



Youth Inclusion Workshop Guide: Responding to Put-Downs

Workshop Description: This workshop includes information and practice for learning how to respond to put-downs and other forms of inappropriate language. These skills include learning how to recognize speech from both youth and adults that is degrading and harmful to individuals or groups such as racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks. Through the development of these skills, program staff will be able to address and respond to inappropriate language that may occur within the program.

Preparation Time: The designated preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This 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.

Material list:

- Two blank sheets of large white paper and/or whiteboard space.
- Markers.
- Chairs (enough for each staff member participant). If there are not enough chairs accessible, sticky notes can also be used.
- Printed copies of the *Inappropriate Language Scenarios* from the Resources section below.

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Youth Inclusion Training website, specifically the content related to Supportive Adult-Youth Relationships. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide and any others related to this topic (e.g., Using Relational Strategies, Developmental Levels and Inclusion, etc.). In addition, gather all necessary materials and familiarize yourself with the workshop guide.

Knowledge: Understanding Strategies to Respond to Put-Downs

The language used within a program is a foundational component of making an inclusive program that is safe and welcoming for all youth.^{27, 8} Program staff not only need to be thoughtful regarding their own use of language but also need to recognize speech from youth that degrades any group of individuals,²⁶ including homophobic remarks (e.g., “that’s so gay,” “no homo”), racist remarks (e.g., racial slurs), sexist remarks (e.g., “sissy,” “you throw like a girl”), or any other speech that demeans a group of youth (e.g., “retard”). In an inclusive youth program that is welcoming and safe for all youth, there are rules in place that explicitly prohibit such speech, and require program staff to consistently respond to it when it is heard.^{25, 26}

Staff should approach youth who use degrading language with education first, proceed to redirection, then limit the opportunities of the youth using the negative languages, and finally progress to a direct consequence. Through this strategy, youth program staff explain what the word or phrase used actually means and why that language might be hurtful toward someone else.²⁵ Staff should name the behavior



and redirect the youth to positive and productive language. For example, tell the youth that the phrase they used is derogatory and considered name-calling and that it is unacceptable.^{24, 25} Staff should explain how they are offended by the phrase²⁵ and encourage youth to find another way to communicate their thoughts.²⁵ Throughout the incident, the staff need to support the targeted youth. One intentional way to do this is to pull the youth aside publicly or privately and ask what he or she needs.²⁴

Objectives:

- Identify inappropriate language that can be received as degrading or harmful to individuals or groups.
- Develop skills necessary to respond to put-downs and other forms of inappropriate language.
- Educate youth on how and why phrases can be derogatory and offend people.
- Encourage youth to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a more positive way.

Introduction (5-7 minutes):

- Describe the topic.
 - What to say: “Today we are going to address how to respond to instances of inappropriate language within youth programs by responding to anyone who uses degrading language. Ultimately, we will work to answer the questions of ‘What is inappropriate language and what does it look like?’ as well as ‘How do you respond to the behavior and redirect youth to a more positive way of communicating their thoughts?’”

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the staff to share how language can sometimes be degrading and used inappropriately, what makes it difficult to respond to put-downs and other forms of inappropriate language, and how youth program staff can respond to these instances?
 - Record staff responses on a sheet of large blank white paper or whiteboard.
- Ask the staff what they think they will learn about this topic and how to address it when it occurs in youth programs. Additionally, ask if there is a specific topic they want to learn more about.
 - Again, record responses on sheet of paper or whiteboard.

Activities:

Activity: *Musical Chairs* (15-20 minutes)

- Describe the *Musical Chairs* activity:
 - What to say: “This first activity is designed to introduce the topic of inappropriate and abusive language. This game will hopefully illustrate how language can be hurtful, even if it wasn’t intended to be.”
- Lead the *Musical Chairs* activity:
 - Have the staff arrange their chairs in a circle, keeping one out; there should be one less chair than there are staff. If there are not enough chairs accessible, place sticky notes on the floor in a circle, one less than there are staff.



- To start the game, one person stands in the middle (“It”), points to a person at random, and says, “Do you like your neighbor?”
- The individual who was pointed to can either say “Yes” or “No”. If they say “Yes,” then everyone has to find a different chair and the person left standing is now “It.”
- If they say “No,” then the person who is “It” asks, “Why not?” The person then responds with some characteristic that several people would share, such as “Because they’re blond” or “Because they wear blue jeans.”
- After the response, only those who fall into that category (blond, wears blue jeans, etc.) has to exchange seats. The one who is left becomes “It,” and the game continues.
- At the end of the game, discuss how, even though the characteristics stated during the game were just observations that those words, based on how someone looks or what they are wearing, can be hurtful. This discussion can be prompted by asking, “Would you consider this game to be an example of inappropriate language? What type (degrading language, racist, sexist, etc.)?”
- Unlike musical chairs, a chair will not be removed after each round. Instead, there will be a new individual who is “It.”
- Ask the staff to reflect on how they would respond if they heard that youth were being singled out by one of their characteristics. If any of the staff have experienced this situation before, ask them if they feel comfortable sharing. Otherwise, brainstorm as a group how you could address a similar situation if it occurs in your youth program.

Activity: *Inappropriate Language Scenarios* (20-25 minutes)

- Describe the *Inappropriate Language Scenarios* activity:
 - What to say: “We are going to practice responding to a series of situations that may occur between youth in your program. These situations are hypothetical, but you may experience similar instances, and the skills you apply here will be useful for a variety of different situations.”
- Lead the *Inappropriate Language Scenarios* activity
 - Divide the staff into four groups.
 - Assign a scenario to each of the groups; either choose one of your own or there are scenarios located in the Resource section of this guide.
 - Instruct the groups that they are to read their scenarios and identify how they could respond to the situation in a way that informs and educates the youth about why their language is unacceptable.
 - Have each of the groups come up with a short skit portraying both their scenario and their responses. Once each of the groups is ready, have them present their skits to the whole group.
 - Once every group has performed, list the response techniques on another sheet of paper or a whiteboard. Ask the staff if they can think of any additional techniques that were not used in any of the skits.

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



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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:

Handout: *Inappropriate Language Scenarios*

Sources:

Footnotes in this document can be found as references within the Youth Inclusion Implementation Guide at http://reach.umn.edu/inclusion/pdf/Youth_Inclusion_Implementation_Manual.pdf

The *Musical Chairs* activity was adapted from http://www.character-education.info/members/respect_for_others_foul_language.htm



Youth Inclusion Handout: Inappropriate Language Scenarios

Directions: Print the handout and follow the instructions for the *Inappropriate Language Scenarios* activity.

1. There is a participant in your program who is calling another participant hurtful names loud enough so everyone can hear.
2. You overhear a participant making fun of another participant's mother, father, sister, brother, or other family member to a group of his/her friends. The participant they are making fun of isn't present.
3. A participant becomes emotionally agitated and begins yelling at you.
4. When playing a game of kickball, a group of boys begins making sexist remarks about the girls and moving in extremely close whenever girls are up to bat.