What should I be taking away from this comment?"

Youth can take their frustrations out on each other. But sometimes they are able to move on easily. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS:

> I am, on a regular basis, completely shocked at one, how resilient kids are, and two, how forgiving and open kids are, and it's a quality that I am very envious of. They think, "Okay that went wrong. That didn't go well. Let's move on. We just fought five minutes ago, that's cool, we're going to move on and come together as a group."

Being comfortable with each other allows productive teamwork to emerge. A youth from the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) at YOB described it this way:

> BSAC has some of the most beautiful debates I've ever seen. We can go on and on, but really all that argument, all it really shows is how much we care about it and how much we put into it and how much we want a solution and how much we really want a change. We'll all be mad at each other and then the next day say, "Hey, guys." I think that's the important part. When we're debating, when we're going over these things, it's about, "Here's why I think this part isn't going to work. That was a great idea, and I totally appreciate you putting it out there, but here's where I see that this part of your plan is not going to work and maybe this will work better." So it's a productive environment.

These are ideal examples of youth learning teamwork skills through self-observation and reflection, both individually and in the group. When the conditions in (T1) to (T5) are in place, youth learn on their own and from each other. They also learn how to learn within a group.

Youth can also learn when team challenges arise that involve problem behavior or negative energy that ends up affecting the group. Lying, physical fights, and interpersonal relationships among group members are difficulties that some of the SEL Challenge sites have had to deal with, according to our research. Elizabeth Howard at TPP said:

> We had been working for about two months on the show, and they were getting on each other's nerves and got into this huge fight in the cast circle; so much so that I was holding both of them apart by my hands. They were going to like *fight,* fight. I had to drag one of them out into the other room and the cast is just sitting there. That affects the whole cast because now what? Two of our members are about to fist fight, which is the opposite of what we're trying to do here. What do we do with that? So we had to sit down and have a talk about it. Like everyone had to calm down and we had to deal with that conflict. The whole cast had to decide how we wanted to deal with that and what's happening.

Sometimes the problems youth experience at home can affect the tone of the group. Staff can support youth by offering some perspective on difficult situations. Sometimes it can be taxing on program leaders to determine how to deal with some of these issues among participants which clearly have an impact on their peers. Victoria Guidi at PWBF said:

> I've got one student who's got some really challenging stuff going on and at home, and he brings it into the shop all the time. It's taxing on the kids. It's difficult. I don't know how to address it. It's a real challenge because I know that it's tough for him—there's a call for help, and I don't know how to give it. He has an effect on programming because he might talk about it throughout the night, and kids get angry and shut him

off. [Another youth complains], "I can't stand…like no one can stand him. He's getting on my nerves." I say, "Let's separate. It seems like it's tough for you right now. It seems like you're having a difficult time hearing him bringing in what, to you, feels like negative energy. Let's focus on the work at hand. Do you think you could find a way to go to him and try to redirect his negative talk to talk that's work related?"

Some of the strategies and structures for effectively dealing with group challenges will be examined below as part of the next standard.

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.   SP

(T7) Staff help youth cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work.

Establishing norms promotes a cohesive team identity and fosters effective group work, which in turn creates optimum conditions for learning. These norms may be established and practiced in the team-building activities mentioned under T1 and T2, building the foundation for the positive relationships that undergird effective teamwork. In many programs, the youth are involved in formulating these norms. Examples from VOBS, YOB, and AHA! show us what this can look like:

> Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS: It's literally sitting down and pulling out a piece of paper and asking, "What is important to our group? Who do we want to be? What are our non-negotiables?" They'll talk about respecting other people and respecting themselves. Sometimes there will be one that's really important to the kids that the instructors have never thought of. Then we write it all down and it allows students to set the tone for every meeting. It's something the instructors can fall back on because we've all agreed as a group that this is who we want to be and how we want to do it.

> Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB: We'll set up ground rules, like, "step up, step back." If you notice you've been talking a lot, then you might step back and let someone who hasn't spoken as much have the floor.

> Jennifer Freed at AHA!: The first few weeks of Girls' Group is about setting the culture and the norms. We talk to the girls right from the onset about what kind of culture they want to create, and we make a list of the qualities the group needs to be the best it can be. We write down what things are going to be helpful in order to have a safe and thriving group culture. They decide, but we also get to weigh in.

