Cultivating Empathy

Participant Notebook

Name: _____

Improving & Aligning Policies

Planning and Partnering for Impact

Strengthening Practices and Programs

About the Forum

The Forum for Youth Investment provides products and services to help leaders improve partnerships, policies and practices to change the odds so all young people are ready for college, work and life. These products and services are based on best practices in youth development and on our experience working with hundreds of communities around the country since our founding in 1998.

About the Forum's Weikart Center

David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality is a leader in 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. Training and technical assistance in quality improvement system design, effective performance data and lower stakes accountability has helped OST networks across the country be successful, scale-able and sustainable. The Weikart Center is a critical part of the Forum for Youth Investment's overall effort to build leadership capacity to advance readiness and equity.

Cultivating Empathy

In this workshop, we explore how and why to support youth in cultivating empathy, which is defined in *Preparing Youth to Thrive* as "relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences."

Empathy is a skill that can be supported and built with intentionality for both adults and youth. Theresa Wilder, nursing scholar, outlines four specific qualities to being empathic: perspective-taking, non-judgement, recognizing emotions in others, and communicating understanding.

Perspective taking is our ability to see the world as others see it. It is knowing how another person feels and what they may be thinking. Nonjudgment is our ability to remain objective and refrain from making comments that infer a person's experience is invalid, bad, or wrong. Recognizing emotions in others requires us to look within and understand our own. We then compare our experience to theirs. Communicating understanding is when we check in with the other person to make sure we understand them and give them an opportunity to correct or clarify what they said.

Affinity Bias

Studies show that, in general, people extend not only greater trust, but also greater positive regard, cooperation, and empathy to in-group members compared with outgroup members. This preference for people like ourselves is largely instinctive and unconscious. Affinity bias manifests not only as a preference for in-group members — but it may also manifest as an aversive tendency towards outgroup members. For example, we are more likely to withhold praise or rewards from outgroup members.

We are all influenced by our culture, identities, and personal histories. Knowing what we bring to the table when working with others experiencing emotions of any kind is a critical skill and requires self-awareness to ensure we do not unintentionally project our own emotional experiences on our youth. Being able to understand our own emotional landscape allows us to self-manage more effectively and be more empathic with our youth or staff.

Preparing Youth to Thrive

Empathy Standards and Pratice Indicators (p. 53)

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES `YE`

INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.

(E1) Youth explore effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures (e.g., based on race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).

(E2) Youth own and articulate their identities, including in relation to these social structures.

DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others.

(E3) Youth develop and share personal stories, and (E4) provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.

ACCEPTANCE. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.

(E5) Youth practice identifying, understanding, and managing judgments and (E6) experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.

STAFF PRACTICES `SP`

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:
(E7) Employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment.
(E8) Actively promoting inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important.
(E9) Cultivating a program culture in which people actively care for each other.
(E10) Providing programs with ritual structures for multiple sessions that allow youth to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.

MODELING. Staff model empathy skills with youth.

(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including:
  a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions;
  b) active listening;
  c) serving as an ally for youth who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power;
  d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.

A free digital download of *Preparing Youth to Thrive* is available at selpractices.org

Four Squares

Take a moment to fill out the squares below. You may use words and/or images to express your responses.

Write your name or nickname here and share if it has a meaning or a story.	What is a value or a lesson that you learned growing up that is still important to you today?
What is a tradition, special occasion, or holiday that you enjoy?	What is a community or a group that you are part of that is meaningful to you?

Empathy Translation

Take a look at the following examples and come up with a more empathic response in each situation. As you're discussing these scenarios, consider what else might be going on for this young person and how you can best support them.

1. A young person arrives at program.
   - Staff person asks, "How was your weekend?"
   - The young person responds, sharing, "I had a terrible weekend – my dog got hit by a car and we couldn't save her."
   - Staff replies, "I had a dog once who got hit by a car and it was so gross and messy. Did you help get your dog out of the street when that happened?"

   New Translation:

2. A child in your program is wandering around during snack time.
   - Staff approaches, "Hey don't you want to get some snack before it runs out?"
   - The child responds, "Well, I want to make sure everyone else gets some first, and bananas make me feel sick sometimes"
   - Staff replies, "Beggars can't be choosers! If you want something else to eat you should bring your own snack next time, but don't come crying to me when you are hungry later."

