

**Additional Training Info.**

**for**

**Youth Program   
Instructors**

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**Non-Discrimination in All Activities**

The Youth Program and all of its activities must be carried out in a way that does not discriminate against participants, potential participants, parents, or others based on actual or perceived protected status. This includes a prohibition on discrimination due to:

* Age;
* Ancestry;
* Color;
* Disability;
* Gender identity;
* Genetic information;
* National origin;
* Race;
* Religion;
* Retaliation;
* Serious medical condition;
* Sex (including pregnancy);
* Sexual orientation;
* Spousal affiliation; or
* Protected veteran status.

In addition, if a participant has an actual or perceived disability, you must provide reasonable accommodations. If you encounter any circumstances where there is a questions about how to handle a situation related to potential discrimination or disability, contact the Office of Institutional Equity at (575) 646-3635 or [equity@nmsu.edu](mailto:equity@nmsu.edu). For more on this subject, visit <https://eeo.nmsu.edu/discrimination-policy/>.

**General Safety**

You are responsible for the safety of all participants in your program. In order to carry out this responsibility, you need to know what to do before something happens, and take appropriate steps to reduce dangers whenever possible. Here are some best practices:

* **Get formal first aid and CPR training:** There are a number of locations where you can get this training, including the NMSU Fire Department and the American Red Cross. This will prepare you to help someone while emergency responders are on their way.
* **Identify and Communicate risks:** If the program will involve physical exertion, working with chemicals, use of power tools, or other activities that could lead to injury, make sure these are identified, steps are taken to minimize risks, and both parents and participants are fully informed.
* **Safety Checks:** Before each session, do a safety check of the area to look for potential hazards. This includes trip and fall hazards (like extension cords across a walking path), potentially dangerous items or conditions (such as chemicals that are within easy reach or sharp objects that could cause injury), and weather hazards if there will be outdoor activities. For example, if you are going to be outdoors and lightening can be seen, it is time to go inside. If thunder can be heard, you are already late and need to get everyone inside a sturdy building immediately.
* **Know your participants:** You should know if any participants have allergies to things they might be exposed to during the program. This may include food allergies, as well as allergies to insect stings if they might be outside.
* **Know how to get help:** Should an emergency occur, ***call 911 immediately***. It doesn’t matter if you are on a cell phone or landline. When the dispatcher answers, state, “This is an emergency” and give your location. If there is time after this, give a brief description of what has happened and the type of help you need (e.g., police, fire, ambulance), if possible. If there is a serious injury, designate someone to call 911, another person to meet emergency responders, and people to assist/provide first aid until help arrives.
* **Assign participants into groups or “safety teams”:** When an emergency happens, it may be difficult for you to keep track of everyone. The members of each safety group or safety team should keep track of each other, and stay together. If someone gets lost or is injured, they should know to tell you immediately. If something happens to you, they should know to call 911 immediately.
* **Have a Safety Plan for each activity:** Let the participants know what you will be doing at the beginning of each activity, what hazards might exits, what they should do to prevent problems, and what to do if there is a problem. This can be as simple or complex as you feel it needs to be for the activity. For example, it might be a simple statement like, “For this next activity, we will be using a scalpel to cut into the widget. These are very sharp, so you need to make sure you only hold it by the handle, like this (demonstrate), and that you have a clear path around you so that nobody accidentally gets bumped. Don’t be “horsing around” with each other as we do this. If something happens and you get hurt, immediately stop and yell our safe word, “Bananas”. If you hear the safe word, immediately stop and put down your scalpel and wait for further instructions while I help the person who is hurt.”

**Child Abuse, Neglect, and Sexual Exploitation**

During the course of the youth program, you will be responsible for helping ensure the safety of the children who are participating. While your youth program likely will not be the place where actual abuse happens (if you are following the appropriate policies, procedures, and training), you might be become aware that the participant is being abused or neglected somewhere else. This might occur as a result of statements made by the participant, or by observations made by the program staff. You have a legal duty to help the victim, and the below information has been compiled to assist you in this endeavor.

**What Is It?**

As of 2017, data\* indicates that 25 out of every 1,000 children in New Mexico have been confirmed victims of abuse. The number of total incidents is likely much higher, since so many cases go undetected and unreported. Here are some terms and definitions to help you understand if you are witnessing possible abuse, neglect, or exploitation:

**Child neglect:** A child is without proper parental care and control. This may mean the child is not being adequately fed (malnourished) or clothed, not receiving necessary medical care, not receiving an education, or not being adequately supervised. It is the result of the parent or guardian not taking proper steps to care for the child when they are able to do so.

