

Out-of-School Youth Development Programs for Young Adolescents Ages 10-14

Understanding the Needs of Youth

In their older elementary school years, children begin to develop more self-awareness and awareness of the world around them. They begin to focus heavily on peer relationships and have a strong need for a sense of belonging. They typically desire a higher degree of independence and want to be treated more like adults and less like “little kids.” They generally enjoy opportunities to take on responsible new roles such as helping younger children, planning activities, and participating in community service. Research has shown that successful youth development programs support the healthy development of young adolescents by offering them opportunities to:

- Build close relationships with peers and adults and develop a sense of belonging in an environment of physical and social safety
- Have input and make decisions regarding the activities they take part in, the rules they abide by, and the setting where they spend their time
- Take on meaningful roles that involve responsibility and opportunities for leadership
- Become involved in the larger community and make real contributions while broadening their knowledge and understanding of the world around them
- Be exposed to a wide range of challenging and interesting learning experiences that help them build understanding, skills and competencies
- Out-of-school programs can do a great deal to provide older kids with opportunities to belong to a positive peer group, develop good relationships with caring adults, and participate in meaningful and tangible projects that enhance self-esteem and offer opportunities for leadership.

(Adapted from statements by the Community Network for Youth Development – see “Resource” section for details)

Youth who participate in effective programs have opportunities to develop positive self-concepts and peer relationships as they engage in interesting, meaningful and useful activities. Youth who lack these opportunities during their out-of-school time often encounter opportunities to feel lonely, develop anti-social behaviors, and become involved in substance abuse and crime. Out-of-school programs that meet the developmental needs of young adolescents can do a great deal to positively shape their lives.

Ideas for Developing Appropriate Programs

The following tips should help you understand and meet the needs of young people ages 10-14:

Learn about the developmental needs of older children. All staff and volunteers working with this age group should read materials or participate in training on the social, physiological and mental development of early adolescents. Children of this age are going through intense changes and adults need to understand what they are going through. The books and manuals listed at the end of this tip sheet offer excellent information.

Learn about the specific needs and wants of the young people you serve or will be serving. Through focus groups, informal conversations with individual young people and parents, surveys and other strategies, find out about the interests, concerns and desires of youth in your community. Survey parents, school personnel, community members, and youth about their observations of what kids are doing during out-of-school time and their ideas and hopes for a youth program.

Get to know the youth in your program. Encourage all staff and volunteers to develop personal relationships with every young person in your program. Find out about their interests and talents, the music they like, their families, their dreams and their fears. Youth are likely to open up to staff and volunteers who:

- ⇒ Solicit and listen to their ideas
- ⇒ Take every opportunity to sit and chat with them in small groups
- ⇒ Show an ongoing interest in specific aspects of their lives

Recognize youth as program owners. Assemble a youth advisory committee to discuss and make decisions about the program. Rotate the youth who participate in the advisory group so everyone gets a chance. Encourage input from all youth as well as those who are part of the advisory group. Youth are more likely to enjoy a program that they help to create. Regularly involve youth in:

- ⇒ Developing policies and a “social contract” for the program (a code of behavior that lays out what is appropriate and inappropriate at the program)
- ⇒ Activity and project planning
- ⇒ Planning and preparing snacks
- ⇒ Designing and setting up the environment
- ⇒ Securing donations
- ⇒ Resolving their own conflicts
- ⇒ Working with community agencies

Develop project-based activities that have tangible results. Examples of project-based activities that have proven very effective with this age group are:

- ⇒ Community service or service-learning projects: Older kids can make a real difference in their community and develop self-esteem, life skills, and responsibility as they plan, execute and reflect on community service projects. (For specific ideas, see separate NIOST tip sheet on service-learning available by calling NIOST at 781-283-3455.)
- ⇒ “Apprenticeships”: Staff members and community volunteers can lead a series of sessions that offer older kids opportunities to develop interests and skills and finish tangible projects over the course of several weeks. “Apprenticeships” could include working with a carpenter to build a chair, working with an architect to design a dream home, or working with a lawyer to prepare and present a “mock court” case.

Involve youth in programs for younger children. Young adolescents generally enjoy the responsibility and leadership opportunities involved in working with younger children and younger children love attention from older kids. Following are examples of some ways that youth can be involved in programs for younger children:

- ⇒ Reading Buddies: Youth are paired with younger children and regularly read with their “buddy.”
- ⇒ Arts and Crafts: Youth prepare arts and crafts activities to do with younger children once a week or more.
- ⇒ Homework Help: Youth spend a small amount of time each day or each week helping younger children with their homework
- ⇒ Health and Life Skills: With the help of staff and volunteers, youth can prepare and present information on smoking, nutrition, the importance of working hard in school, conflict resolution, etc.

Resources

Unless otherwise indicated, all resources are available from School-Age Notes by calling 1-800-410-8780. This listing of materials does not constitute an endorsement from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time.

Books:

By Design: A New Approach to Programs for 10-15 Year-Olds. A kit including two manuals and a video detailing ideas and best-practices for running effective programs for youth ages 10-15.

Working with School-Age Children by Marlene A. Bumbarner. A comprehensive manual on understanding and working with children of all ages in out-of-school programs. Available at your local bookstore or on-line bookseller.

What Do You Stand For? A Kid's Guide to Building Character by Barbara Lewis. Designed for ages 11 and over, this book offers activities to help youth think about choices and consequences and explore such character traits as confidence, restraint, integrity and forgiveness.

The Kid's Guide to Service Projects by Barbara Lewis. Offers step-by-step instructions for planning effective projects and more than 500 service project ideas appropriate for youth of all ages.

Adventures in Peacemaking: A Conflict Resolution Activity Guide for School-Age Programs by William Kreidler and Lisa Ferlong. Offers hundreds of ideas and games to help children and youth of all ages learn to resolve their own conflicts.

3:00 to 6:00 PM: Programs for Young Adolescents by Leah M. Lifstein and Joan Lipsitz. Ideas and tips for running effective programs for young adolescents. Available through Available at your local bookstore or on-line bookseller.

Urban Sanctuaries : Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner-City Youth by Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Merita A. Irby, and Juliet Langman. Offers an in-depth look at exemplary neighborhood organizations and the roles they play in providing positive, supportive environments for inner-city youth. Available through Available at your local bookstore or on-line bookseller.

Organizations:

Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD)
657 Mission Street, Suite 410, San Francisco, CA 94105
415-495-0622