



DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

structure & clear limits



SAFE ENVIRONMENT



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The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality,

a division of the Forum for Youth Investment, is dedicated to empowering education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. The Weikart Center encourages managers to prioritize program quality. We offer training, technical assistance, and research services that all come together in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a comprehensive system for improving the quality of youth programs.

Bringing together over fifty years of experience and the latest research, the Youth Work Methods are proven strategies for working with youth. Whether you believe that the purpose of an out-of-school time program is to improve academics, to build life skills, or just to provide a place where kids can hang out and be kids, the approach presented in the Youth Work Methods series provides a foundation for building safe and productive places for youth.

To learn more, please visit www.cypq.org.



structure & clear limits

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Acknowledgments

The youth development approach described in these pages was originally developed and tested at the HighScope Summer Workshop for Teens (founded in 1963), later called the Institute for IDEAS. In the late 1990s, HighScope's Youth Development Group took the learning approach developed at the Institute for IDEAS and delivered training for youth workers. These workshops, grounded in HighScope's direct experience, were extended by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality through research in positive youth development and evolved into what is currently our Youth Work Methods series.

The current training framework rests on a foundation developed by many, including David P. Weikart, Nicole Yohalem, John Weiss, Becky Prior, Kiku Johnson, Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom, Laenne Thompson, Tom Akiva, Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, David Martineau, Linda Horne, Mary Hohmann, Charles Hohmann, Charles Smith, Monica Jones, and many others.

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structure and clear limits:

Creating a Safe, Productive Space

The Structure and Clear Limits Method can help you establish a safe environment in your program that promotes youth engagement and productivity. An appropriate structure with routines sets the stage. Clear limits establish what's okay and not okay and can ensure a safe program climate.

Background

The Structure and Clear Limits Method was developed at the HighScope Institute for IDEAS, a residential summer program for teenagers that operated in Clinton, Michigan from 1963-2005. Directors and staff at the camp worked within and supported a highly structured environment with a regular, daily routine that all participants followed. The camp always attracted a diverse range of young people, including international students, and the structure and clear limits established by the staff created a common culture and a space where everyone had the opportunity to collaborate on projects, really get to know each other, and have a lot of fun. The Structure and Clear Limits Method is important and applicable in any youth program.

Feeling Safe

Many young people face a lot of uncertainty and inconsistency in their lives, which can limit their capacity or even willingness to take on new challenges and problem solve. The strategies that make up this Method are designed to support you in creating a consistent, predictable environment where youth feel like they can trust the space, trust you, and relax enough to be open to engaging with your program. Feelings of emotional and physical safety are the foundation to working up the Pyramid of Program Quality and being able to achieve higher levels of engagement.

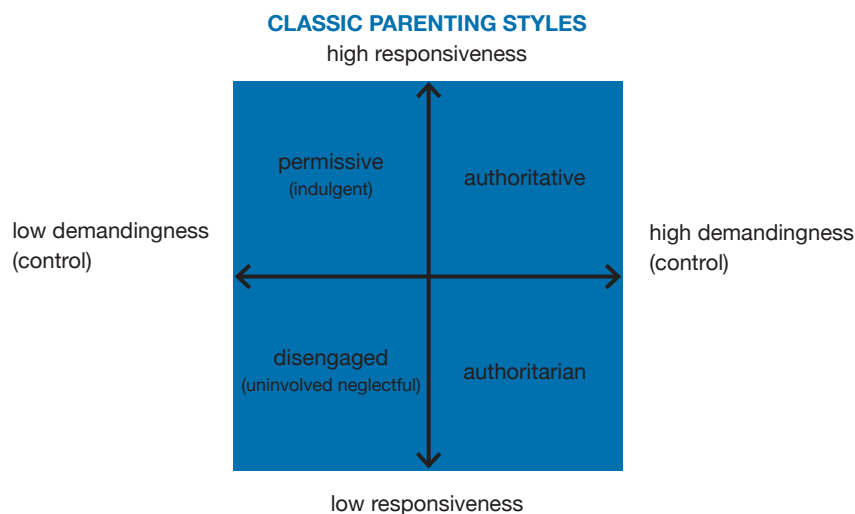
overview

What are Structure and Clear Limits?