**Child abandonment:** This is when a parent or guardian intentionally leaves the child under circumstances where the child may (or does) suffer neglect.

**Child abuse:** This is when a person either knowingly, intentionally, or negligently – and without justifiable cause – causes or permits a child to be placed in a situation that may:

1. endanger the child’s life or health,
2. torture, cruelly confine, or cruelly punish the child; or
3. expose the child to inclemency of the weather.

**Sexual Exploitation of a Child**

There is also a very specific type of crime called Sexual Exploitation of a Child. This includes:

* Knowingly taking, possessing, or distributing photographs or video of a child in an actual or simulated prohibited sexual act if the person is under the age of 18;
* Causing the child to engage in actual or simulated prohibited sexual acts with the intent to have them photographed or recorded; and
* Receiving any money or goods/services as a result of a child engaging in a ***prohibited sexual act*** with another.

A ***prohibited sexual act*** includes:

* Criminal sexual contact, including masturbation
* Incest
* Sexual intercourse (regardless of gender of either party), including genital, oral, or anal;
* Bestiality;
* Sadomasochistic abuse for the purpose of sexual stimulation; or
* Lewd and sexually explicit exhibition with a focus on the genitals or pubic area

**Signs of Physical Abuse**

These are some indicators to look for:

* Sudden changes in behavior or performance
* Developmental delays or regression to earlier developmental stages
* Depression
* Cutting
* The child has been exposed to illegal drugs, chemicals, or substances
* Injuries that cannot be explained, or don’t match explanations given
* Bruising that shows different stages of healing, suggestive of being injured in the same area multiple times
* Trouble sitting or walking
* Flinches from sudden movements or noises in a way that is different from other youth;
* Appears to be afraid of adults
* Wears clothing inappropriate for the season or weather in a manner that may be covering injuries
* Refusal to change clothes for physical activities (e.g., PE) or refusal to participate
* Frequent headaches, stomach aches, or body aches with no attributable cause
* Increased anxiety or fear about having to go home , especially fear of a particular person or family member
* Running away from home
* Bullying behaviors against other children
* Abuses animals or pets
* Discloses maltreatment

**Signs of Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse can, and often does, include many of the same signs as other physical abuse, but might also include:

* Sexual knowledge or behavior inconsistent with the child’s age
* Acting out sexually on other children
* Genital pain, itching, bleeding suggesting trauma or infection to genital area
* Acts age-inappropriate with strangers or new adults

**Signs of Neglect**

While not necessarily a form of child abuse, neglect can also impair the ability of a child to be healthy. There are many resources available to help families who have financial difficulties, including housing, food, clothing, and medical assistance. Please report children who exhibit the following and who might benefit from referral and resources:

* Frequently absent from school
* Theft of food or money or begs for food (possibly from other students)
* Consistently poor hygiene
* Consistently dirty clothing
* Lack of appropriate clothing for weather or season
* Often left unsupervised, particularly in unsafe situations
* Lack of needed medical or dental care

**What Should You Do?**

The State of New Mexico takes the welfare of children very seriously. If you believe a child (a person under the age of 18) has been abused, you are required by state law (Section 32A-4-3 NMSA 1978, et seq.) to report it immediately to the local law enforcement agency (which is the NMSU Police Department, if you are on campus) or the Children, Youth, and Families Department.

NMSU Police Department 911 or (575) 646-3311

NM Children, Youth, and Families (CYFD) 1-855-333-SAFE (7233) or

#SAFE on cell phones

This applies to anyone in the state, even those who might otherwise have some type of confidentiality (such as doctors, nurses, school teachers, social workers, and members of the clergy). In addition, anyone who has records related to the child abuse (such as records of treatment, disclosure forms, communications with parents, and any other records) must make them available to the law enforcement officer investigating the abuse. However, you should not make additional copies of any potential evidence (such as any child pornography), and do not share with others who do not have a need to know. Preserve the original evidence and turn it over to the law enforcement officer who responds.

In addition to notifying law enforcement or CYFD, the university also has additional responsibilities that must be met. If the incident involves domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, you must also contact the Title IX administrator as soon as possible. If there is a serious injury or death as a result of an incident that takes place during the youth program, the Program Director must also notify the Environmental Health, Safety, and Risk Management office as soon as possible. Furthermore, coordination of notification of parents or guardians should take place with the police officer who responds (and with the Dean of Students if the participant is a registered NMSU student).

