



Creating Positive Environments for Summer Learning

When your summer learning environment engages students and develops their potential, you support positive youth development. This approach recognizes the different strengths and needs of children, and uses age-appropriate strategies to promote positive behaviors. This checklist offers key strategies.

For Elementary School Students (Grades K-5)

Provide a structured environment and clear expectations:

- Keep a consistent schedule and provide specific and monitored choices during “free time.”
- Use week-long themes to tie together academic, enrichment and recreation activities to create a sense of continuity.
- Use transitions such as songs or rituals to signal changes between activities.
- Support children in creating behavioral expectations as a community, letting them decide what those behaviors do and do not look like. Have children create visual and written descriptions of positive behaviors, and display these in the program space.
- Consistently reward students verbally for using positive behaviors, so you highlight the power of positive choices rather than focusing on negative choices.

For Middle School Students (Grades 6-8)

Create a program culture in which youth feel confident and supported:

- Center the program on activities and projects that promote collaboration and teamwork. Have adults provide encouragement and constructive feedback to help students learn to verbalize their needs and become more confident and productive in teamwork situations.
- Incorporate project-based learning to allow youth to engage socially while developing positive communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.
- Provide opportunities to help students plan for success, and explicit instruction and continuous support in areas such as self-management, time management and productive communication.
- Use conflict mediation and discussions of personal choice as intervention strategies.

For High School Students (Grades 9-12)

Develop a safe environment where young people feel heard and respected:

- Demonstrate commitment to youth voice and choice. Have students partner with staff to design activities that align to their career and personal interests and reinforce important academic and life skills.
- Provide opportunities to contribute and connect to the community. Offer activities such as service learning and internships that highlight youth’s ability to control their environment and work toward positive change.
- Build positive staff-student relationships to motivate and challenge youth to be their best selves and find productive, peaceful solutions to issues they encounter.