   New Translation:

3. A young person is tearfully refusing to enter program space.
   - Staff leaves the room to address this saying, "I really need you to come back in here and participate."
   - The young person responds, "I can't do it. I hate this project and I hate the stupid cardboard cutting job I got today!" while stomping around.
   - Staff replies, "It's really not that bad, and please don't call the project stupid. Just come back in here and try. We all have to do jobs we don't like sometimes."

   New Translation:

Sharing Our Stories: Guided Reflection

For this exercise, we encourage you to choose an event that you have already processed through and is not emotionally activating. Please practice self-care during this exercise. Go only as deep as you are comfortable with. If you need support at any time, please let a facilitator know, or do whatever self-care works for you.

Here are a few techniques for reflecting on this experience:
- Bring dual awareness by making sure you have one foot here and one foot there.
- See the memory through a strong glass wall.
- See the memory as if you are watching clouds go by in the sky.
- Look at the situation with a bird's eye view.
- Look at the situation as if you were in the balcony of a theatre, watching the scene unfold on the stage below.

Take a deep breath, and then begin your meditation:

Think back to a time when you were a young person and either felt completely seen and understood for who you were, or you did not. Maybe this happened when you were in school or at an after-school program, with family, friends, or maybe someone you didn't even know.

Imagine you are watching the scene like you're in a movie theater, like it's happening right in front of you. You are not in the movie, but rather you're watching it from the audience. What were the circumstances when this happened? As you think back, what sensations were you feeling in your body? What emotions were you feeling? What impact did this event have on you?

If you want to take a moment to capture some key points about your experience in writing, please do so in the space below.

Constructivist Listening Guidelines (www.nationalequityproject.org)
- **Equal time.** Each person is given equal time to talk and to listen. Because everyone deserves attention.
- **No interruption.** The listener does not paraphrase or interpret the talker's thoughts or feelings, analyze, give advice or break in with a personal story. Because people can solve their own problems.
- **Confidentiality.** The listener does not talk about what the talker has said to anyone else, or even bring it up to the talker afterwards. Because one needs to be assured of confidentiality to be authentic.
- **No criticism.** The talker does not criticize or complain about the listener or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. Those challenges can be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue. Because one cannot listen well when he/she is feeling attacked or defensive.
- **Undivided attention.** Do not eat or drink, glance at your cell phone or email. Remove any other distractions

Reflection Questions

1. Something I learned/want to learn more about biases is...

2. A key learning from exploring the SEL Thrive Guide's empathy standards and practice indicators is...

3. Something that struck me during the Sharing Our Stories activity is...

Implementation Plan

Choose one standard from Structure and one from Modeling that you would like to work on in your program. What are three (or more) strategies you want to try implementing to better meet your chosen standards?

STRUCTURE	MODELING
• Structure for **sharing** different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs and stories without judgment. • Actively promote **inclusion and equity and demonstrating support** for the principles that all are different, equal, important. • Cultivating program culture in which people actively **care** for each other. • Provide programs with **ritual structures** for multiple sessions that allow youth to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.	• Intentionally **recognizing influence** of their own identities and how these may **affect** interpersonal interactions. • **Active listening**. • **Serving as an ally** for youth who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power. • Model **boundary setting**, including sharing/withholding personal experiences as appropriate/needed.

