Two–Minute Tips

This Week's Topic: Cultivating Program Norms

Program norms are the values and routines your staff and participants strive to practice while in the program. Establishing program norms are a quick and easy way to foster emotional safety in your program. Developing and agreeing upon them with participants fosters mutual responsibility to reinforce expectations. It also communicates an environment where participants feel heard and respected and builds confidence that encourages sharing. [1] Feeling safe by setting norms and establishing routines is important for young people (especially for those who've experienced trauma) as they learn and grow.[2]

Practice Tips

Here are a few quick tips to cultivate program norms.

Activity
Small Group Discussion. Ask open-ended questions, invite participants to share their ideas, and ask a volunteer to take notes. The group agrees upon a set of program norms.

Materials
Markers and presentation paper.

Questions
Feel free to use the questions below, expand upon them, create your own, or work collaboratively with participants to adapt them to your program.

- How would you like to be treated while in our program?
- What are some examples of how we can show _____ while in programming?
- If we had to select 3 to 5 norms from this list, which norms do you think are the most important?
- What strategies can we use to make sure we remember the program norms and hold each other accountable?
- How will we encourage participation from everyone?

Additional Tips
Once participants decide on 3 to 5 program norms, post them in your program where everyone can see them. Encourage participants to create a chant, song with hand motions, or a dance. This will be a fun way to recite the norms and promote belonging. You can use the chant to start and end each program or as an attention getter.

It's very important to integrate your program norms into your activities and program. You can also use them as a tool to resolve conflict. Use open-ended questions to help participants connect program norms to how they treat each other in group work or during activities.

Be Accountable
It's critical to hold yourself and fellow staff accountable to program norms. When you break a program norm, acknowledge it, reference the norm, and make amends. Encourage participants to hold each other accountable to norms as well.

Tips in Action!

Watch staff at Village Theatre integrate program norms throughout program activities.

Want more two-minute tips?
Check out:
https://depts.washington.edu/cqel/expanded-learning-opportunities/

There you will find the latest tip, an archive of past tips, and a discussion board to connect with peers!

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[1] Smith, C., McGovern, G., Larson, R., Hillaker, B., & Peck, S. C. David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. (2016). *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social emotional learning.* (Forum for Youth Investment Report). Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://www.selpractices.org/resource/preparing-youth-to-thrive-methodology-and-findings-from-the-sel-challenge
[2] Ibid.