For more information, contact CYFD or go to: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/whatiscan.pdf>.

\* <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5162-child-abuse-rate?loc=33&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/871,870,573,869,36/any/11625>

**Avoiding Potential for Inappropriate Behavior**

When minors are in contact with adults who are not their parents, there is often concern about whether they are in danger of becoming victims of sexual abuse. Numerous incidents have demonstrated that predators often seek positions of authority in order to get close to potential victims. This includes becoming teachers, coaches, camp counselors, tutors, and volunteer leaders. While NMSU requires personnel working authorized youth programs to have a background check, it isn’t a guarantee that someone who has yet to be caught hasn’t been employed. The best way to prevent this type of abuse from taking place is to use a system of controls to prevent a predator from being able to take advantage of a position they might have and victimize someone. Below are some best practices that you should use in your youth program:

**No “one-on-one” contact between leaders and youth:** There should never be an instance when an adult (outside of a parent) has contact with a youth without another trained person in both visual and auditory range, and watching for issues. If it is necessary to talk to a youth away from other program participants, the adult should first notify another trained person and arrange for them to both watch and hear what takes place. There should also be a minimum of two trained leaders present during drop-off and pickup times to ensure there is no one-on-one contact. When it comes to electronic communication, the same steps should apply, with another trained adult copied on electronic messages. (NOTE: One way to minimize risk with electronic communication is to limit electronic communications to authorized platforms that log all communication. In addition, use of a “generic” contact address (like [STEMYouthCamp@nmsu.edu](mailto:STEMYouthCamp@nmsu.edu) or [Team1Leaders@nmsu.edu](mailto:Team1Leaders@nmsu.edu)) that goes to several individuals can reduce the potential for one-on-one contact and hidden messages.)

**Train youth participants and parents:** Make sure the youth participants and their parents are aware of the signs and dangers of “grooming” behaviors used by predators and know how to recognize risky situations. The training should include the steps taken to avoid one-on-one contact, prohibited conduct, and how to report inappropriate conduct (contacting local law enforcement is always a good recommendation).

**If transporting youth, make sure you are covered:** If transportation of youth program participants will take place by the program, make sure that there are at least two trained leaders in each vehicle to ensure there is no opportunity for one-on-one contact. In addition, make sure the driver(s) has a chauffer driver license, if needed (required if they are being paid to transport people). Vehicles used to transport participants need to have adequate and appropriate insurance coverage, and should undergo a safety inspection by the driver before each trip.

**Keeping Parents Informed / Consent Forms**

* Provide an orientation session, training, or materials to parents who enroll their children in the program
* Include a description of all activities, along with identification of any risks and mitigation efforts
* Explain the role of parents in encouraging participants to follow rules and safety direction, along with making sure their child is able to participate safely
* Explain the physical setting of the program and how it is structured, to include an understanding of the college environment, supervision provided in the program, contact with adults, and potential adult content (if applicable)
* Describe measures taken by the program to address safety concerns
* List computer and equipment use expectations and limitations
* Ensure parents know they are responsible for maintaining health insurance
* If this is an overnight program, or parents will be far away, obtain authorization for medical treatment

**Hazing**

When it comes to hazing, youth programs have two things they must do. They need to: 1) ensure that activities within the program do not constitute nor encourage hazing; and 2) they need to ensure hazing does not take place among program participants while in the program but out of sight of the program staff. This is actually fairly easy to do, once you understand what hazing is and how you can reduce the likelihood it will take place.

**What Is Hazing?**

Hazing is the term used to describe an activity or activities that a person must do in order to join or participate in a group (or group subset) that tends to:

* Humiliate,
* Degrade,
* Abuse, or
* Endanger

the person, even if the person is willingly participating in the activity. It is important to note that consent is not an element of hazing, as many people erroneously try to get out of trouble by claiming that “everyone agreed”. The very nature of hazing is that someone who wants to join a group bad enough might agree just to get in, but may not fully understand what it is that they will be doing. When pressure or coercion exist, the law has long recognized that true consent is impossible.

Hazing has been seen at almost all ages, from elementary school groups to college/university groups, and even adult organizations/societies. It has taken place in sports teams, bands, military cadet programs, fraternities, sororities, “secret societies”, and even medical schools, and it has taken place for hundreds of years. A quick online search reveals hundreds of documented deaths from hazing, and there have been many more serious physical and psychological injuries for each recorded death. Abusive and dangerous hazing practices have included rape, consumption of alcohol or drugs, beatings, forced exercise, forced drinking of water, eating of particular foods like ‘ghost peppers’ or cinnamon powder, exposure to temperature extremes, sleep deprivation, burial, dunking in water, cutting/stabbing, and even gunshots. Humiliating and degrading acts have included stripping a person nude, shaving their head, wearing particular clothing (that isn’t part of the sanctioned uniform), holding embarrassing signs, singing or chanting, associating only with one particular group of people and shunning others, being yelled at or cursed, and performing sex acts.