Structure and Clear Limits in a youth program lay the foundation for a safe environment that supports young people. Structure is the framework for a program and the offerings within it. It's what sets the stage for activities and youth engagement and includes schedules, staffing, routines, and program space. Clear Limits are the established boundaries set and reinforced by an adult, youth, or a partnership between the two. They should be established and clearly explained early on so that youth can assume responsibility over them.

Why are Structure and Clear Limits important?

This method seeks a balance between being warm and caring (responsive) but also setting high expectations (demanding), and whenever appropriate and possible, involves input from youth (see figure below). This healthy balance is optimum for positive youth development. It is neither too permissive nor too authoritarian, establishing a structure that encourages growth and creativity while setting clear, high expectations, which in turn builds a strong foundation of emotional and physical safety. By implementing Structure and Clear Limits in a program, adults can begin to establish strong interpersonal relationships with youth and create spaces where young people can feel safe and flourish.



The Method

The Structure and Clear Limits Method is divided into two categories with the following seven strategies. The pages that follow provide details on each of these strategies.

Build Structure

- Establish routines
- Define goals or objectives
- Create a space that works
- Consistently reinforce the structure

Establish Clear Limits

- Set clear, positive guidelines
- Use rules to meet the needs of youth
- Have high expectations for behavior
- Communicate limits consistently

