



Youth Inclusion Workshop Guide: Activity Planning 201

Workshop Description: This workshop includes information and practice for learning about and identifying ways to keep competition between youth healthy while still creating an inclusive environment for all. After this workshop, staff will be able to recognize the fine line between cooperation and competition, and develop the skills to balance both.

This workshop guide includes a series of activities that are aimed at involving all youth through the thoughtful creation of cohesive groups, making sure the same groups and individuals aren't always in competition, and recognizing the value and importance of having youth work cooperatively toward a common goal.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Youth Inclusion Training website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete all activities within this guide.

Materials:

- Poster-sized sheets of paper.
- Markers or pens.
- Open space for the *Human Knot* game.
- Construction paper.
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard.

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Youth Inclusion Training website, specifically the content related to Program Structure. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide as well as the Activity Planning 101 workshop guide. Also, gather all necessary materials and familiarize yourself with this workshop guide.

Knowledge: Activity Planning 201

The debate over whether or not competition is healthy for youth is ongoing. Many of the activities and organizations that youth partake in employ competition. While competition can be healthy and teach invaluable skills and life lessons, there are some cautionary notes to be aware of as a youth program staff member. Competition can create cliques and groups that isolate individuals based on perceived weaknesses, which can lead to youth feeling unwelcome, insecure, and bullied. A healthy balance between competition and cooperation can teach youth valuable skills that will prepare them for the transition into adolescence and adulthood while also creating bonds and a view of peers as assets.

Competition during activities in youth programs can be seen as a healthy part of adolescence considering that competition is a normal part of human nature and everyday life. However, there are some effects on self-esteem to be cognizant of research has shown that only winners feel good about themselves in a competition; losers often feel worse about themselves. Competition may also lead to



cheating and unfair practice, imbalanced skill development, and false judgement about an individual's ability (Mincemoyer, 1994). Therefore, incorporating activities where all youth are working together towards a common goal and ensuring that the same individuals aren't always in competition will allow for healthy competition and cooperation.

Cooperative learning among small groups of youth working towards a common goal has been shown to be more effective in preparing youth for their roles as adults. This concept of team-oriented interactions with peers fosters invaluable social skills like leadership, decision-making, building trust, communication, etc. (Rowe, n.d.). In addition, through cooperation, youth begin to see each other as assets, which reduces cliques, groupings, and bullying based on perceived weaknesses.

Ultimately, well-planned and well-executed activities will enhance positive youth development and prepare youth with positive knowledge about competition and the skills, attitudes, and aspirations to experience success throughout life (Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.).

Objectives:

- Understand ways to blend existing groups of youth to help ensure groups are inclusive.
- Explore activities that support teams of youth working towards a common goal.

Introduction (5-7 minutes):

- Describe the topic of competition vs. cooperation in regards to youth. Highlight how to instill a healthy sense of competition in youth by integrating cliques and groups during games and competitions so youth can see each other as assets. Ensure that the same individuals and groups aren't always in competition and that youth learn how to work together towards a common goal in cooperation.
 - What to say: "Competition is undoubtedly in our human nature, but teaching youth how to balance competition and the skills of cooperation with their peers is essential for incorporating all youth and making them feel welcome."
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: "To begin, we are going to gauge your knowledge on what the positives and negatives of competition in youth programs are, as well as how to promote competition on a healthy level."

Prior Knowledge (7-10 minutes):

- First, ask the staff to define both competition and cooperation. Within these definitions, staff can also use examples to explain what they mean. Try to come to a unanimous decision and write that definition on a large sheet of poster-sized paper.
- Then, ask the staff to define what healthy competition is. How does this definition differ from the staff's previous definition?
- Ask the staff what they believe are some advantages and disadvantages to competition. You can refer to the knowledge section of this module if the staff are stuck. Record their responses in two columns (Advantages and Disadvantages) on the same sheet of paper as the definitions.
- Ask the staff how their roles as program staff can help youth actively participate in activities and how to promote positive/healthy competition. Record their responses.



