



Youth Inclusion Workshop Guide: Informal Staff Development

Workshop Description: This workshop includes collaborative practice for reflecting on, discussing, and sharing thoughts to help program staff improve their competence, skill, and effectiveness. Successful implementation of informal staff development will ultimately allow staff to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses while gaining feedback from one another to strengthen the program overall.

This workshop guide will ask participants to communicate and collaborate with one another to learn how to improve their own individual youth development skills as well as how to improve the program. Participants will also develop the skills to better identify and incorporate informal development into everyday program activities and schedule for further program improvement.

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 45 to 50 minutes to complete all activities within this guide.

Materials:

- Seven large sheets of blank paper
- Writing utensils for each participant
- 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 Staff Development. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide. Finally, gather all necessary materials, prepare for the activities, and familiarize yourself with the workshop guide. To prepare for the activities in this guide, you should divide five large sheets of paper into four quadrants labelled Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Title each sheet of paper Relational Strategies, Role Models, Building Relationships, Activity Planning, or Community Building.

Knowledge: Understanding Strategies for Informal Staff Development

Youth development is a process that prepares youth for the challenges they will face when transitioning into adolescence and adulthood (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, n.d.) The staff in positive youth development programs are challenged with the task of balancing program requirements, planning and delivering activities, and meeting the needs of all of the program's youth. Therefore, program quality is vital for fostering positive development of children and youth while minimizing behavior problems. Understanding the strategies for staff professional development and training will allow staff the time to develop and practice the skills necessary for promoting positive youth development.



A good training program includes both formal and informal professional development practices.

Formal. Training programs with a set of curricula to ensure that all program staff receive the same training and materials are considered formal. This training is organized, structured, and typically has learning objectives. Formal professional development can take a variety of different forms and is often facilitated by program managers or fellow staff who have expertise in a particular area. If your youth program is considered part of a larger organization, set curricula and objectives may already be in place for various topics.

Informal. Informal staff development training doesn't follow a set of curricula but is somewhat casual and occurs naturally. This development is rooted in modeling, reflection, discussion, sharing, and relationship-building among staff.

Informal staff development and training can be just as important as any formal training and often results in deep, effective learning. Especially because it allows for a constant feedback loop between staff with different skills and abilities and provides opportunities for trial and error (MBA Skool, n.d.).

Objectives:

- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within the program
- Communicate and share knowledge and opinions with other staff members
- Identify opportunities for informal development in the youth program

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe informal staff development and how it creates an inclusive and successful environment and program.
 - What to say: "Today we are going to talk about how informal staff development can be used to improve program quality. Many can describe formal training and professional development, but oftentimes, informal training can be just as important to a program's success. Informal training primarily occurs through the utilization of reflection, discussion, and sharing among all program staff members."
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: "To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of informal development and where the gaps in your knowledge are."

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the staff to share how they would define informal staff development and how it is different from formal staff development. 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 staff can see.
- Once you have agreed on a definition for both formal and informal staff development, come up with some examples of each as a group. Examples of formal development may include lectures, workshops, seminars, etc. Informal development may include discussions, shadowing, mentoring, etc.
- Ask the staff how they will know if informal professional development is being implemented successfully. Record responses.



- Ask the staff if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to informal development or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *SWOT* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *SWOT* activity:
 - What to say: “We are going to do a collaborative activity that will implement your own thoughts regarding the characteristics of the program and your role as a staff member within the program. The goal of this exercise is to have you identify your strengths and weaknesses, the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and the opportunities for improvement for both.”
- Lead the *SWOT* activity:
 - Prior to the start of the activity, you should have collected and divided five large sheets of paper into four quadrants and hung them around the room. At the top of each paper should be a title describing a program quality (i.e., relational strategies, role models, building relationships, activity planning, and community building).
 - Divide the staff participants into smaller groups of three to four and provide each individual with a writing utensil.
 - Instruct the groups to rotate around the room, adding their ideas to each of the categories in the quadrants (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) for all of the posters.
 - Emphasize what should be written in each of the quadrants:
 - Strengths** - What are the staff’s and program’s strengths? What do we do well?
 - Weaknesses** - What are the staff’s and program’s weaknesses? What don’t we do well?
 - Opportunities** - What are opportunities around us that we can use? Who and what can help us?
 - Threats** - What are threats or obstacles that may stand in staff or the program’s way?
 - Once all the groups have had a chance to write on each sheet of paper, discuss among all staff in order to identify common themes and any gaps that individuals feel should have been mentioned that weren’t.
 - Once you have discussed and reflected on these individual and program strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for growth, etc., transition into the next activity by asking staff to think about how these reflective practices are unknowingly and unconsciously incorporated into everyday program interactions and activities.

Activity *Informal Staff Development at Work* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Informal Staff Development at Work* activity:
 - What to say: “Now that you are familiar with the importance of informal staff development, we are going to identify opportunities to maximize its effect.”
- Lead the *Informal Staff Development at Work* activity:
 - Provide the staff with a few examples of what informal development looks like. These examples may include shadowing or observing another staff member while they



describe an activity or respond to a youth exhibiting bad behavior, collaborating with another staff member over lunch regarding a program factor, etc.

- Ask the staff to get into groups of three to four people. These can be the same groups as the previous activity. Provide each group with a piece of construction paper and pens or pencils.
- Instruct the staff to think about any previous formal training workshops they have been through, previous program experience, or experience in this program (if applicable). Ask staff to think about times when they felt they learned something through observation, discussion with another staff member, building a relationship with another program staff member, etc.
- Have group members share their experiences with one another and write down these instances on the construction paper in front of them. These are examples of informal staff development. Staff can also write down any other examples of informal staff development at work within a youth program that they can think of.
- Have a few volunteers share what their groups wrote.

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:

None

Sources:

National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition. (n.d.). Youth development & youth leadership. Retrieved from <http://nasetalliance.org/youthdev/index.htm>

MBA Skool. (n.d.). Informal training. Retrieved from MBASKool.com. (n.d.). Informal Training Definition | Human Resources (HR) Dictionary. Retrieved August 18, 2018, from <https://www.mbaskool.com/business-concepts/human-resources-hr-terms/15464-informal-training.html>

The *SWOT* activity was adapted from ACT for Youth. (n.d.). Engaging youth: Planning activities. In *Positive youth development 101 – Handout*. Retrieved from ACT for Youth. (n.d.). Engaging youth: Planning activities. Retrieved August 18, 2018, from http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/pyd/pyd_4-3_engaging-planning.pdf