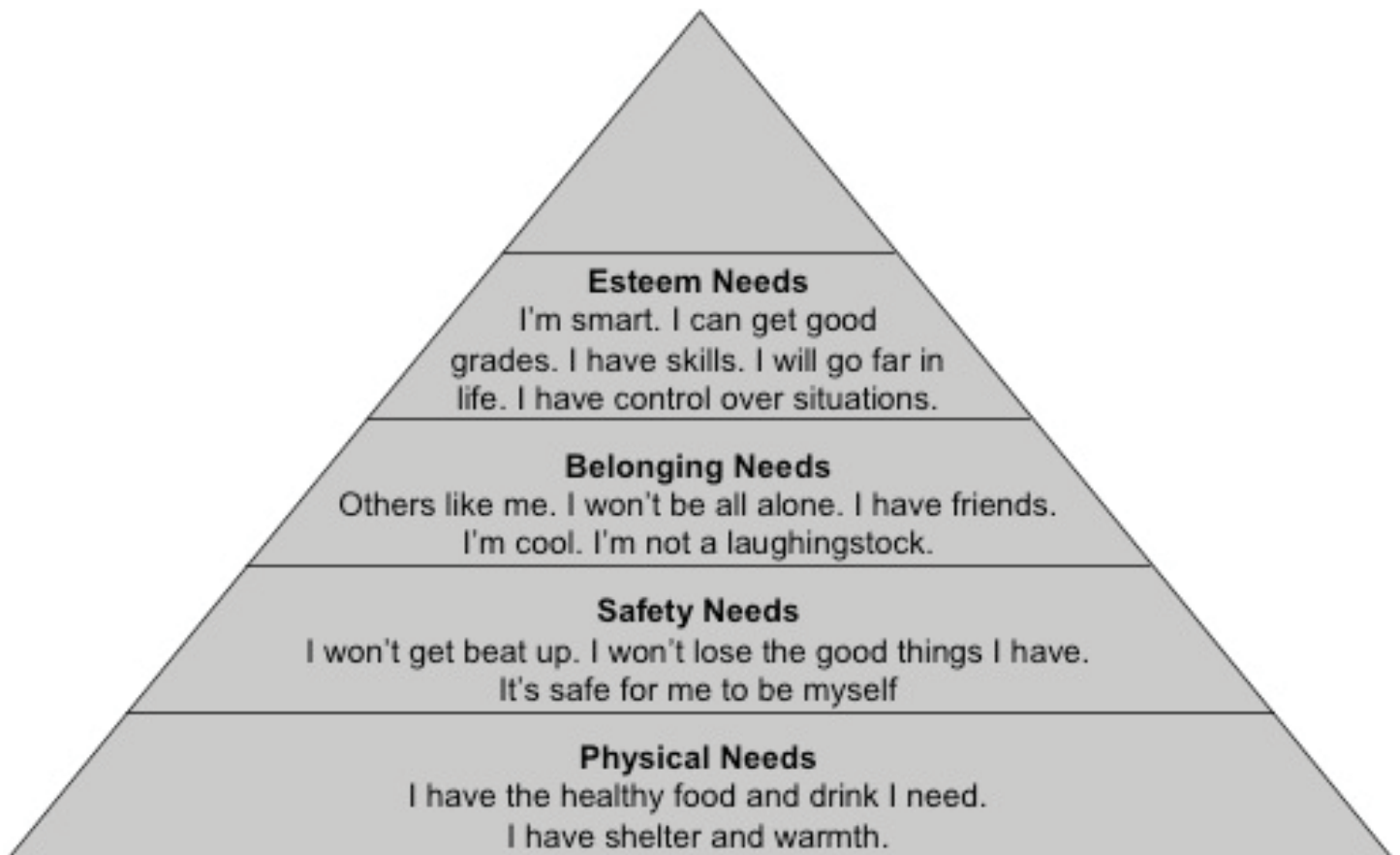
Remember Youth Needs

The Youth PQA Quality Construct has parallels with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow was a psychologist who thought that humans have basic needs that must be met in order to survive (for example, we need food, water, and protection from the elements). Once basic needs are satisfied, we naturally seek to satisfy more and more complex and socially meaningful needs (for example, the need for belonging, the need to be respected and loved, the need to contribute positively to society). Consider the pyramid below in regard to your own program space. The structure and limits that we create for our programs begins with meeting the needs for physical and emotional safety. This is then a gateway to meet needs higher on the pyramid. As you apply

the strategies outlined in the previous sections, keep youth needs in mind. Part of recognizing youth needs is asking them open-ended questions to get to know them better, but another important part is interpreting what their behavior is communicating.

A useful idea to keep in mind is that, "Behavior is the language of needs." Even when young people have trouble identifying their needs, their actions can help you both figure out what's going on. Structure and clear limits will generally be easier to implement and more effective when they are built around the needs of not only young people in general, but the specific young people that your program serves.

In the section that follows, you will have an opportunity to apply the strategies in considering the needs of youth in a few examples.





Creating a Program Schedule

A well thought-out program schedule supports the developmental needs of young people while providing opportunities to explore a wide range of activities and program offerings. You probably already have a program schedule but put that aside for the time being and create a new one that includes attention to the guidelines for program structure and routines. The following activity can help you and your co-workers organize the program offerings for your program.

Step 1

Individually, make a list of all the different program offerings you want for your program.

Share the list with a colleague, and add or subtract where needed. (Consider what activities your facilities can support, and what the interests and skills of staff are).

Step 2

Take Post-Its® and think about each one representing one hour of programming. On each Post-It®, write down the name of something that takes about an hour (for a two-hour class, write the same thing on two different Post-Its®; for something that takes half an hour, write it and something else on the same Post-It®).

Step 3

Make a weekly calendar for the hours your program will be open, and put the Post-Its® on the calendar to create daily routines and a weekly schedule. You can then take the next step and assign different spaces to each activity.

Using the Guidebook

These short activities could fit into a staff meeting or planning time. Alternatively, combine several of these activities to create a mini-workshop on Structure and Clear Limits.

The Method (page 6) 10-15 minutes

Have staff read the Method section of the guidebook. Have staff work in pairs to discuss the questions on page 13, Check Your Understanding. Discuss highlights from pair discussions with the full group.

Youth Needs (pages 14-17) 15-20 minutes

Read page 14 with staff. Then have staff work in pairs to complete the activities on pages 15-17. Alternatively, have staff complete the activity on page 17 while thinking about the youth they work with. Discuss and debrief conversation highlights when everyone has completed the activities.