- Ask the staff if there is anything they want clarification on, feel they don't fully understand, or want to learn regarding the concept of activity planning around competition. Again, record their responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Creating Inclusive Groups* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Creating Inclusive Groups* activity:
 - What to say: "One way to integrate cliques that may form during activities is to vary youth groups. Not only does this strategy introduce youth to more of their peers, it also allows youth a chance to compete against different groups and individuals. This activity will provide you with some of the useful methods for forming varied youth groups."
- Lead the *Creating Inclusive Groups* activity:
 - Begin this activity by first splitting the participants into smaller groups of two to three people.
 - Provide an example of a way to create an inclusive group, such as having youth find group members who all share the same birth month as they do. Groups may need to be altered depending on how many individuals share the same birth month.
 - Emphasize how having a repertoire of ways to mix youth up to create more fair teams or to have youth branch out and interact with peers they don't typically interact with will improve the quality of the program.
 - Then, have the groups of staff brainstorm and list on construction paper their own ways of creating groups before an activity. Encourage staff to be as creative as possible and to come up with as many different methods as possible.
 - Once each group has exhausted all the methods they can think of, ask each group to share their top two. If any of the staff members have had experience with and would like to share how they have handled creating groups of youth that are fair and work to involve everyone within the group, have them share.
 - Instructor Note: A list of examples of ways to create inclusive groups is provided as a resource at the end of this workshop guide (*Instructional Aid: Examples of Ways to Create Inclusive Groups*).

Activity: *Human Knot* (30 minutes)

- Describe the *Human Knot* activity:
 - What to say: "This next game will highlight the benefits of working cooperatively and the consequences of too much competition."
- Lead the *Human Knot* activity:
 - Have the staff stand in a circle around the room so that they are standing close to the person next to them. If the room isn't large enough for all of the participants, you can either divide the staff into two smaller groups or try to find a larger space.
 - Once the staff are in the circle (you can also join the circle and play too), reach out and hold hands with two different people in the circle. These **cannot** be the people next to you. Each left hand should hold a left hand, and each right hand a right.



- Begin the game. Communicate with other players to figure out where to begin untangling. It is against the rules to let go of the hands you are holding while playing the game, but you may have to readjust your grip at some point.
- Maneuver around other staff (bend, twist, step over arms, etc.) to untangle the knot.
- As you begin to untangle, a circle will start to form. Some individuals will be facing the inside of the circle, some the outside. Once you have finished untangling, you will have an unbroken circle of joined hands!
- Come back together as a group to discuss what made the completion of the game successful or unsuccessful (depending on how quickly the staff completed the game or how challenging they found it).
- Ask this question in the follow-up discussion: “Could you have completed the activity without working with ALL the other staff members?”
- Summarize the point of the game by saying “This game highlights the type of activity where youth can work toward a common goal rather than in teams competing against each other. Activities like the one you just completed are examples of youth cooperating to achieve a shared goal.”

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?”

Resources:

Instructional Aid: *Examples of Ways to Create Inclusive Groups*

Sources:

Mincemoyer, C. (1994). Competition and self-esteem. *Cooperation, competition, and kids: A learn at home series for volunteers, parents, coaches, and anyone who works with youth*, (2). Retrieved from <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/4-h/leaders/resources/publications/s2060-cooperation-competition-and-kids-2-competition-and-self-esteem.pdf>

Rowe, T. (n.d.). When winning doesn’t mean coming in first. *Skills You Need*. Retrieved from <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/rhubarb/competition-vs-cooperation.html>

Virginia Cooperative Extension. (n.d.). 4-H Competitions. Retrieved from <https://ext.vt.edu/4h-youth/competitions.html>



Youth Inclusion Instructional Aid: Examples of Ways of Creating Inclusive Groups

Directions: Instructors should use this list to prompt responses from participants and as examples to get creative thoughts flowing during the Creating Inclusive Groups activity.

Playing Cards: Groups can be arranged by the same number (Aces, Kings, Queens, etc.), by the same suite, or by odd numbers or even numbers. Variations will depend on the size of the group necessary for the desired activity.

Index Cards: Make/prepare index cards ahead of time that will serve as a way for youth to form pairs. On each pair of cards, write a famous pair such writing “peanut butter” on one card and “jelly” on another. In order for youth to form a pair, they must find the matching card that goes with theirs.

Counting Off: Have youth line up. Variations in how they line up may include alphabetically, by height, in chronological order by birthday, etc. Then, count off in groups 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. for however many groups you need.

Birth Month: Have youth find group members who all share the same birth month as they do. Groups may need to be altered depending on how many individuals share the same birth month.

Candy Bags: Place four or five different kinds of candy in a large bag. Ask youth to reach in and choose a piece of candy. Have youth get into groups based on what type of candy they have. For example, you may choose to include lollipops, Tootsie Rolls, Hershey’s Kisses, M&M’s, etc.

Draw from a Hat: Write youth’s names on strips of paper (or on Popsicle sticks for a different variation). Shake the hat, cup, or whatever contains the names and draw to create random groups.

Half and Half: Each youth picks a partner and then the teacher combines pairs to form larger groups.

Stand or Sit: To create two teams, have youth pick a partner. Within the pairs, choose one person to stand and one person to sit. All sitters are a team, and all standers are another team.