



Youth Inclusion Facilitator Instruction

Understanding Bias and Values

Everyone has had biases or been prejudiced at some time in their lives. Implicit or unconscious bias and prejudices are part of the unconscious decision making part of the brain.⁵⁰ Staff need to understand themselves to overcome any unconscious biases that work against an open and welcoming youth program.

Bias and prejudice are terms used to describe a set of beliefs that influence and sometimes misinform decisions and interactions with others.

- **Bias** is a preference for or against a person, idea, or thing.
- **Prejudice** is judging or forming an opinion before having all of the relevant facts.

Reflection can help an individual become aware of their unconscious biases and prejudices by spending time thinking about specific actions, thoughts, and statements. Reflection gives a person understanding, and with understanding, they gain knowledge. Knowledge is what program staff use to inform the way they interact with youth. For example, if a person walks barefoot in grass and is stung by a bee, the next time they walk barefoot through grass, they will watch for bees to avoid being stung. Understanding that bees sting happened after the person was stung. The knowledge (understanding that bees sting) changed their behavior (watching for bees) to avoid being stung. This is the goal of reflection.

Because biases, prejudices, and values form over time, it often takes time to change or remove them.

Strategies to Understand Bias and Values

- Explain:** Explain the importance of understanding our implicit or unconscious biases.
- Train:** Train staff on productive reflection techniques.
- Identify:** Identify time for reflection (i.e., during staff prep time).
- Provide:** Provide examples of how understanding biases can positively affect the youth program.
- Create:** Create opportunities for program staff to interact, work with, and know the objects of their biases or prejudices to begin to break down stereotypes and create new experiences on which to base their beliefs that influence future decisions and interactions.⁴⁶

Strategies in Action - Reflection

There are two important parts to productive reflection: observation and examination.

Observation, or taking the time to consider, assess, look at, or review a statement or thought, allows a person to pay attention to what is important. Since an individual is reflecting on their unconscious biases and prejudices, they should think about what it is about other people that makes them uncomfortable and why they feel the way they do.



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Examination, or clearing one's mind, allows a person to set aside distractions and consider the topic, person, or attribute with fresh eyes. An individual should ask himself or herself: is this bias or prejudice fair or relevant? How did I get this bias? Why is it so powerful? Why is it so important to me?

This exercise may feel uncomfortable. This discomfort is likely because the person truly does not know anything about the object other than what their bias tells them and, for the first time, they are ignoring the bias, causing them to feel that they are being untrue to themselves, giving up part of their distinctiveness, or betraying their cultural identity. Through reflection, youth program staff can begin to understand their unconscious biases and prejudices and begin to let them go by putting less of an emphasis on them.⁵¹

Workshops related to Understanding Bias and Values

Developing Reflection Skills

Program staff need to be aware of their unconscious biases and prejudices so they can understand and inform the way they interact with youth. Reflection is a tool that helps an individual to think about their actions, thoughts and statements and gain that insight.

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