



Workshop Description: This workshop includes activities designed to increase youth program staff knowledge regarding acceptance as it relates to emotion regulation.

Activities will include examples of techniques youth program staff can use to help youth develop and strengthen their acceptance skills.

This workshop guide will ask youth program staff to examine and improve their own individual acceptance skills in order to better understand the internal process of nonjudgmental awareness (recognizing emotions) and acceptance (allowing oneself to feel emotions) when it comes to emotions. Staff will develop these skills with the understanding that it will help them empathize with and teach new skills to youth more effectively.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop, as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 45 to 50 minutes to complete all activities within this guide.

Materials:

- Copy of Instructional Aid: *Emotion Triangles*
- Copy of Instructional Aid: *Emotion Messages Clue Cards*
- Copy of the Instructional Aid: *Being Present Script*
- Writing utensils for each participant
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to [Emotion Regulation Strategy – Acceptance](#). In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Emotion Regulation,*
2. *Development of Executive Functioning,*
3. *Understanding Peer Relationships*
4. *Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,*
5. *Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,*
6. *Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,*
7. *Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,*
8. *Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and*
9. *Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.*



Knowledge: Understanding Emotion Coaching and Acceptance

How an individual reacts in a given situation has roots in how they were raised, their family, and the relationships between them and their family and others around them. Many people have figured out ways to manage times when they are sad or very mad, and they have likely had to figure out ways to control joy and happiness so they don't disturb others or make someone jealous. Youth are no different from adults in that they have also figured out ways to manage their emotions. Sometimes they use healthy (or adaptive) strategies like counting to 10, and sometimes they use unhealthy (or maladaptive) strategies like eating when they are sad. Research has linked positive development with more use of healthy and less use of unhealthy strategies.⁷⁵

Emotion coaching is where one individual helps another to understand and manage his or her own emotions through several key strategies. Emotion coaching is an important tool youth program staff can use to guide youth toward healthy coping strategies and away from unhealthy ones.

- Adaptive/Healthy Coping Strategies
 - Cognitive Reappraisal
 - Problem-Solving
 - Acceptance
- Maladaptive/Unhealthy Coping Strategies
 - Avoidance
 - Suppression
 - Rumination

Identifying negative emotions is as important as offering solutions, which is why *acceptance* and *cognitive reappraisal*, or changing thinking, are included along with *problem-solving*, or finding ways to manage specific emotions.

Helping youth understand and manage their own emotions through emotion coaching can help them identify their feelings and find solutions to emotionally challenging situations. Youth who learn how to manage their emotions in healthy ways are more likely to participate in youth program activities. Program staff can use emotion coaching to help youth identify emotions and generate solutions to help youth work through challenging emotional situations.

Youth program staff need to practice awareness of their own emotions before they can be truly adept at providing emotion coaching to youth in the program. This self-awareness helps staff be more in tune with youth's emotions and connect with them.

One strategy that can help us manage strong emotions is acceptance. When a person uses acceptance they allow themselves to feel emotions without judging themselves for feeling the emotion and without judging whether the emotions are good or bad. By accepting the emotion, you are more aware of the effects of the emotion on your body, thoughts, and behavior and you can let the emotions pass without acting on them in a more instinctual manner. For example, if you are experiencing anger and you use acceptance you would recognize the anger, the anger's effect on how you are thinking and behaving, and be better able to control outbursts.⁷⁵ When used in therapeutic interventions, like mindfulness or acceptance and commitment therapy, being able to understand and tolerate emotions has been related to increased healthy outcomes and a decrease in unhealthy outcomes.⁸⁹ Youth programs that teach how



to label and describe emotions through creative outlets provide an opportunity for youth to learn how to tolerate or accept emotions. Words, art, dance, music, and other forms of expression provide a positive focus for youth and redirect thoughts towards applicable solutions to emotional responses.

Objectives:

- Understand the definition of acceptance as it relates to emotion regulation
- Identify and practice acceptance techniques
- Understand ways to support, promote, and teach acceptance with youth in the youth program

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe acceptance as it is defined in the background information.
 - What to say: “Today we are going to talk about acceptance. When talking about strategies to manage emotions, acceptance is often the first topic. Some of us might initially define acceptance as resignation or believing some undesirable event or emotion is just inevitable, fated. But that is not what we mean when we talk about acceptance in regards to emotion regulation. Instead, acceptance as it relates to emotion regulation is about recognition or acknowledgement of the emotion without trying to change it, protest it, or judge it. People who acknowledge and accept their emotions when they experience them, are accepting a truth about how they are feeling. Through this understanding they are better able to do something about the emotions.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: “To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of acceptance and where the gaps in our knowledge are.”

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the participants to share how they would add or change the definition of acceptance you have given. You may need to assist with these definitions using the background information provided for you to jumpstart the conversation. Record these responses on a large sheet of paper or white board so all of the participants can see.
- Once you have a basic definition, come up with some examples of times when the participants or someone they know has practiced acceptance of a strong emotion.
- Ask the participants if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to acceptance and if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Working With Our Emotion Triangle* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Working With Our Emotion Triangle* activity:
 - What to say: “Emotions are natural occurrences. They are actually messages being sent to us by our bodies, minds, and behaviors. These messages aren’t good or bad, positive or negative, they are simply the product of thousands of years of human experiences and evolution.”
- Lead the *Working With Our Emotion Triangle* activity:

