Communication

Description: Communication is the ability to express ideas and thoughts clearly, listen to others, and respond to others respectfully.

Youth who struggle with communication often:	Youth who communicate strongly often:
• Are either very quiet, or very talkative • Have difficulty sharing "airtime" • Express their feelings through actions rather than words, especially when upset • Offend others when expressing opinions and feelings without a "filter"	• Are good listeners • Share ideas clearly • Easily turn complex thoughts into words • Enjoy getting to know adults and youth • Express their frustration or anger in words rather than acting out

Best Practices and Evidence

Accountable Talk: Accountable Talk is when youth learn to respectfully agree and disagree with each other. It is important for staff to explicitly teach and model respectful, accountable forms of communication.

Evidence of a program that incorporates Accountable Talk includes:

- Practice of "I" statements, especially during conflict. For example, instead of saying, "You're rude and ruined my project," one would say, "I felt like you ruined my project on purpose."

- Visual reminders for youth to use Accountable Talk in classroom discussions. Visual sentence starters may help youth who have difficulty expressing themselves when upset (i.e. "I respectfully disagree because…"; "I'm feeling ____ because _____"; "Help me understand _____"; etc.). Many examples of Accountable Talk language stems can be found online.

- Staff prompts other youth to rephrase and build upon what they have just heard to practice active listening.

- Youth use nonverbal communication to demonstrate engagement (i.e. tracking the speaker, nodding, silent applause, body language, use of sign language, etc.).

Opportunities for Sharing: To support practice in communication, build time into the day for youth to share their thoughts, ideas, experiences, and work with each other. Sharing can be ritualized and structured, or informal, but it is important for adults to support those who struggle to clearly communicate.

Evidence of a program that includes Opportunities for Sharing include:

- Circle discussions, advisory periods, and group work offer structured opportunities for youth to share with one another.

- Presentations, performances, and reflection conversations encourage and value student voices of all kinds.

Safe Space: Creating an environment in which youth feel safe is necessary for them to feel comfortable communicating their thoughts. Building trust among youth and between youth and adults is crucial.

Evidence of a program that has established Safe Space includes:

- Adults listen closely to youth when they speak and model listening skills.

- Youth are eager to communicate with adults and with each other.

- Insults, slurs, and bullying behaviors are acknowledged, addressed, and not tolerated.

- Youth are welcomed to talk to adults privately when necessary.

- Conflicts are addressed and debriefed among all parties involved.

- Norms and expectations are set for communication (i.e. pass a talking piece, use "I" statements, allow for conflicting opinions, etc.).

1	2	3	4
*There is **no evidence** of strategies to support youth who struggle with communication.*	*There is **some evidence** of strategies to support youth with communication.*	*There is **moderate evidence** of strategies to support youth with communication.*	*There is **extensive evidence** of strategies to support youth with communication.*
In conflict, youth use ineffective or disrespectful forms of communication, resulting in the need for intervention by a staff member.	In conflict, youth use limited strategies to communicate effectively and respectfully, often resulting in the need for resolution by a staff member.	Youth use some strategies to communicate effectively in conflict with support from a staff member.	Youth use varied strategies to effectively resolve conflict with minimal support by staff.
Communication skills are not explicitly taught. No rules or expectations about communication are present.	There are few, if any, ways in which communication skills are explicitly taught. Few rules or expectations about communication are present.	Communication skills are taught explicitly to some youth or in some settings, but not all. Some rules or expectations about communication are present, but they are inconsistently applied.	Communication skills are taught explicitly to all youth. Rules or expectations about communication are present and are applied consistently for all youth.