Strategies

Social Emotional Learning Methods Sequence
with *Preparing Youth to Thrive* Domains
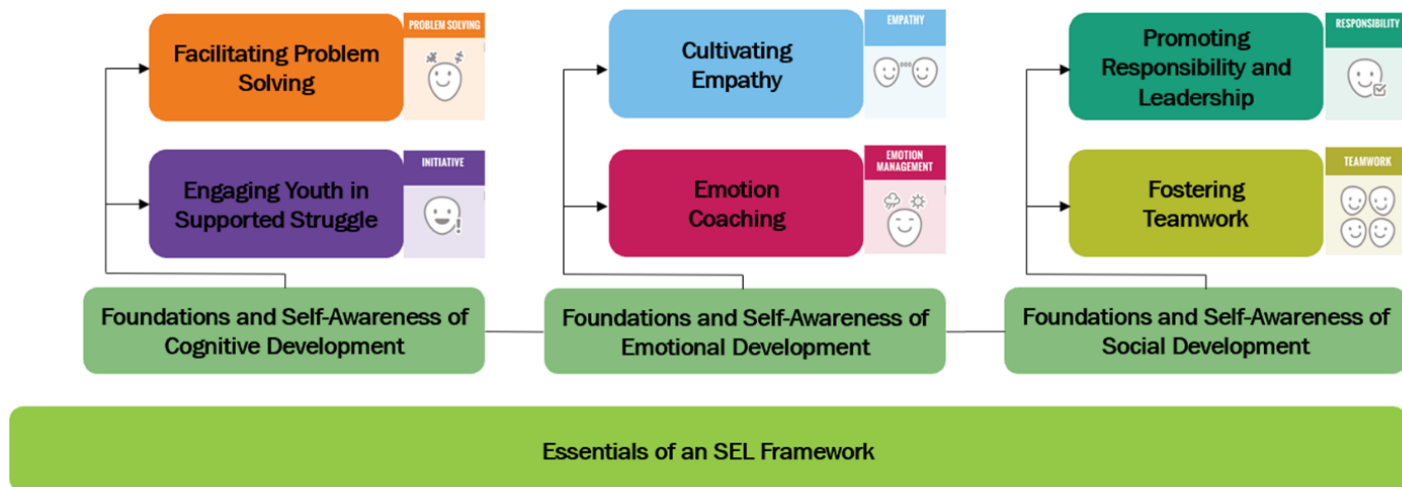
Social Emotional Learning Pyramid of Program Quality
with SEL PQA Scales
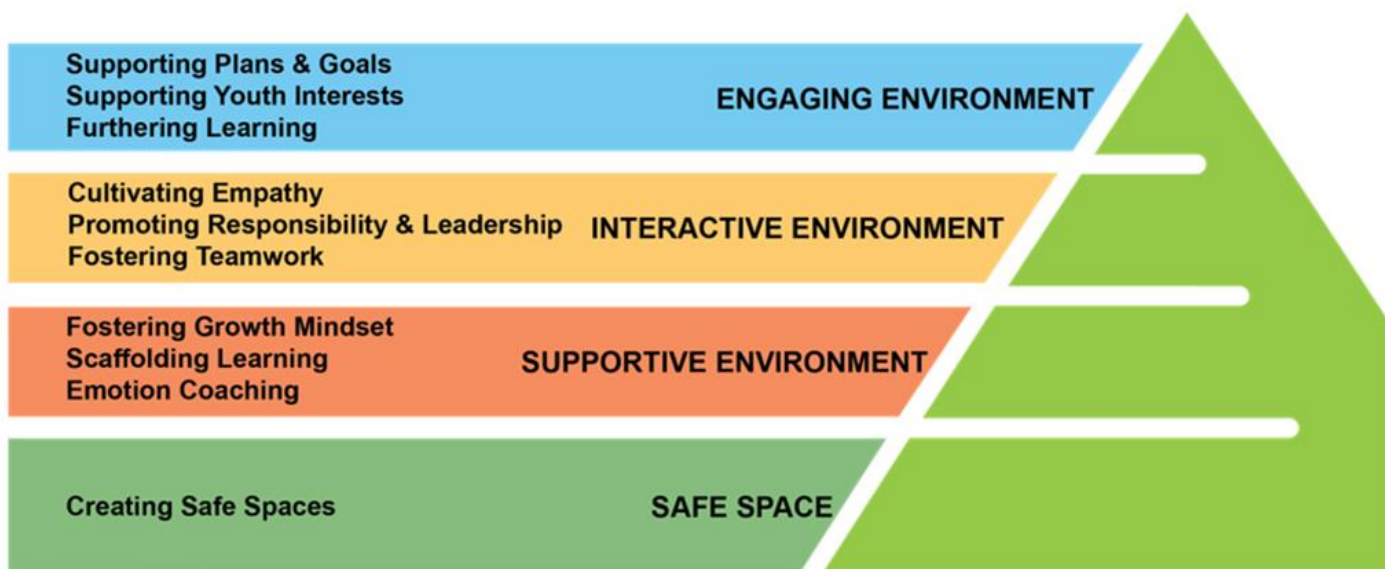
Crosswalk of Weikart Center's SEL Resources and Supports