Excuses used to justify hazing include:

* It builds a bond/unity between current members and new members
* It shows how much they want to be a part of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* We have to be able to trust each other
* No one will get hurt
* It is “tradition” or a “rite of passage”

**How To Recognize and Stop It**

The first step in stopping hazing is recognizing that it is not healthy nor appropriate, and setting the standard in your program that it is not acceptable. All program staff play a role in making sure there is no hazing in the program, and that any hazing identified among participants is quickly identified and stopped. Prior to the start of the program, go through the activities planned for and make sure there is nothing being done that implies or requires participants to do things as a condition of being or feeling accepted.

At the same time, keep an eye out for participants creating their own hazing. If a team is requiring all of their members to do something that might be perceived as hazing, ask questions. Wearing of a team uniform or logo may be perfectly acceptable if all teams are given a chance to do the same thing, but other behaviors (like those described above) might suggest coercion among group members. If membership in the group requires the participant to do anything other than applying based on the his/her own merits and abilities, hazing should be suspected. Ask yourself if the activity is potentially embarrassing, abusive, or dangerous, and if group acceptance is conditioned on doing it. If so, hazing is likely taking place, even if everyone claims to be consenting.

If hazing is identified, the program leadership should make sure all program staff are aware to help identify the breadth of the issue, and then those participating in it should be informed that the behaviors are not acceptable and must cease immediately. Watch for any potential retaliation among group members, and make sure parents are aware of what was identified as happening, why it was not acceptable, and what has been done to address it. Even parents of children not involved should be notified, as it is likely that many of the participants knew about it. If there was illegal action taking place (see also the section on Child Abuse), notify law enforcement so an appropriate investigation can take place.

For more information and resources, including the video “We don’t haze”, visit: <https://www.stophazing.org/> and <https://clerycenter.org/initiatives/hazing-project/>

**Bullying**

This section has been taken from the publication**Not In Our School - Preventing and Addressing Bullying and Intolerance, A guide for law enforcement (2015)**. It is being reproduced in part here, as it does a great job covering many of the issues surrounding the issue of bullying. While the guide is designed to help deal with bullying in K-12 school settings, the behaviors and ages encountered in youth programs is the same. The complete guide can be downloaded at: <https://www.niot.org/sites/default/files/cops-p334-pub.pdf>

**The accepted bullying definitions: Something old and something new**

A common but outdated perception of a bully is a bigger kid physically overpowering another child to get his lunch money. Today however, especially with the anonymity of the Internet, bullying is far more complex than that. The U.S. Department of Education defines bullying in the following way:

“Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include

◾ *an imbalance of power*: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people;

◾ *repetition*: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”6

An imbalance of power may include physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or threats to popularity that are used in attempts to control or harm others.

There are three main kinds of bullying:

1. **Physical.** Hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking personal property or making mean or rude hand gestures. [NOTE: Physical bullying that involves actual or threatened violence, theft, or damage to property is a crime and needs to be reported to law enforcement. If it is based on a protected status, such as gender or national origin, it also must be reported to the Title IX coordinator.]

2. **Verbal.** Teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threats of physical harm. [NOTE: As with physical bullying, if verbal bullying is based on a protected status, it must be reported to the Title IX coordinator.]

3. **Relational.** Leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors, or embarrassing someone in public.

Bullying often happens under the radar of teachers and other adults. When a young person is accused of being mean to another, they might respond with, “I was just kidding.” This is one way bullying can start and gradually accelerate. The target feels bad, but out of shame, she does not report it. In other cases, a youth is threatened that worse things will happen if he reports.

Cyberbullying, defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices,”7 has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Cyberbullying is willful because it consists of intentional actions that, like other forms of bullying, are repeated with the intent to hurt another person. New forms of cyberbullying continue to emerge as different electronic applications (“apps”) become available, making it possible to anonymously share words, photos, or videos with large numbers of people. The imbalance of power in cyberbullying manifests differently: Power in cyberspace may be gained from access to information, photos, or videos along with the capacity to spread the information quickly, rendering the target powerless to stop or respond to it.8, 9

**Bullying has been linked to criminal behavior**

Some researchers have suggested that those who bully others are at higher risk of becoming involved in antisocial and criminal behavior later in their lives,17 including dating and intimate partner violence.18 In one study, 60 percent of those characterized as bullies in grades 6 to 9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24.19 These statistics underscore the importance of helping students who bully transform their behavior.

