

Strategies for Creating Commonalities

Do you....

- Have a youth and/or staff welcome/orientation team for new members
- Engage youth in icebreakers and team-building exercises on a weekly basis
- Engage staff in icebreakers and team-building exercises at staff meetings;
- Give youth choices on a daily basis (start with discrete options then move to open-ended; many youth don't know the possibilities)
- Emphasize that youths' experiences at the program are important to you
- Notice what youth are doing well and give positive, specific, timely feedback
- If possible, have 'office hours' for 1:1 discussions with youth
- Resist using harsh and sarcastic tones
- Use the 3:1, positive to negative statement rule
- Look for non-verbal cues that youth are disengaged and disconnected from programming
- Employ the 1, 2, 3 rule: be able to name 1 spark that each youth has, 2 sparks that each of your colleagues has, and 3 strengths that each youth has
- Integrate opportunities for self-expression (the creation of art, music, dance, etc.) in program areas where you would not expect them
- Introduce parents to one another; do icebreakers at events that involve parents
- Intentionally group kids who wouldn't otherwise select to be with one another in activities
- Use experiences as a gateway to open-ended discussion (think 50/50 rule)
- Incorporate youth-led activities regularly
- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen as an equal (resist the urge to preach or show judgment)
- Emphasize relationships over performance
- Show vulnerability (tell youth about your struggles)
- Take responsibility for building the relationships
- Make 'relationship-building' part of the job description and performance review