Building Group Cohesion & Creating Program Culture

Resource Packet

Warm Up Activity

Name: Check-In/Check-out

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to allow each group member the opportunity to share something with the group, typically for the purpose of "taking a temperature" of the group.   It is a useful beginning or ending ritual.   It can be used in a variety of ways to "see how you are feeling", "find out what you learned", "gather questions or comments", etc.

Supplies Needed: None

Instructions: The group leader reviews the name and purpose of the activity.   The group leader identifies what information is being requested One group member begins (group leader can model first several times). Start by saying "check-in" and say your name and any other necessary identifying information (what school you go to, what your role is, etc.).

Coat of Arms/Family Crest

Activity Name: Coat of Arms

Purpose: To share about ourselves and our families, appreciate our differences and celebrate our lives.

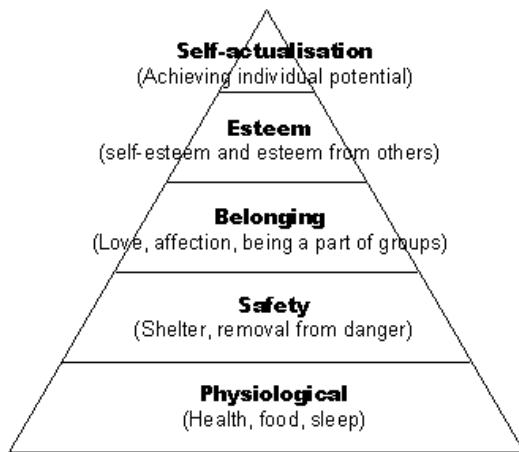**Materials Needed:** Example crests and symbols, crest outline worksheet.

Expectations: Respect self and others, participate, show courage, have fun.

Instructions:
Coat of Arms or Family Crest a unique design that is a symbol of a family's identity and values.   It is used to cover, protect, and identify the wearer.   The design is a symbol unique to an individual person, and to his family, corporation, or state.   Originally used to identify warriors dressed in armor, each knight chose symbols and colors to represent his family or clan. These family crests or coats of arms have been passed down throughout generations.   However, most of us are not directly connected with these ancestors, or the symbols of yesteryear are not representative of who our family is today. Make your own personal coat of arms based on the activities, values and goals important to you now and for years to come.   Choose colors and symbols that represent you, your family and/or community.   Be prepared to share your coat of arms with the group so we can learn about you.

When people are at ease in their environments, they perform better.   Fear, anxiety and mistrust are barriers to well-being and success.   Ideally, people feel safe both physically and psychologically in the environments of their daily lives. However, many do not. Bullying, exclusion and unresolved conflicts are prevalent in schools and in work environments and can impact us.   As leaders of programs, we are in a position to define and develop the environment.   Creating a program culture that intentionally promotes safety, belonging and esteem will allow participants to reach their full potential in the program.   By giving attention and tending to the culture of your program, you can assist in "breaking down the walls" between people

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Self-actualisation
(Achieving individual potential)

Esteem
(self-esteem and esteem from others)

Belonging
(Love, affection, being a part of groups)

Safety
(Shelter, removal from danger)

Physiological
(Health, food, sleep)

Dimensions of "Culture" that Can be Developed.

Values, beliefs

Practices, methods

Language
    Verbal

    Non-verbal

Traditions/Rituals
    Daily, weekly, yearly?

    Planned vs. Organic

Symbols
    Concrete symbols

    That which is "symbolic"

Definitions of Culture

Read the definitions below and <u>highlight</u> any words that you want to remember about culture.

Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people.

Culture is communication, communication is culture.

Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning.

A culture is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.

Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.

Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

Evaluation of Program Culture and Group Cohesion

1). What are the values and goals of my program?

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2). What are some of the existing group norms?

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3). What are some examples of traditions and rituals in my program?   Which are facilitated vs. naturally occurring?

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4). What are some examples of a "common language" that we use in my program?

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_____

5). On the scale, how cohesive is the group I work with in my program?   Describe your assessment?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

_____

_____

_____

_____

6). The methods we use to develop teamwork and cohesion are…

_____

_____

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7). The leadership skills or specific strategies I use to promote group cohesion are…

_____

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8). Areas of my programs culture that could be improved or developed are…

_____

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_____

Building a Program Culture

Be a visible, articulate leader that actively promotes the culture you are establishing.

Educate youth about "culture" and why it matters in your program.

Acknowledge cultural differences in society and how developing a shared culture in your environment can allow individuals to know what to expect of one another and can foster cohesion/teamwork.

Identify the goals, expectations, values, etc. of your program and state them clearly and repeatedly both verbally and in writing.

To build group cohesion, identify expectations/norms that directly relate to social interactions within the program.

When actions or behaviors do not support program culture, make reminders about program culture.

Create rituals, traditions, symbols, methods, practices, etc…that promote your desired culture.

Use structured activities that facilitate interaction between group members to break down naturally occurring barriers.

Concrete Strategies for Building Group Cohesion

Articulate goals for group cohesion and rationale.

Use name tags for as long as needed.

Be intentional in teaching social skills (verbal and nonverbal communication, conflict resolution, "interview skills")

Utilize group activities that intentionally address "diversity" and teamwork.

Tips for Addressing "Diversity Issues"

Articulate verbally and in writing norms that acknowledge and value differences between people.

Say the words "race, class, sexual identity, cultural differences" etc. to model openness to these issues.

Structure activities in a way that allows people to get to know each other beyond appearances.

Give people a resource/point of contact for addressing any concerns they have privately.

When issues come up directly in the group (comments, slang, assumptions), first assess the impact on the group and/or individual members of the group.   This assessment will help you decide how to respond.

If you assess the issue may impact the psychological safety of group members, address the issue to the group as a whole.   If you don't know what to say, say something general that acknowledges the issue…such as, "something happened here which seems to have an impact on group members".

If you assess the issue may impact individual group members, you can approach them individually to assess the impact and decide on the proper response.

To intervene, always reiterate the norms/values of your culture that relate to the issue.

"Remember, we are a community. We believe all people deserve respect.   We talk openly about problems and find solutions. We are a team and work hard at everything we do." Always bring issues back to how they fit into the culture you   are developing.   Use the "common language" you have developed and expand and   modify it for each situation.

Try not to completely avoid "the elephant in the room".   In most environments, "diversity issues" are unrecognized and unaddressed.