**Intolerance and bias**

Intolerance is often at the heart of bullying, revealed through unkind remarks and negative stereotypes regarding a person’s race, ethnicity, language, social class, appearance, sexual orientation, religion, or physical ability.

Peers, family members, teachers, coaches, or other adults in a child’s life sometimes encourage these intolerant attitudes. They may use anti-gay epithets or make remarks about people of different religions or racial groups or disparaging comments about a person’s weight, appearance, or intelligence, all the while unaware that their children are listening. Intolerant behaviors are also learned through exposure to television, music, and the Internet. For example, students may hear news items about people of Middle Eastern descent being called terrorists and then target their own peers who wear turbans or hijabs. They may mimic anti-gay remarks about effeminate peers or repeat the overwhelming number of insulting comments about overweight people they hear in movies. Students may express intolerance out loud in a classroom or public place or online or in other secret places.

Adults are often unaware that bullying is taking place. In a diverse community, people may assume that since their child has been exposed to different races, sexual orientations, etc., he or she will automatically be tolerant. Children need adult guidance to help them understand that all people deserve respect and equal opportunities. While many organizations are dedicated to addressing bullying, often the link between bullying and intolerance is ignored. As part of bullying prevention efforts, it is crucial to examine intolerance and help children develop accepting attitudes about people from different backgrounds.

**Where do people learn to be intolerant? How does intolerance foster bullying incidents?**

Statistics show the link between bullying and intolerance. For example, consider the following:

◾ 65 percent of parents whose children have Asperger’s Syndrome report their children have been victimized by peers.20

◾ 86 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students report being bullied at school.21

◾ 67 percent of Sikh youth reported that they are bullied in school, especially those wearing turbans.22

◾ 80 percent of Muslim youth reported being bullied, and 50 percent said they had been taunted in front of teachers or administrators.23

These numbers signal the need to help students learn to be empathetic and get to know people who are different from themselves. School resource officers and law enforcement officials can help children and adults change their attitudes, and in turn, change their behavior.

**It’s never too early to teach and to learn**

Starting in preschool, children need to learn about differences and about being kind to others. Skills for social-emotional learning (SEL) can be taught at home and in school. Children can learn how to communicate and express feelings, how to be empathetic, and how to control their impulses and think before they act.

Playful teasing and calling other children embarrassing nicknames, which can begin innocently, should be stopped as well. The target may laugh on the outside to cover up hurting on the inside. Starting at a young age, children also need to be given clear messages that hurtful remarks and exhibiting cruel behavior are harmful acts and will not be tolerated.

**When a child is being bullied: Changes to look out for**

How can adults discern that a child is being bullied, especially amidst the typical angst associated with growing up? The biggest warning sign is a dramatic change in behavior. Parents may notice that suddenly their child comes home from school and locks himself in his bedroom. His answers are mostly just one word and are delivered in an angry tone. He says he has a stomach ache and doesn’t want to go to school. Absences mount. A dramatic change in his demeanor is observed. Teachers notice his grades are starting to drop.

When asked if anything is wrong, he says no. He may not want to speak to teachers, administrators, or others in authority. Students of any age are often embarrassed that they have been bullied, or they may feel like they deserve it. Teens might worry that the bullying will get worse with adult intervention.

Unfortunately, if these incidents are not handled appropriately, the bullying often does get worse. If adults bring the target together with the child who is bullying her, the conflict might be exacerbated by intimidation or threats, or the bullying can go underground and become even more secretive. Therefore, handling bullying incidents must be done carefully.

School resource personnel and law enforcement officials can be an important extra set of eyes and ears and provide a different perspective before, during, and after the school day.

These are potential signs that a child is being bullied:24

◾ Unexplained injuries

◾ Frequent headaches or stomachaches, feeling sick, or faking illness

◾ Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating; kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch

◾ Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares

◾ Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school

◾ Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations

◾ Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem

Depression, anxiety, and isolation, among the most damaging effects of bullying, can have a lasting impact on a child’s social identity and self esteem. Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, and—in rare instances—suicide or school shootings can also result from bullying. An eight-year longitudinal research study by The Lancet Psychiatry in 2015 reported that children who were bullied by peers only were more likely than children who were maltreated by adults to have mental health problems.25 The impact of bullying can be life threatening and life changing for students of all ages and often persists into adulthood.

