

HOW TO GIVE YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHOICE

We all want the youth to feel connected to our programs. We want the youth to feel safe and supported, with opportunities to express themselves and to grow. Giving youth voice in the set-up of program schedules, sign-ups for activities and choices of electives can be a highly-successful way to achieve youth buy-in. This method can also be used for youth of all ages, from elementary to middle to high school students.

1) When should I start?

Opportunities for youth choice need to start in the program from the first day. The greater variety of youth choice more often means the greater the buy-in from the youth. If youth choice hasn't been a big focus in the program yet...then start right away!

2) Where can youth choice fit into my program?

There are many ways to incorporate youth choice into the day-to-day program and choices in actual activities in the program schedule.

- The site coordinator can get student feedback about the program schedule and the types of enrichments offered in program.
- Line staff fit youth choice into deciding on what to teach as well as behavior management.

3) What do everyday youth choice questions sound like?

The site coordinator may have focus groups or surveys to ask the students what enrichments they like best—or what activities they would like to see in the program, as well as if they need more time for certain activities. Sample survey questions for youth choice may include:

- "What activities do you enjoy most in the after school program?"
- "Do you feel like you have enough time for homework in the ASP?"
- "What changes do you think should be made in the program schedule?"

All staff has the opportunity to create choice in their lesson plans and programming. Creating two different lesson plans and letting the students choose which one they way to play is great for letting the youth feel connected to the program and giving the youth choice.

- "Would you rather play 'Math Around the World' or 'Math Quiz Game'?"
- "Would you rather do your homework now during homework time or during recess?"
- "What are your favorite P.E. games? If we play 'Grab the Apple' and 'All-Run Kickball' you can have 10 minutes of kickback at the end of our class."



WHAT SHOULD I HAVE IN MY TOOL BOX?

- Provide staff training to give them ideas on quick and easy techniques for youth choice in their individual classes.
- Easy-to-update youth interest sheets (*see the example of the sample youth classes and clubs sign-up on reverse*).
- Have a set of questions concerning program to survey the students individually or through small focus groups—ask follow-ups after initial evaluations to see how the program is working.

I HAVE A TIGHT BUDGET, WHAT'S THIS GOING TO COST ME?



Including opportunities for youth choice in programs can be as costly or inexpensive as a program may need. Giving the youth voice in a program on a day-to-day basis doesn't cost any money but is vital for youth buy-in and development.

- 💰 Individual surveys for youth on white paper (Office Depot Recycled paper—500 sheets, \$3.99 & copy costs from \$0-.10 per copy).
- 💰 Polling youth in classes and through focus groups (\$0).
- 💰 Prizes for youth to fill out extensive program surveys (\$.05-\$1.50 per youth participant).