

This Tip Sheet is intended to be a resource for Program Managers and Staff to recognize and celebrate diversity in their programs and create a welcoming environment for middle school youth and teens.

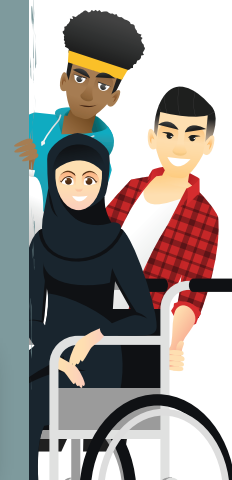
What is Diversity?

Aspects of our identity such as race, ability, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, or religion. This spectrum of characteristics can promote individuality or inspire group affiliations.

Why is Celebrating Diversity Important to Teens?

As Maya Angelou said, "...in diversity there is beauty and there is strength." Teens can take pride in who they are, and yet sometimes differences can make it harder to connect and empathize with each other. It's up to you to create a welcoming program environment where differences are appreciated and celebrated.

You can't think about diversity without considering intersectionality - how someone's multiple identities (race, gender, country of origin, etc.) interact and impact their experiences.



What can Program Staff do to Celebrate Diversity?

It starts with intentionally **building positive relationships with youth**. Staff should also **recognize youth strengths** and **promote opportunities for youth leadership**, empowerment, and authentic voice. **Remember:** nothing about them, without them!

The Most Important Factor - Positive Relationships

An authentic relationship with at least one adult fosters a youth's sense of belonging and impacts their future success. Here's how you can build those relationships with the teens in your program!

- Greet each youth by their preferred name, every day. Use their preferred pronouns.
- Create greeting rituals that are fun and inclusive, like a unique handshake or a "dab."
- Spend two minutes with a youth you want to get to know, every day, for ten days. Learn something new at each encounter.



A Checklist for Celebrating Diversity in Your Program

Consider your environment:

- ☐ Do your materials reflect a diverse world? Do the youth in your program see themselves reflected in images, books, and other materials in your space?
- ☐ Is your space fully accessible with ramps, signs/materials in braille, and other types of adaptive or assistive technology? Are instructions and other information presented in a way that matches a youth's cognitive development?
- ☐ Do you have gender-neutral bathrooms available? Do you use gender neutral language in your call-outs and attention getters?
- ☐ Do you encourage youth to share their cultures and experiences in your program? Consider "Diversity Ways" instead of Diversity Days where youth can share about their culture and/or their interests/hobbies with everyone. Promote and model respectful listening and conversation.
- ☐ Do you have a shared agreement or group contract to be open, accepting, and respectful of all? Youth can sign or add their photo to the agreement.
- ☐ How do you help youth identify and process their emotions? Do you teach yoga, meditation, running, chess, or other mindfulness strategies to help them regulate their emotions as they arise?
- ☐ How do you handle peer-to-peer conflict in your program? Teach and model for youth what peer conflict negotiation may look like. For example, how to share perspectives, how to agree or disagree, and how to take fifteen minutes to walk away then return to work it out. Some strategies may include:
 - Journal writing, drawing, painting, or the expressive arts
 - Role playing and practicing respectful conversations