- Write a list of common emotions on a large piece of paper or a white board. Ask participants for ideas. A list is provided below.
- Once you have a list of 5-10 emotions, ask participants to brainstorm what messages each emotion is trying to send us.
 - Fear sends a message that you are in danger
 - Anger that you are not being treated fairly
 - Sadness that you have lost something important
 - Guilt that you have done something wrong
 - Joy that you found something important to you
 - Contentment that everything is OK
- Next say this: “Messages get to us through three different means: *body*—physical sensations; *mind*—thoughts, memories, and imagination; and *behavior*—urges and actions. In this next activity, we are going to try to sort through a series of clues not only for which emotion they are letting us know about but also whether the clue comes from the mind, body, or behavior.
- Tape up the six Emotion Triangles found in the Instructional Aid: *Emotion Triangles* and set out the *Emotion Messages Clue Cards* found in the Instructional Aid: *Emotion Messages Clue Cards* on the center of a table or chair.
- Ask the participants or a group of participants to come forward and help sort the cards, taping them to the Emotion Triangles in the appropriate location (i.e., if the message is one of fear and comes from the mind, they would tape that message to the Fear Emotion Triangle near the word “mind”).
- After all of the clues have been taped onto the Emotion Triangles, process the results with the group ensuring the correct clues are assigned to each emotion and in the correct location. You can do this by saying “Does anyone see something that needs to be changed or adjusted?” Work through all of the clues before moving on to the next step.
- Ask the participants this series of questions and lead a short discussion about the impact of each of these unhealthy emotion regulation strategies. The instructor should review the unhealthy strategies prior to leading this processing activity.
 - What happens when we ignore emotion messages? (Avoidance)
 - What happens when we bury emotional messages? (Suppression)
 - What happens when we misidentify emotional messages? (Cognitive Distortion)
 - What happens when we spend a lot of time thinking about an emotion? (Rumination)

Activity: *Being Present* (7-10 minutes)

- Describe the *Being Present* activity:
 - What to say: “Next, we are going to learn a little more about how we can each practice acceptance. This is important to understand if we are going to support, promote, and teach youth about the value of acceptance. In order to accept an emotion we often have to acknowledge or label it and allow ourselves to experience it. One way to do this is to use a simple exercise to try to help us focus our attention on the present. By being in the present we can pay attention to our physical and emotional states without getting bogged down in judgement.”



- Next say: “We are not going to do a deep dive on any of our emotions, but we are going to spend about 5 minutes in reflection about the state of our minds and bodies right now.”
- Ask participants to make themselves comfortable—usually a comfortable place to sit, a chair or on the floor. They should choose a posture that feels okay in their body.
- Once everyone is ready, follow the instructions on the Instructional Aid: *Being Present Script*.

Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the staff’s responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?” and “How could you use these strategies with youth?”

Resources:

Instructional Aid: *Being Present Script*

Instructional Aid: *Emotion Message Clue Cards*

Instructional Aid: *Emotion Message Clue Cards Key*

Instructional Aid: *Emotion Triangles – Anger, Sadness, Joy, Guilt, Contentment, Fear*

Sources:

The *Working With Our Emotion Triangle* activity was adapted from

NHS Fife Department of Psychology. (2016). Emotion regulation: Managing emotions. Retrieved from https://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/15343/ER_handout_Final_16_June_2016%20pdf.pdf

The *Being Present* activity was adapted from

Sucitto, A. (2015). *Meditation – An outline*. Retrieved from <https://mindfulnessexercisess.com/meditation-an-outline/>



Instructions: The place and timing for this exercise is important. The location should be comfortable and free from disturbances. A quiet room with little in it to distract participants is ideal. A light and uncluttered space will help with brightening and clearing the mind. Ask the participants to find a seat and make themselves comfortable.

Mindfulness is awareness of our thoughts, what our body feels like, what our ears are hearing, and anything else around us that is happening right now.

Read the script slowly allowing silence between each statement.

Say:

Begin by bringing your attention into your body.

You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.

You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.

Take a few deep breaths.

As you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen, enlivening the body. As you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.

You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight, pressure, vibration, and heat.

You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.

Notice your back against the chair.

If your thoughts tend to wander during this practice, do not fret. The concerns of the past, and future are indeed difficult things to ignore. Should you find yourself wandering off into worries or anxieties, simply draw your attention back to your breath. No self-judgements. Just refocus and come back to an awareness of yourself.

Next, bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.

Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.

Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.

Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.

Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.

Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.

Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.



Instructions: Print this page and cut out the clue cards along the dotted lines. Mix the clue cards up and place them in a central place. Ask each participant or a group of participants to sort the clue cards by what gives us the clue (i.e., mind, body, or behavior) and for which emotion. Encourage participants to tape the message in the correct location on each Emotion Triangle.

Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid	Avoid
Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid	Confront
Thoughts slowed, think in circles, focused on the negative	Heavy, empty, numb, tired	Withdraw
Critical focus on self and others' opinion of self	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid, heavy, empty, numb, tired	Hide
Thinking fast, focused on the positive	Energized	Approach
Focused on the moment	Calm and relaxed	Stay



Emotion Regulation Instructional Aid
 Emotion Message Clue Cards Activity Key

Fear	Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid	Avoid
Anger	Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid	Confront
Sadness	Thoughts slowed, think in circles, focused on the negative	Heavy, empty, numb, tired	Withdraw
Guilt	Critical focus on self and others' opinion of self	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing rapid, heavy, empty, numb, tired	Hide
Joy	Thinking fast, focused on the positive	Energized	Approach
Contentment	Focused on the moment	Calm and relaxed	Stay











