

Tips for Building and Managing Positive Group Behavior

Building Positive Group Behavior

1. Model positive behavior and practices

If you behave in a positive way, then your group will be more likely to behave in a positive way too.

2. Teach the group positive behavior qualities

Give your group opportunities to build skills that reflect the qualities of a positive group—like cooperation, communication, emotional expression, ownership, appreciation for diversity, and conflict resolution. Enable the group to practice these qualities so they become second nature.

3. Establish clear expectations within the group

Whether you call them ground rules, agreements, or ways of being, work with your group at the outset to proactively decide what they are.

4. Be aware of the group dynamic

This means staying in the present moment and paying close attention to what is happening between you and your group, as well as what is happening between group participants.

5. Focus on the positive

Give positive attention and affirmation when participants in the group practice positive behavior qualities or adhere to the established group agreements.

- What you focus on is what you promote. If you dwell on the negative, you empower the negative.
- Try to give at least two affirmations for every one time that you focus on a negative behavior.

6. Find the positive

It is often easier to see and respond to the negative than the positive. So it is important to look proactively for what you can appreciate, admire, and love about your group and/or its participants, and share these positive observations.

7. Visualize what you want

Regularly visualize the group participants behaving well and expect them to behave in that way. What you consistently visualize and expect is what you empower.



Managing Positive Group Behavior

8. Listen

If a conflict has occurred, or a young person is not following the agreements, ask them what is going on, actively listen to them, and help them explore and express their feelings in a productive way.

9. Preserve self-control at all times

Controlling challenging situations begins with controlling your reactions to those situations. Learn and be aware of what pushes your buttons.

- Take responsibility for your reactions and admit when you are wrong.
- Be willing to handle almost everything patiently and calmly.
- Avoid arguing, screaming, nagging, pleading, showing stress, criticizing, or complaining as ways to control your group. When you feel like doing these things, stop and consider alternative responses.

10. Redirect behavior that is not positive

Instead of standing by and allowing mildly inappropriate behavior to become more serious, intervene early. Remind the participants involved of group agreements and positive behavior qualities, or redirect them toward another activity.

11. Use a consequence system, ideally created by the group

A consequence system fosters consistency and clear expectations. If participants decide on the consequences themselves (just like the other group agreements), they will be more invested in their success.

- Establish a clear system of warning—sometimes young people really aren't aware of their behavior.
- Administer consequences without anger.
- Be sure that you and the group are not being overly controlling, restrictive, or oppressive when enforcing these rules, or else the system will backfire.

12. Give choices

Instead of giving the group or individual participants directions, give choices whenever possible, even before negative behaviors occur. This gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility, and allows them to “save face.” For example, if a participant is being disruptive, you could calmly say: “You can either sit down or go work in the computer lab instead. Or you can keep doing what you're doing and you will receive a consequence. I'm going to give you 30 seconds to make your decision. It's up to you.”

13. Connect consequences to the behavior

Whenever possible, make sure the consequence relates directly to the negative behavior. For example, if someone makes a mess, their consequence is to clean.

14. Weigh group vs. individual needs

When dealing with difficult behaviors, try to keep in mind what would be best for the participant, as well as what would be best for the group. For example, avoid responding in a way that is good for the participant but not for the group, and vice versa.

This tool has been adapted and is courtesy of Health Resources in Action (HRiA).