Establishing the norms for group work early on, helping youth take ownership of these norms, and reinforcing them as needed helps build a sense of shared accountability and provides a clear structure that youth can count on within the program. Sometimes norms are created and reinforced by rituals. The norms and rituals create a code that help youth learn how to contribute as members of high-functioning groups, including how to navigate inevitable conflicts and disagreements. Natalie Cooper from BGCGM shared something she uses at all her sites:

> I was doing a Girls' Group six years ago and we had a lot of drama. So I established [the ritual] that every group will have a box. If you have a problem, you write it down and put it in the box. It's anonymous, but we form a circle and talk about what's on the paper. It's a Peace Circle to deal with the conflict that's taking place. We use a talking stick and no one is allowed to speak unless they have it. We process the conflict that way.

Sometimes language is used as a type of ritual or signal for the group to reset according to the norms and agreements that they have made. Allison Williams, senior vice president, programs, at Wyman, described an acronym that functions this way: ROPES:

> Facilitators often use the acronym of ROPES to facilitate the teens setting their own ground rules. Typically, the ROPES identified by teens include respect and responsibility: opportunity, openness and "ouch" (a term used if something offends); participation and positive attitude; education, empowerment, and escuchar (Spanish for "to listen"); and sense of humor and sensitivity. Facilitators will also articulate their expectations for the teens, and teens can share their expectations back for facilitators to develop a common

Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning

understanding. The ROPES are signed by all group members and posted in the club meeting space where they can be referenced throughout the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) club.

When conflict or emotional tensions get the group off track, staff may remind the youth to "Remember our ROPES." In VOBS, the youth have another acronym tool, PROPS, that functions similarly. Laura Greenlee Karp described it:

> We were having a rough time with people talking over each other. So we gave the kids a tool called PROPS: People Respecting Other People Speaking. When we were standing in a circle and people would talk [out of turn], the instructors would be quiet and other students would just say, "PROPS," and that was the cue for the students to be quiet and continue to focus.

While certain rituals are used in times of difficulty or conflict, standard rituals and practices that promote a sense of group identity, cohesion, and camaraderie are woven into the everyday fabric of many programs. Regular practices of reflection, affirmations, or having dinner together reinforce the relationships that support teamwork. Allison Williams at Wyman shared:

Initial program activities include getting-to-know-you icebreakers and games to help all teens feel welcome and begin to form as a supportive group. Facilitators may use name games, group games, team-building activities, and other simple challenges that allow teens to get acquainted with each other, with TOP, and with their facilitators.

MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with youth.	SP
(T8) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-youth and staff-staff interactions.	

SEL Challenge programs described the importance of staff modeling the behaviors and skills they want the youth to develop. In each program, staff are expected to model social and emotional skills in order to maximize group functioning. Jennifer Freed at AHA! said:

> We ask facilitators to constantly up their game in terms of modeling spontaneity, responsibility, positive attitude, accountability, and teamwork.

The essence of modeling effective teamwork skills is integrity: being an example of the qualities you espouse for the youth. Keeping one's word is important. You mean what you say, both in terms of the commitments you make to the group and also in the caring you communicate. La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of Social Emotional Learning at BGCGM, said:

> We don't just say it, we show it through our actions. When we say we're going to do something, we do it. If we can't, we apologize and say, "You know what, I apologize, but I'm not going to be able to do this right now. Can you give me more time?" instead of pretending like we were going to do it and just, "Oh yeah, they'll forget." Kids don't forget that stuff.

However, the modeling must be done within their role as a staff member. Jennifer Freed at AHA! said:

> *One of the things we found out the most is we can't be their friends.*
> *—Jennifer Freed, AHA!*

> One of the things we found out the most is we can't be their friends. So we have a very important boundary that we maintain of being incredibly authentic and vulnerable and connected, while also being very clear that we're not the people for them to go to. They go to each other. Our role stays as motivators and mentors but not as parents and not as therapists and not as friends. We're facilitators of their own connections to each other.