**Responding to a child who has been bullied: Listening with empathy**

Building positive relationships and trust is important.

◾ Listen and take it seriously. When adults diminish the power of the child’s experience or make an excuse for the behavior, a child may feel unsupported. Saying “Oh, he must have been joking around” or “Oh, he didn’t really mean it” or “You’re just too sensitive” or “Just walk away when he does it” is not helpful to the child.

◾ Stay unemotional and avoid being inflammatory or accusatory. Express your concern and empathy about what he is going through, but do not show anger or sadness. This may make him afraid to tell the truth again in the future.

◾ Discuss with the child why bullying happens. Make sure he understands that it is not his fault that he is a target. Explain that the person who bullies often has problems of his own, and bullying another child is his inappropriate way of dealing with those problems.

◾ Reassure the child that everyone will work together to make it better without retaliation from the bully. Often a child will feel like she is the only target. Explain that bullying is common, but not everyone talks about it.

◾ Explain that you will investigate the situation. Calm the students and parents down and reassure them. Explain that an overreaction or vengeful attitude by the parents may have the reverse effect and may cause the child to feel more shame and not supported.

◾ Inform the child’s parents to not speak directly to the parents of the person who bullies, even if they know them well. This is rarely helpful. They are most likely going to be defensive if a parent says, “Your child has been bullying mine.

**Successful strategies: Create identity safe and empathetic school climates**

A bullying prevention program cannot be successful without people simultaneously working to create a positive and welcoming school climate. School climate is defined as the quality and character of whole school environment. This includes how each member of the school community has a sense of belonging and feels valued and safe from physical or psychological harm.

A positive climate is achieved through shared goals and norms of behavior together with positive relationships between teachers and students and among students in an affirming organizational structure. Research has shown that a positive school climate fosters not only academic achievement but also improved student behavior and a reduction in bullying.33

Identity safe school climates are those in which educators work to ensure students that their social identities are an asset rather than a barrier to success in school. Acknowledging students’ identities, rather than trying to ignore differences or being colorblind, can build the foundation for students to feel a sense of belonging.34

In spite of real and powerful social inequalities in the world at large, identity safety is an antidote to negative stereotyping in our society and to stereotype threat (the fear of confirming a negative stereotype). Research on stereotype threat shows that student behavior is impacted even by the worry that he or she may inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype. Improving school climate is critical when it comes to addressing bullying.35

**Evidence-based strategies and procedures to prevent and respond to bullying**

Following are promising practices for school bullying prevention and response:37

◾ **Reporting systems.** Students should have several methods of reporting. Find out how students are informed of the reporting system. Effective methods include — official reporting forms available in the office; — identified staff who receive reports: administrators, teachers, counselors, and paraprofessional staff; — anonymous systems for students to report if they have observed a peer being bullied.

◾ **Supervised and safe campus.** Find out how the school collects data on bullying and learn how the campus is supervised during the school day and as students come to school in the morning and depart in the afternoon. Schools have specific bullying hot spots, like the hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, school buses, and places in the school yard where there is less supervision. Develop plans to assure these areas have sufficient supervision.38

◾ **Staff training.** All staff members need training on definitions of bullying and intolerance; school policies; and how to recognize, respond to, and prevent bullying. New staff members need the full training, and information needs to be updated regularly.

◾ **Bullying curriculum and refusal skills.** Students need to be taught about bullying and intolerance as part of the curriculum during elementary, middle, and high school. They need to do role-plays to practice refusal skills and need to be taught how to be an upstander instead of a bystander.39

◾ **Additional supports for students who are bullied and those who bully.** Individual and small group counseling and skill-building groups need to be offered for those who have been bullied or who have bullied others repeatedly.

◾ **Parent education and involvement.** Parents need education so they can support their children in being safe at school, not engaging in bullying behaviors, and insuring siblings at home do not bully one another. Parents can also join and support [program]-wide events and efforts to prevent bullying.

◾ **Identity safe school climate building activities.** Empathy, positive relationships, and valuing each person’s background need to permeate the school environment and be reiterated in classrooms and school-wide activities.40

◾ **Assessment and evaluation.** [Program]-wide surveys are a useful way to assess the problem of bullying and to evaluate progress on bullying prevention programs. Parents should be notified when surveys are conducted and parental consent obtained as required. Responses should be kept confidential to protect privacy. Reports of bullying-related discipline are also useful to review. After findings are analyzed, they should be distributed and discussed.41

For all strategies used, it is important to monitor effectiveness and identify what works to reduce bullying in a particular school.