Preparing Youth to Thrive	Youth Work Methods	SEL Methods	SEL PQA
			ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT
Problem Solving	Active Learning	Facilitating Problem Solving	**Furthering Learning**
			Support connections to previous knowledge
			Link examples to principles
			Encourage extending knowledge
			Encourage logical reasoning
			Guide discovery
Initiative	Youth Voice		**Supporting Youth Interests**
			Provide open-ended choice
			Provide multiple opportunities for choice
			Support creativity
Problem Solving, Initiative	Planning and Reflection	Facilitating Problem Solving	**Supporting Plans and Goals**
			Set up planning opportunities
			Ensure young people record or represent plans
			Facilitate monitoring progress toward goal
			Support problem-solving alternatives
			INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENT
Teamwork	Cooperative Learning	Fostering Teamwork	**Fostering Teamwork**
			Promote active collaboration
			Establish shared goals
			Provide group-process opportunities
Responsibility	Youth Voice	Promoting Responsibility & Leadership	**Promoting Responsibility and Leadership**
			Assign responsibility for tasks
			Support carrying out responsibilities independently
			Provide mentoring opportunities
			Provide leadership opportunities
			Provide opportunities to present
Empathy	Building Community	Cultivating Empathy	**Cultivating Empathy**
			Structure activity for sharing and listening
			Encourage understanding other's emotions
			Structure activities for showing kindness
			Support valuing of differences
			SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT
Management Safe Space (Curriculum Feature)	Reframing Conflict	Emotion Coaching	**Emotion Coaching**
			Acknowledge emotions
			Support young people to name emotions
			Discuss constructive handling
			Discuss emotion causes
Responsibility	Active Learning, Intro to Active Participatory Approach	Engaging Youth in Supported Struggle	**Scaffolding Learning**
			Break task into steps
			Model skills
			Encourage young people to improve performance
			Monitor challenge level
Initiative	Ask-Listen-Encourage	Engaging Youth in Supported Struggle	**Fostering Growth Mindset**
			Guide young people to self-correct
			Use non-evaluative language
			Attribute achievement to effort
Safe Space (Curriculum Features)			**Creating Safe Spaces**
	Building Community, Reframing Conflict	Fostering Teamwork	Foster positive emotional climate
	Building Community,	Fostering Teamwork Cultivating Empathy	Convey warmth and respect
			Provide support for safe space
	Structure & Clear Limits Reframing Conflict		Demonstrate positive group management style
			Demonstrate mutual accountability
	Building Community	Cultivating Empathy	Show active inclusion

SEL PQA Item Reflection

Below is a list of items with their level 5 indicator from the Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) that are related to Cultivating Empathy in program spaces. Use the space below each to reflect on how this practice was demonstrated during today's workshop and how you can adapt what you experienced today to promote these practices in your own setting.

Safe Space - Creating Safe Spaces: Staff provide a safe and welcoming environment.

- Staff consistently hold young people and themselves accountable to an agreed-upon set of guidelines, behavior expectations, or consequences (e.g., staff note guidelines apply to themselves as well as to young people).

- There is no evidence of bias on the part of staff based on religion, culture, race/ethnicity, class, gender, ability, appearance, or sexual orientation and there is evidence of mutual respect and active inclusion (e.g., meal plans include dietary or religious food requirements; reference is made to more than one type of family grouping; preferred pronouns are used).

Interactive Environment - Cultivating Empathy: Staff support young people in practicing empathy skills.

- Staff provide young people with an intentional activity where listening, understanding, and acknowledging the personal stories, experiences, feelings, culture, or viewpoints of others is the sole focus of the activity (e.g., staff have young people in small groups share about an experience that shaped their life).

- Staff ask young people to discuss the causes or consequences of other people's emotions (e.g., in response to in-the-moment situations, past experiences, or in discussion of other actual or fictional events or experiences).

- Staff provide explicit opportunities for all young people to affirm, appreciate, or show kindness to others (e.g., staff have young people write notes to a peer who is ill; organize can goods drive for a food bank; have each young person describe the strengths they appreciate in a teammate and how it helps them build on their own strengths).

- Staff provide formal opportunities to learn about, discuss, and value differences (e.g., young people interview people from different generations, countries, or backgrounds; staff have young people learn about each other's strengths after they take personality inventories).

A free digital download of the SEL PQA is available at www.cypq.org/downloadpqa