

## Youth Leadership & Autonomy

**Description:** Youth Leadership and Autonomy allow youth to play an active role in the program. Through leadership they are able to teach, guide, or encourage others, and through autonomy they are able to practice self-management. Both leadership and autonomy can happen in developmentally appropriate ways.

| Youth who struggle with Leadership and Autonomy often:   | Youth who are strong at Leadership and Autonomy often:  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not volunteer for roles</li> <li>• Remain passive and follow others without questions</li> <li>• Look for direction and seem unable to choose their own actions or activities</li> <li>• Have difficulty speaking up and being heard in a group</li> <li>• Behave inappropriately when unsupervised</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer when staff ask for help or for someone to take a role</li> <li>• Ask questions in order to make informed decisions rather than following blindly</li> <li>• Make their own decisions even if they are unpopular</li> <li>• Voice their opinions or ideas in groups</li> <li>• Are able to behave appropriately even when not supervised</li> </ul> |

### Best Practices and Evidence

**Opportunities for Leadership:** Leadership takes many forms, sometimes vocal, sometimes quiet, and sometimes leading-by-example. Providing frequent and varied opportunities for leadership can bring out the potential in all youth.

*Evidence of a program that has Opportunities for Leadership includes:*

- Staff often ask for volunteers for tasks both simple (e.g., passing out papers) and complex (e.g., leading the group in a warm-up activity).
- Leadership roles are available in all activities and at multiple points throughout the day.
- Staff reach out to more hesitant or quiet youth to be sure they have the opportunity to be a leader.

**Explicit Teaching of Leadership:** Leadership can be taught and explored through various models that enrich many different activities or curricula. The skills of being a good leader are something that youth can practice with support.

*Evidence of a program that Explicitly Teaches Leadership includes:*

- Leadership skills, e.g. speaking in front of a group, are taught one at a time, with opportunities for practice and feedback.
- Models of leadership (e.g., the Leadership Compass) are discussed in groups or as part of curriculum.

**Scaffold Autonomy:** With too much freedom too fast, most youth struggle to choose the right behaviors. Scaffolding Autonomy provides them with gradually increasing levels of autonomy with frequent feedback.

*Evidence of a program that Scaffolds Autonomy includes:*

- Youth are given small opportunities for autonomy, such as going to the office for supplies, before more extensive opportunities, such as working on a project in the hallway without an adult.
- When youth struggle with autonomy, they are given feedback on what they need to do next time.
- If youth abuse autonomy, it is not removed as an option forever, and youth can earn it back by showing they can handle smaller autonomous tasks.
- Youth who manage themselves well without supervision are given greater opportunities for autonomy to encourage the growth of skills and independence.

| 1  | 2   | 3   | 4   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <i>There is <b>no evidence</b> of strategies to support youth who struggle with Leadership and Autonomy.</i> | <i>There is <b>some evidence</b> of strategies to support youth with Leadership and Autonomy.</i>                                 | <i>There is <b>moderate evidence</b> of strategies to support youth with Leadership and Autonomy.</i>                           | <i>There is <b>extensive evidence</b> of strategies to support youth with Leadership and Autonomy.</i>                  |
| There are no opportunities for youth to take leadership roles or act autonomously.                           | There are some opportunities for youth to take leadership roles or act autonomously, but they are brief and not available to all. | There are extended opportunities for some youth to take leadership roles or act autonomously but they are not available to all. | There are extended opportunities for youth to take leadership roles or act autonomously, and they are available to all. |
| There is no explicit teaching of leadership or autonomy skills.  | There is minimal, if any, explicit teaching of leadership or autonomy skills.   | Explicit teaching of leadership or autonomy skills takes place but is only given to a subset of youth.                          | Explicit teaching of leadership or autonomy skills takes place with all youth.  |