Being an effective model to youth requires always thinking about how youth may be interpreting and thinking about what you are saying or doing. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

> TPP staff and artists are asked to consistently look at what they are doing, not just what they are saying, and to be aware that what they are doing is the basis for their youth's understanding of them. Integrity is a cornerstone of our youth-staff relationships. Staff examine each and every one of their actions and interactions

with youth through this lens, asking ourselves if we are responding to our youth in a way that aligns with our mission as an organization, which is to empower youth to transform the negative forces in their lives and communities into action and support their realization of their vision for their lives as determined by them.

The staff at AHA! shared an example of addressing a changed group dynamic by channeling their emotional response into respectfully starting a conversation about getting the group back on track. Jennifer Freed described it:

Inside of us we feel enraged and irritated, but what we say is, "Wow, the group is feeling really fractured, and this is really hard, and is this how you want it to be?" And we ask them, "How is it going for you to have it be like this?" And you know, we might make a personal statement about the impact to our sense of relatedness with the girls. So we might say, "You know, I'm feeling really sad and upset that we're not feeling like a group right now. What do we need to take this to another level?"

Staff also model effective communication by adjusting the tone and cadence of their voice. Victoria Guidi at PWBF said:

If I see that students aren't communicating very well I take a moment to address it. I try to do it in a professional way so that they can reflect and see how they're treating each other. If I step back and listen to the tone of my voice or the choice of my words that can totally change the dynamic of what we're working on. It will lift whatever negativity is present and dividing us.

To model teamwork skills, staff must pay attention to their own behavior and actions and the impact those have on the youth. They demonstrate their skills in their interactions with youth and also in how they treat their co-workers. Staff internalize the skills over time, reflecting their own learning back to the youth. Elizabeth Howard at TPP shared how she models what she's learned:

It's easy for me to teach this stuff now because I believe it and I do it. It doesn't feel like I'm trying to tell them something I'm not willing to do myself. When I say it's hard and that it's typical because emotions are running high, I'm saying that because I have done it and I fail too.

FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration. `SP`

- j) (T9) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics. This includes:
- k) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all youth's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility);
- l) intervening only as needed, allowing youth to lead group processes;
- m) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity);
- n) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

Staff throughout all the SEL Challenge programs work to establish positive group norms and maintain the cooperative dynamics and participation that are essential to teamwork and to youth learning teamwork skills. Staff play an ongoing, day-to-day role as a monitor-participant-coach of group processes and dynamics. They may also be part of the group and share their personal thoughts when others share.

One of the ways staff facilitate teamwork is by allowing and encouraging the youth themselves to manage the group dynamics as much as possible. Laura Greenlee Karp from VOBS said:

They are their own regulators. If there is somebody who is having an off day and is being negative, the group has, hopefully, already come up with how they're going to handle that.

Staff cultivate an underlying ethos that youth are accountable to each other, to the group, and to the program.

     Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning

PWBF establishes youth team leaders whose role it is to help keep small groups on track. Being close in age to the youth, these team leaders often have ideas and insights that help them relate to the small groups. They also serve as intermediaries between the lead staff and the youth teams. They help convey the positive culture and values to the group, and they communicate with staff when teams confront social and emotional challenges that are beyond the team leader's skill level. Executive Director Brett Hart explained:

> There are three teams, one for each boat, and each team has a team leader. Part of the purpose of that is to have a person who is a moderator for discussion with the group. Conversation comes out in group discussion. Victoria is not shy about engaging kids and having them talk about challenges. She'll often have a conversation with the team leader in advance and she can get insight from the team leader that she might not have had before. That actually happens quite frequently.

Allowing youth to lead is successful when staff effectively model interpersonal skills and provide the youth with individualized, scaffolded levels of support. However, the staff take a more active or assertive role when necessary. Staff are guarantors of the group's processes and learning.

Staff monitor the work of the youth and help manage team challenges. They also hold the youth accountable to the goals and guidelines established and help calm emotions. Allison Williams at Wyman provided an example of how staff might refocus youth during a challenge:

> "Hey, we can work through this. It's okay for people to disagree, but what we're talking about is right here within our TOP club, what we've agreed to, and how we committed to engaging with one another. Can we be good there?"