Stopbullying.gov is the federal hub on bullying prevention by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They offer a PowerPoint “Bullying Prevention Training Module” for staff and a set of PowerPoints in English and Spanish for parents and communities. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/index.html>

**Appendix A. Sample Survey Questions**

Select from these questions to develop an electronic or paper survey for students. These questions can also be used for small or large focus group discussions by asking the questions and having the participants explain and elaborate on their answers.

* 1. If you could change one thing about the climate and culture of the program, what would it be?
  2. Have you or other students from different racial backgrounds been teased and bullied by others in this classroom/school?
  3. Do you think that immigrant students feel welcomed? Do they actively participate in all school activities?
  4. Do you hear racist slurs, or have you seen racist graffiti around the campus?
  5. Have you or other students been teased or called anti-gay names?
  6. Have you heard the phrase “that’s so gay”?
  7. Have you or other students been teased or bullied about being overweight?
  8. Have you or others been teased or bullied about being dumb (not as smart)?
  9. Have you or others been teased for how much money you or your family has?
  10. Where do you see bullying and cruelty taking place?
  11. “I feel safe here.” Is this statement true for you? Why or why not?

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**Tips for Youth Program Administrators**

As you get ready to plan your youth program, here are some tips gathered from other youth program administrators that you might find useful:

**Plan For Fun**

Adequate planning can make the difference between a youth program where the participants learned something, and one where they had fun learning something. When ***fun*** is built into a youth program, participants tend to learn more, pay attention better, return in future years, and spread the word about your program to their friends and family. Fun doesn’t just happen because of the topic of your program, though. It has to be designed into the program, even a program that we might already think would be fun (like a sports camp).

**Provide Adequate Time**

The schedule for the program should provide the participants with enough time to accomplish the objectives and have something they can be proud of at the end. For example, building a model rocket can be a lot of fun, but if participants don’t have enough time to finish their project and they go home with only a half-built rocket that has never been launched, they won’t have had much fun.

**Don’t Have Too Much Downtime**

Program participants will have different skill sets and abilities, and those who catch on quickly can end up standing/sitting around a lot while waiting for others. Here are some ways you might be able to handle this challenge:

* Team up participants with others of similar ability
* Identify the participants who are faster as “mentors” within each team to help others
* Have additional things the fast-finishers can do, either by making their project more complex or as a reward for finishing

**Variety**

Not all participants will enjoy doing the same things. Even activities like watching a popular movie might not appeal to some participants. It is alright if you don’t have 100% agreement for participants on an activity, as long as there is enough variety so that each participant is able to have fun the majority of the time. One of the strategies that some program leaders have used is to challenge the participants to come up with their own schedule and activities for “fun time” using some leader-provided guidelines that help ensure program objectives are still met. For example, a STEM program might challenge participants to come up with a new “sport” that can be played in a low-gravity environment like the inside of a space station, and then participants can have a chance to try out their game inside a bounce-house toward the end of the program. The participants might have to come up with the objective, the scoring system, and the rules of play. Using things like a beach ball (available in a variety of sizes) can help mimic how a thrown object might act in such an environment.

**Let Participants Decide On Activities**

If your program can handle it, sometimes allowing the participants to decide what order things will take place, and how much time will be spent on each, will help them stay engaged and give buy-in to the decisions. It might not be significant, but they feel included. For example, there might be 3 hours total available for 3 different activities that normally would be 1 hour each. The students might be allowed to allocate 15 minutes from one or two of the activities to the one they want to spend more time doing, so that perhaps two activities are done for 45 minutes each, and the third is done for 90 minutes. The objectives of the program are thus met by having all three activities accomplished (and students can be reminded in the shortened ones that they need to keep things moving to get everything done in a shorter period of time), while students get extra time on the one they identified.

Do you have tips you can share with future program leaders on how to make things fun? If so, please submit them to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inclusion in future publications and training sessions.

**Prepare Your Staff for Safety**

Another key function you have as the leader of the youth program is to ensure your staff is ready and prepared to carry out their duties. They obviously will need to know their material, and they will need to gather the necessary resources to accomplish their tasks. In addition, they will need to recognize that they are the front-line for safety associated with your program. The following are some commonly used approaches to ensuring safety at youth programs:

**Safety training for staff**

Taking time during staff training to talk about safety helps ensure everyone knows what to do if incidents arise, and it reinforces the importance of safety. Challenge the staff to identify potential safety issues that might arise during the planned activities, along with ways to minimize safety risks.