Consequences (pages 20-22) 20-30 minutes

Read pages 20-21 and use page 22 to decide what types of responses are appropriate for a variety of situations. Think about logical, natural, and punitive consequences for each situation presented by staff. Debrief as a full group.

Creating Strong Objectives (pages 23-24) 10-15 minutes

After reading page 23, have staff work through page 24, considering how to frame their objectives using the guidelines on page 23. Have staff work together, and then offer critical feedback to peers about their objectives. Follow up at the next staff meeting to see if staff were able to meet their objectives. How were they able to measure success?

Across Age Groups and Content Areas (pages 25-28) 10-15 minutes

Write a different content area at the top of large sheets of paper. Have staff rotate to each of the sheets and brainstorm ways to introduce Structure and Clear Limits to different age groups in each of the areas. After all the ideas are posted, have staff do a gallery walk to gather ideas from the posted sheets.

Establishing a Routine/ Creating a Program

Schedule (pages 32-35) 20-30 minutes

Have staff work together to review the examples provided. Then have them create their own routines and schedules that they feel will best meet the needs of youth. Alternatively, try the activity described on page 33.

Guidelines & Rules/ Group Contracts

(pages 36-37) 20-30 minutes

Help staff to prepare to present guidelines to youth using the worksheet on page 36. Prepare staff to create a behavior contract together with youth by working through the information on page 37. Have staff share ideas, successes, and challenges with each other.

The Research (pages 44-51) 20-30 minutes

Have staff read the Research Review before coming to the meeting. Begin the session by having staff underline two sentences in the text that stand out as important or intriguing. Have staff form group of no larger than 4. Have one person in each group begin by reading the statement that they underlined, without going into why they underlined it. The person to the left then shares their thoughts on the quote the leader read aloud. The next person shares their thoughts on that same quote, and so on until it gets back to the leader. Then the leader has the “last word” to share their thoughts. Then the leadership shifts to the next person. Debrief with the large group once all of the small groups have completed the exercise.

Structure and Clear Limits: The Research

According to guidelines published by the National Research Council, appropriate structure including “limit setting; clear and consistent rules and expectations; firm-enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries; and age-appropriate monitoring” is an important element of quality programming for youth (Eccles and Gootman, 2002, p.90). Most of the evidence supporting this assertion comes from research on parenting and to a lesser extent research on classroom management or students in school settings. Researchers for a half a century or more have grappled with the issue of limit setting in the context of the parent-child relationship, so we will take a look at that literature first, putting it in historical context.

Research on Styles of Parenting

In the mid twentieth century, prior to the work by Diana Baumrind (Baumrind, 1966, 1975), child psychology was dominated by the view children should be free, make their own choices, run their own lives as much as possible, and to have few limits imposed upon them by adults (Baumrind, 1996). Baumrind brought the field of child psychology empirical evidence and terminology that spurred a new vein of study. She studied a group of children and their parents over many years, focusing on the relationship between parental authority and normal development. From this research Baumrind derived three types of parenting that described three

groups of parents she observed, and examined the child outcomes associated with each. Rejecting the extremes of permissive parenting (high on warmth and responsiveness, but low on demanding appropriate behavior) and authoritarian parenting (high on parental authority and demands, but low on responsiveness and warmth), Baumrind’s research found that authoritative parenting, which is warm, responsive, yet enforces parental limits and demands, was associated with the broadest range of optimal outcomes.

From Baumrind’s perspective, insisting children behave and comply with their parent’s directions and listening to children and encouraging their ability to think for themselves and make choices are two concepts that can work together and are not mutually exclusive (Baumrind, 1996). Sometimes these ideas are viewed as a continuum like the figure below.

Baumrind’s research was the starting place for later research that used these parenting style categories. A fourth style of parenting, the disengaged or uninvolved style, which is low on both demandingness and responsiveness, was later added to the repertoire of primary parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Visualizing the types of parenting as a quadrant, allows us to see all four types in relationship to each other, as well as to place further differentiated subtypes (Baumrind, 1991). Baumrind used the terms responsiveness and demandingness to summarize the parenting characteristics she described in her work

