



Youth Development
Resource Center

GUIDES TO QUALITY PRACTICES

Fostering Positive Emotional Climate

This guide will introduce you to strategies, tools, and resources that will support you to create a positive emotional climate and safe space for youth to grow. Specifically, you will learn about the elements of a positive emotional climate and emotional activation. Below you will find definitions and practices that will support you in creating a positive emotional climate, preventing emotional activation, and caring for youth when they are emotionally activated.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL SUGGESTED INDICATORS

Use this checklist when designing your program.

ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE:

Language

- Positive and warm words, tone of voice, and body language that convey enthusiastic welcome, sincere affection, or genuine interest.
- Practice: encouragement, affirmations, or support to others.

Group Norms

- Norms that are set to allow autonomy and affirmation.
- Youth and adults are accountable to an agreed-upon set of guidelines, behavior expectations, or consequences.
- Practice: challenge by choice, talking stick, acknowledgement.

Positive Group Management

- Proactively promoting constructive engagement.
- Practice: calm redirection, structured attention-getters, showing understanding of possible emotional or physical activation of individuals.

Belonging & Inclusion

- Promoting a space where everyone feels welcome and comfortable to participate as their whole selves.
- Practice: evidence of mutual respect and active inclusion (race, religion, class, gender, pronouns, dietary requirements, etc.).

EMOTIONAL ACTIVATION:

What is emotional activation?

- ❑ Emotional Activation is when an intense or excessive emotional response is set off by any number of things (people, words, places, situations, etc.)
- ❑ When we are emotionally activated, our “thinking brain” goes offline and our “survival brain” directs our behavior. This may be referred to as “flipping our lid”.
 - ▶ Thinking brain - critical thinking, problem-solving, planning, impulse control, etc.
 - ▶ Survival brain - basic bodily functions (breathing) and survival strategies (fight, flight, and freeze)

How do you support youth when they are emotionally activated?

- ❑ Provide youth with the space to calm their emotions and reconnect with their thinking brains.
 - ▶ Practice mindfulness. Breathing meditations, body scans, observing-thought meditations, and sensory awareness exercises are useful strategies to use when youth are emotionally activated.
- ❑ Provide youth with the time and tools to reflect.
 - ▶ Connect. When you provide opportunities for students to share their reflections, make the conversation warm and informal. This is not a quiz or test.
 - ▶ Notice. Where are your perceptions and students’ perceptions different? This provides information that can guide your instruction and help you to better respond to and understand each student.
 - ▶ Learn. Different students express and respond to emotions in different ways depending on culture, personality, or context (CASEL, 2020).
- ❑ Provide youth with the opportunity to advocate for their emotional needs.
 - ▶ Create opportunities for youth to make relevant and meaningful choices.
 - ▶ Have conversations with youth about their strengths and challenges.
 - ▶ Remind youth asking for help is a good thing and encourage them to speak up.

What can you do to prevent emotional activation?

- ❑ Getting to know your youth as individuals can go a long way in preventing emotional activation. Your youth and their needs will shape the specific practices that will foster an emotionally positive climate.
 - ▶ Practicing the four elements of positive emotional climate described earlier in this guide, should support the emotional, social, and physical needs of the specific group(s) of youth served.
- ❑ Have staff model emotion management.
 - ▶ Staff should model healthy emotion strategies like active listening, remaining calm, communicating effectively and honestly, and validating others’ emotions (Preparing Youth to Thrive, 2016).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Creating Group Agreements/Norms

- ▶ <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/groupagree.pdf>

The Emotion Sensation Feeling Wheel

- ▶ <https://lindsaybraman.com/emotion-sensation-feeling-wheel/>

Hand Model of the Brain – A Doodle-Illustrated Learning

- ▶ <https://lindsaybraman.com/hand-model-brain/>

Flipping Your Lid Video

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>

Pixar Emotion Video

- ▶ [Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puXSw8yrVnI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puXSw8yrVnI)

CASEL Social Emotional Learning Reflection Prompts

- ▶ <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SEL-Reflection-Prompts.pdf>