Staff manage group situations by taking different approaches with different personalities. Making the process explicit and using humor was recommended by Jennifer Freed from AHA!:

> The know-it-all and monologuers are my job because they're hard. So what I do is use a lot of humor. To the monologuers I'll say, "You have an extraordinary amount of good things to say, and we need you to hold back so other people can learn to do that too. We're going to have an agreement that you'll get to say what you want, but you'll learn how to be in a relationship with others and not go on too long." I say it over and over and over, but I'm making good rapport with the girls, and we laugh about it. With the know-it-all or the drama queen or the loner, I use humor, and I make it explicit.

We intentionally use the term "facilitator" for the adults who work directly with the teens. The facilitator's role is to provide experiences that lead to discussions through which the group can explore issues and learn. During training, new facilitators learn that the facilitator's role includes:

• Two-way communication— participants do most of the talking; facilitator guides learning through strategic questions, dialogue, and modeling

• Defining the educational process with input from teens

• Setting the stage for teens to learn through the experience

• Allowing learners to take an active role

• Focusing on feelings and attitudes as well as information

[Wyman]

Situations that escalate or threaten the security of the group may be handled in various ways. Even in extreme cases, such as fighting, the staff may keep the group as a whole involved in deciding how to handle a situation. DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program at Wyman, admitted they have had challenges:

> I mean, we've had some challenges. We've had fights in the program. Some of those have really brought about huge changes in the peer relationships within the groups and even relationships with staff. We really try to understand what happened and what's going on with the teens. There have been times where, as a group, the whole group decided, "No, we don't want the person to go." We've really worked on it and tried to make sure that everybody felt like this was a safe place.

At BGCGM, staff facilitate a peaceful and structured process whereby youth communicate and reiterate group norms and clarify whether someone wants to remain part of the group or not. Natalie Cooper shares an example from one of the sessions:

> La'Ketta brought it home talking about how everybody is equal and the same and we have love for them all and that's the love that we want to share with each other. That is Agape love. The whole session ended up talking about Agape love, and once that happened, La'Ketta opened up the floor for what we sometimes call "Conflict Circle" where it's time to hash this thing out. The kids talked in a productive way; no yelling, no screaming but just kind of put it out there to the young lady about what she was doing. They held her accountable to either change or not be a part of the group anymore. She decided the group wasn't for her, and we were okay with that because she didn't fit with the dynamic and she wasn't willing to play by the rules.

One conversation was a sharp disagreement over the use of potentially offensive language. Julie Thayer, InIt program manager at YW Boston, shared a story where a volunteer staff member was able to assist the youth in diffusing the emotion around disagreements about whether and in what contexts the "N-word" is acceptable. Some youth felt it has been reclaimed within hip hop culture and has an affectionate meaning when used among black youth, especially if the r is dropped. But:

> Others said, "It's a shameful part of our history. Why would you want to reclaim that? What do our elders think? We need to respect generational differences about it." Some of the white students said, "Well, if you can say it, why can't I?" It got really intense. We have a wonderful volunteer staff member who has been involved in racial justice work for a long time. He let the youth drive the conversation but did a very nice job of reminding students that the most important thing they were doing was having this conversation. That it wasn't something they would solve today or maybe ever come to resolution on. The important thing is that they were listening to one another and having the conversation in the first place.

At YW Boston, the emphasis is on the importance of learning to understand others and have a respectful dialogue rather than resolving the issue or making rules about it. Successful teamwork and collaboration is something youth and staff work on together. The youth themselves recognize the value of teamwork. One youth from YW Boston put it this way:

> I watched a video that talked about how our human society is very similar to an ant colony. How an ant colony only functions when those massive amounts of ants have really, really good teamwork and they all do what each of them is designed to do. It's similar to ours how an engineer cannot exist without the farmer or the teacher. You know, all these things are interconnected—without one, there is no other. So that's how society functions; we all work together to help each other out and use our own skills to benefit each other.

Youth learn valuable skills for teamwork from helping to create and participate in well-functioning groups. These groups are characterized by a culture of authentic caring and having effective, respectful procedures for resolving differences.

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