**Prior-to-arrival walk-through**

At least 30 minutes before the youth participants will arrive, have designated program staff do a walk-through of all areas that will be used to ensure there are no safety hazards. Look for the obvious, like cleaning chemicals left out or an extension cord laying across an aisle, as well for the not-so-obvious, like a back door that has been propped open and could allow an unauthorized person access to the participants. In addition, make sure all emergency exit routes are unobstructed.

**Safety specific to your activities**

Many youth programs will have potential hazards that can be safely managed. For example, programs where there is a lot of physical activity should be prepared to keep participants hydrated, and deal with injuries like sprains and strains. Those working with hot objects, like hot-melt glue guns or heating plates, should ensure participants are properly supervised, are not engaging in horse play, and are using appropriate safety equipment. Program participants should be given safety training for all activities where there is an identified hazard, as well as general safety training for the overall program. They should know how to report a hazard they observe (such as, immediately notify the team leader), and what to do until it has been addressed (like stay away and warn others). For those who are outdoors during all or part of the activities, participants should have sunscreen, adequate shade during rest times, and water to drink. In addition, there should be one or more of the staff designated and trained in weather monitoring to ensure there are no hazards (e.g., high winds, lightning, hail, etc.) that creep up on the participants. In these cases, a sheltering plan should be in place so everyone knows what to do if the weather turns dangerous.

**Did You Know?**

When there is lightning, there is thunder. Most people in the US grew up learning to estimate the distance of the lightning by counting the seconds between a flash of lightning and when the thunder is heard. Unfortunately, most were taught that each second of delay means 1 mile of distance from the lightning. This is incorrect, as it takes just over 5 seconds for the sound to travel 1 mile. That is a big difference, since a 10-second count means the lightning is only about 2 miles away, not 10, especially when a single lightning strike can be several miles long. Basically, if you can hear thunder, it is time to stop the outdoor activities and get to safety inside. For youth programs during the summer and early fall, lightning safety needs to be part of your overall safety plan, though it can be part of any youth program safety plan, since it can occur at any time of the year. Learn more about preparing for lightning and other weather hazards at: [www.weather.gov/safety/](http://www.weather.gov/safety/)

**Overnight Programs/Camps**

Besides the logistics of handling meals and sleeping space, there are a few things to keep in mind if your youth program will be housing participants overnight.

**On-duty staff**

While the formal program activities may be over, there needs to be at least one person (and preferably two so there is no potential for “one-on-one” contact) on duty and patrolling the sleeping area throughout the night. This applies whether the participants are sleeping in tents or in dormitories. The on-duty staff are responsible for ensuring the participants stay in their assigned quarters and don’t take off, and for ensuring no hazards come up during the night (including animals, fire, criminals, etc.). If it is known that a participant is the subject of a custody battle by parents, the on-duty overnight staff should be particularly alert to the non-custodial parent trying to access the child.

**Rules for participants**

The participants should know what they can and cannot do, and what the rules are during the night. This includes what “lights out” means, and whether they are allowed to use personal electronic devices after that time. There should be clear rules on when they can leave their sleeping quarters, and how they can report issues to the on-duty overnight staff.

**Parental contact**

Parents often worry if they haven’t heard from their child in what they think is a reasonable period of time. Often, this is because they assume things at the program are scheduled just like they are at home. They might not realize that the program might have activities scheduled well into the evening. Make sure parents realize what time the scheduled activities end, and when they might stand a reasonable chance of reaching their child to check in with each other. It also might be a good idea to have a pre-designated time for participants to call or text their parents, since they will hopefully be having so much fine in your program that they aren’t thinking at all about home. This might be as simple as making the statement at the end of the last formal event of the evening, asking participants to take out their cell phones and send a message home. Some programs have even found it helpful to create an “invitation only” social media page for parents and post the daily schedule, along with photos of each participant having fun in various activities, as a way to relieve parental anxiety and give them something to talk about with their child each evening.

**Emergency contacts within the program**

Just as it is hard for parents to know what is happening within the program, it is also sometimes difficult for program staff to know what is happening back at a participant’s home. Emergencies can happen there, too, which might necessitate getting ahold of the program staff immediately. This includes death or injury to a family member, natural disasters nearby, and pet emergencies that might impact the program participant. Parents should be provided a way they can reach camp staff at any time of the day or night should something tragic happen back home. It is typically rare, but it does happen on occasion.