



AGES 11–23

**Supporting young people to:**

# EXPAND INTERESTS

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Expand Interests is a young person's experience with an adult who supports them to try new things, broaden their horizons, learn about other people's cultures and perspectives, and explore their own identities.

Expanding interests involves exposing young people to new ideas, experiences, and places.

# WHAT

## DOES EXPANDING INTERESTS LOOK LIKE AS A PART OF OUR PROGRAM?

Adults who expand the interests of young people help them explore new possibilities, try new things, take positive risks, and build connections beyond immediate friends and family as well as across differences.

### RESEARCH-BASED EXPERIENCES

\* [ONE]

**Create opportunities for young people to try new things they have never done before.**

Challenge them to be open to new experiences — things they’ve always dreamed of doing or things they never thought they’d try! Invite them to reflect on their experience and discuss whether it sparks any new interests or possibilities.

\* [TWO]

**Encourage young people to take a risk and try something new, even when it seems difficult to do.**

When young people try new things, encourage a growth mindset by reframing new experiences as learning opportunities. Thank them for their willingness to take risks and for persisting even when things are difficult or challenging.

\* [THREE]

**Create activities that reference or include things young people enjoy.** Be curious about young people.

Learn who they are by finding out about their cultures, life experiences, and interest areas. Include what you discover in conversations and the program itself.

\* [FOUR]

**Provide opportunities for young people to explore their own passions, cultures, identities, and histories.**

Tapping into a young person’s interests can increase their engagement. Ask young people what they are interested in, and be sure to listen and support them. If you feel personally challenged by an interest, ask more questions to understand their perspective.

\* [FIVE]

**Support young people to learn about one another — both their similarities and their differences.**

Encourage young people to learn about one another’s cultures, experiences, families, perspectives, and strengths. As you identify young people with similar interests, be sure to help them connect about their shared interests.

\* [SIX]

**Provide opportunities for young people to meet and connect with new people.**

Invite guest speakers to share their stories, histories, personal backgrounds, and professional journeys. Try to enlist guests who have similar interests or backgrounds as young people as well as those who might see things differently.

# WHY

## IS EXPANDING INTERESTS IMPORTANT?

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Expanding a young person’s interests and possibilities has been shown to increase school engagement and high school graduation rates, promote healthy behaviors, decrease risky behaviors and increase overall satisfaction with life (Search Institute 2020). Young people with expanded interests understand multiple points of view, develop a greater sense of contribution and have strong positive identity (Benson, P.L. 2006; Scales, P.C., et al., 2011).




### DISCOVERIES FROM HELLO INSIGHT

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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.

- \* Expanding Interests is a highly predictive experience of the development of SEL across age, gender, and ethnicity. It works best when combined with authentic engagement and promoting peer bonds. Together, these experiences amplify SEL growth.

# HOW

## HAVE OTHER PROGRAMS INCORPORATED EXPANDING INTERESTS?

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

### PROGRAM EXAMPLES



**At Trellis For Tomorrow’s Food for Thought program, learning is a very individualized process, and each young person has a unique learning journey that they create based on their interests.**

Adult staff encourage young people to follow their interests, asking inquiry questions and encouraging them to problem solve along the way.



**Play Rugby USA, capitalizes upon young people’s own interests in the sport as a basis for its approach.**

As one staff member says: *“The biggest thing is that kids want to be here, that they choose to be here. Many kids have identified rugby as a passion before they enter the program. But they do not join to become professional rugby players, it might be an indirect outcome, but it’s not the goal.”* Others join Play Rugby USA to become part of a team and really enjoy working together toward a common goal.



**At DREAM, the TeamBuilders program promotes expanding interests among young people through deep engagement with baseball,** encouraging them to explore all of the roles from management to statistics to coaching to playing.

# HOW

## CAN OUR PROGRAM BEST SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPAND INTERESTS?

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.

<b>PRACTICES</b> Ways to support young people	<b>BRIGHT SPOTS</b> Examples of what the program already does	<b>ACCELERATORS</b> Ways you could easily incorporate this practice	<b>CHALLENGES</b> What might make this practices difficult to do
Providing opportunities for young people to try many things they have never done before.			
Encouraging young people to take a risk and try something new, even when it seems difficult.			
Creating activities that reference or include things young people enjoy.			
Providing opportunities for young people to explore their own passions, cultures, identities and histories.			
Supporting young people to learn more about how they are similar and different from their peers.			
Providing opportunities for young people to meet and connect with new people.			



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

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