Youth Inclusion Facilitator Instruction
Rules, Systems, and Language

A program and environment where youth feel welcome and safe is intentionally structured to support positive peer relationships, foster cooperation between youth, involve youth on multiple levels, and create and expand opportunities for youth leadership. Let's explore each of these components of intentional program structure.

Rules

Good youth programs are safe and welcoming for all youth and communicate this value to the participants and families involved in the program.[21] One way this is done is through the development of clear and understandable rules that prohibit harassment, bullying, and discrimination and by training youth program staff to implement and model those rules.[11, 8] Program managers and staff who work with youth should develop and periodically review rules with youth to ensure specific protection for youth who may feel excluded. These rules should be shared with the youth in the program and their families.[21, 6, 24] These rules should include a no-tolerance rule regarding hate speech, including homophobic remarks and language that demeans one population like "fag," "that's so gay," or "retard."[25, 26, 23]

Strategies for Program Rules

Review Rules: Review the rules and assess whether or not the rules include protections from harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

Review Process: Review how the rules are created, reviewed, and shared with family and youth.

Implement: Review how the rules are implemented.
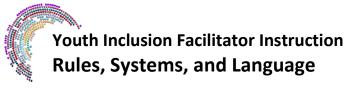
Systems

In addition to having rules that specifically prohibit and protect against harassment, bullying, and discrimination, robust systems are necessary to enforce rules, support youth safety and belonging, and ensure youth have input into program structure and activities. Generally, systems are a uniform way to make sure the same steps are taken each time an action occurs. Systems build an expectation for how rules will be followed and set the boundaries for acceptable behaviors in a program.

Strategies for Program Systems

Reporting System: Utilize a reporting system where youth are comfortable reporting bullying, harassment, and discrimination. This system should include a way to log incidents, information about how staff respond to the report, and the plan for addressing the issue.[21, 11]

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Staff Recruitment System	Utilize a staff recruitment system that helps program managers recruit staff who reflect the diversity of the youth and who are prepared to work with diverse youth and families.[6, 22]
Staff Training System	Utilize a staff training system where youth program staff receive training on how to respond to bullying, harassment, and discriminatory behavior when it occurs.[24]
Communication System	Utilize a communication system for communication between program staff and parents and staff and youth[21] regarding all of the happenings in the program (both positive and negative news).
Creating, Updating, and Implementing Rules	Create, update, and implement rules that incorporate youth input and are dynamic, addressing the current concerns and issues within the program.

Language

The language used by individuals within a youth program significantly contributes to whether youth feel welcome and safe in a program.[11, 22, 23] Creating program-wide language that reflects a welcoming and safe environment involves critical consideration of currently used language and how that language may be heard by different youth or groups of youth.[8] This requires youth program staff to be aware of what they are saying and how they are saying it as well as the way language is used in print and electronic materials.

Strategies for Program Language

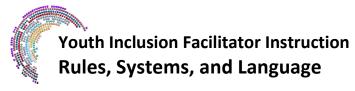|	
Adjust:	Adjust language and terminology to reflect youth and parent preferences for name, pronoun, or adjective of choice.[21, 27, 28, 8]
Reflect:	Reflect adjusted language and terminology on registration materials, field trip forms, marketing material, etc.
Train:	Train program staff on the use of language and terminology to include what the terms are and why it is important to adopt them.
Review:	Review the languages youth speak, read, and write and reflect this knowledge in printed materials and the program staff hired.
Communicate:	Review how youth communicate and adjust to their preferences (i.e., email versus social media, etc.).[22]

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Workshops related to Rules, Systems, and Language

Following the Rules

Rules communicate the programs expectations and help youth and program staff to be successful in all other aspects of the program. Program managers and staff should periodically review the rules as well as review the rules with youth to make sure the right rules are in place.

Language and Inclusion

Spoken and written language can sometimes send unintentional messages to youth in a program, leading to unintended consequences. It is important to be aware of and understand how our intent and choice of language may impact those around us.

Responding to Challenging Behavior

Problematic behavior are any behaviors that take away from the program experience for a particular person or group. Youth program staff are constantly addressing problematic behavior as youth often learn by testing boundaries. However, strategies to address problematic behavior should be part of every youth program professional development plan.