



Session 4: An Inclusive Environment

Definition

An inclusive environment is one that creates a sense of belonging and encourages and supports its members with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members, taking pride in the collective efforts of all.

Application

An inclusive or welcoming environment goes a step beyond a safe environment. It is one where individuals feel included as a part of the group and feel supported and encouraged. The feeling of belonging to a group is very important to a young person. This is often why youth assume certain styles of dress and behave in certain ways. There are some very simple ways to create belonging from club or group membership cards to club or county t-shirts (adapted from Ferrari, 2003).

Introduction to the Session

One of the most pronounced developmental needs of adolescent youth is a sense of belonging or fitting in. As youth age, the influence of parents and other adults becomes less pronounced and the influence of peers increases. Status and peer influence often greatly affect how youth, especially adolescents, form their sense of “self” and react in different situations. It is important to remember that peers are not the only factors creating a sense of an inclusive or exclusive environment for youth. Adults can create an atmosphere that promotes inclusion or exclusion. This session explores how status, peer influences and environmental factors play out in a social setting and guide youth attitudes and interests.

This Element is present when:

- Youth members encourage each other during fair judging, at sports events, or through academic challenges.
- Members feel they belong to a specific club, or group while knowing that they also belong to larger state and national organizations and efforts.
- Signs, banners, t-shirts and other recognitions identify the youth’s clubs, organizations, and symbols.
- All members feel free to invite friends and welcome new members to events throughout the program year.

to those who excel in competition with other youth. (See National 4-H Recognition Model, available from your county Extension office for framework and ideas)

- Involve everyone right from the beginning through ice-breakers and other get acquainted activities.

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

—Maya Angelou

Ways to support this Element:

- Use buttons, t-shirts, hats or other symbols to signify group membership.
- Actively seek out others to diversify group membership.
- Provide many forms of recognition, not just

Goal of Lesson

To help adults working with youth recognize the importance of inclusive environments and the factors that create a sense of exclusion or inclusion among youth.



Objectives

The participants will:

- Recognize the effects that status and power have on youth attitudes and interest.
- Experience acceptance or rejection based on status, peer pressure and power.
- Examine strategies useful to the creation of inclusive environments.

Activities

Chain of Diversity

A Trip to the Mall

Materials Needed

- Several decks of playing cards
- Headbands to hold playing cards in place
- Copies of “A Letter to Me” or plain stationery
- Envelopes (one per participant)
- Glue sticks
- Six strips of colored construction paper per person. Strips should be about 1.25 to 1.5 inches wide and approximately 8 inches long.

Time to complete lesson: Approximately one hour

Introduction to Lesson

From the beginning of these sessions, what types of things did you see that were inclusive or exclusive in making all participants feel important and valued? (List them if applicable.)





Activity One: Chain of Diversity

Goal

Participants will discover and recognize the many ways in which they are similar and are different from others in the group as well as the ways in which each person is unique.

Do the Activity

1. This activity is a strong follow-up to an initial discussion about differences and similarities among people from different groups.
2. Introduce this activity by inviting participants to think about some of their own similarities and differences.
3. Pass bundles of colored strips of construction paper around the room.
4. Ask each participant to take six strips.
5. Ask participants to think of ways in which they are similar to and different from the other people in the room.
6. On each strip, participants should write down one similarity and one difference.
7. When completed, each person should have written six ways in which they are similar and six ways in which he or she is different from other people in the room.
8. Tell participants to be prepared to share what they have written on two of their strips with the whole group.
9. If group members are having difficulty, give some examples of ways that people may be different or similar, such as appearance, birth order, the type of community in which they live, hobbies and interests, age, parental status, or marital status.
10. Ask each person to share two ways he or she is the same and two ways he or she is different from the other people in the room.
11. Start a chain by overlapping and gluing together the ends of one strip.
12. Pass a glue stick to each person and ask the participants to add all six of their strips to the chain.
13. Continue around the room until all the participants have added their strips to the chain. After the discussion, display the Chain of Diversity on a bulletin board or around a doorway of the meeting

room. The Chain of Diversity will symbolize the common aspects and the uniqueness that each person contributes to the group.

Ingram, P. (2008). *Diversity Activities for Youth and Adults*. Penn State Cooperative Extension, University Park, PA (used with permission).

Share

- Have participants share examples of what they wrote on their strips.

Process

- Ask participants to reflect on the many things they have in common, as well as the ways that each person in the group is unique.

Generalize

- Conclude by pointing out that, even though members of the group come from different backgrounds, in many ways they are the same.
- What types of words would participants in your 4-H program put on their strips?
- How would this be different from other groups they are a part of?

Apply

- How does it make you or other participants feel when you are more different than alike in that group?