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Supporting staff to:

PROMOTE PEER BONDS

Promote Peer Bonds is a young person's experience with an adult who helps them work with peers in teams and groups, creating a safe space to learn with and from one another, exploring similarities and differences, and developing deep bonds and relationships.

Promoting peer bonds involves supporting young people to share and value one another's unique perspectives, experiences, strengths, and ideas. This is a Foundational Experience for young people, bolstering all other PYD practices measured by Hello Insight.

WHAT DOES PROMOTING PEER BONDS LOOK LIKE AS A PART OF OUR PROGRAM?

Promoting peer bonds requires a safe and supportive space for young people to listen to and learn from each other without judgment or critique. It is essential that adult facilitators step back and let young people grapple with difficult issues together, supporting them to see each other as resources, allies, and leaders. At the same time, when adults see interactions that suggest a young person is being excluded from the group, it is important to step in and to facilitate conversations about valuing others who are different from us. Encourage young people to see the unique assets and contributions of every group member, and to leverage these strengths in support of achieving group goals.

RESEARCH-BASED EXPERIENCES

- * **[ONE]** **Create opportunities for young people to work together and help one another.** Encourage young people to see each other as resources, allies, and leaders. Strive to create an environment in which teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration are essential. Create projects and activities that encourage young people to work in teams to solve problems.
- * **[TWO]** **Create an environment in which young people feel safe and supported by one another.** Support young people to listen to each other’s perspectives without judgment or criticism.
- * **[THREE]** **Create opportunities for young people to work in small groups to solve problems.** Step back to let young people grapple with difficult issues. When necessary, gently mediate conversations to remind young people of agreed-upon rules for engagement.
- * **[FOUR]** **Create a sense of team or group identity.** Consider having young people create team names, logos, t-shirts, or other elements that would help them to identify as a team. Foster a strong sense of “we” instead of “me” through team building activities that invite young people to develop their unique identity as a group. Don’t forget to take opportunities to reflect on positive team building strategies.

WHY IS PROMOTING PEER BONDS IMPORTANT?

When staff promote peer bonds, young people increase their self-confidence and life skills, academic motivation, as well as leadership skills and disposition (Search Institute, 2020). Promoting peer bonds has also been shown to increase high school and academic engagement, improve young people’s academic achievement, and enhance their general well-being (Donlan, A. E., et al., 2015).

In addition to the program benefits of promoting peer bonds, there are also larger societal benefits. Racism, sexism, and homophobia often come from a place of ignorance or a lack of social contact with others who are different from us. Exposing diverse groups of young people to each other and encouraging them to learn from each other by listening to their experiences can go a long way in breaking down these divisive viewpoints. It can also build their critical consciousness, empathy, and positive self-identity (Sabo Flores, K., 2020; Richards-Schuster, K. et al., 2019).

DISCOVERIES FROM HELLO INSIGHT

Young people are dynamic and full of promise, with many different pathways to success. Every year Hello Insight mines our growing dataset of more than 125,000 young people, participating in more than 1,500 programs nation-wide, so that we can continue to learn what works for each and every young person.

- * Hello Insight has found that Promoting Peer Bonds between young people is a Foundational Experience, bolstering SEL growth for all ages, genders, and ethnicities. It is critical for SEL growth amongst young men, especially those ages 16 or older. It is also critical for young people of color (those identifying themselves as Black or African American, Latinx, Asian or Indian, or two or more races). Promoting Peer Bonds works well when combined with efforts to engage authentically and expand young people’s interests and possibilities. Together, these experiences increase the likelihood of promoting SEL development.

HOW

HAVE OTHER PROGRAMS INCORPORATED PROMOTING PEER BONDS?

PYD, including promoting peer bonds, is not a curriculum, it is a way of working with young people that has been proven to promote SEL. You can incorporate promoting peer bonds in a wide variety of interventions and programs. Here is how some Hello Insight members have integrated this practice into their programs.



PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Educational Video Center’s Documentary Workshop intentionally brings young people together from different communities to work on video projects over the course of 15 weeks.



They specifically aim for a balance of “less college bound” young people from around NYC working alongside young people who tend to be “more college bound.” To ensure the video project is meaningful to the group, staff engage young people in an inquiry process that sheds light on their backgrounds, ethnicities, communities, and life experiences. Together, they discuss the issues that young people struggle with today and develop a film that incorporates their personal stories.

The Queens Community House’s Access for Young Women Program engages young women from different cultures and backgrounds to work on shared interests and issues important to them and their communities.



Young women share their stories with one another and create community workshops that communicate their life experiences and highlight their issues of concern. As staff pair more seasoned young women with newer young women, they build a sense of mutual aid: the ability to rely on one another.

For DREAM, the notion of being a “team” is key. Teams are formed when young people first come into the program.



These groups function both as actual baseball teams and as cohorts that move through the program together over time. Young people travel together as a team, study together, do health education together, and so on.

HOW

CAN OUR PROGRAM BEST SUPPORT STAFF TO PROMOTE PEER BONDS?

Use this reflection guide with your staff to explore “bright spots” – practices that you already do, highlight potential “accelerators” – practices that you could easily incorporate into your work, and “challenges” – things that might make this practice difficult.

PRACTICES Ways to promote peer bonds	BRIGHT SPOTS Examples of what the program already does	ACCELERATORS Ways you could easily incorporate this practice	CHALLENGES What might make this practices difficult to do
Create opportunities for young people to work together and help one another			
Create an environment in which young people feel safe and supported by one another			
Create opportunities for young people to work in small groups to solve problems			
Create a sense of team or group identity			



This guide is part of a set meant to help youth-serving programs incorporate PYD. Visit www.ins.gt/pyd-exp to learn more.

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