



Using a Code of Conduct with youth participants

TIP SHEET

What is a Code of Conduct?

A Code of Conduct, or Conduct Code, is a set of written program expectations that are agreed to by participants prior to the beginning of participation in a program. Participants acknowledge agreement by signing the Code of Conduct. Oftentimes, parents/guardians and program staff also sign the Code to acknowledge their roles in supporting successful program participation.

Why use a Code of Conduct?

Conduct Codes allow everyone to have a shared set of guidelines and expectations from the outset as to what is and isn't acceptable behavior in a program.

The Code provides:

...participants with a road map to success, including clear examples of what is expected and what is not allowed. Youth want to know the rules of the game- a code of conduct provides the rulebook.

...parents/guardians with information on their important role in supporting their child's success, and also reminders about important program policies. Busy parents/guardians need to know what is most important to pay attention to when it comes to their child's successful completion of the program.

...staff with a tool to refer back to when addressing issues as they arise; a Code of Conduct provides a roadmap for addressing problems objectively and consistently, by outlining pre-determined consequences of failing to follow agreed upon expectations. Remember, these tools are only as good as they are put into use; it is important to follow through when a participant or parent/guardian does not comply with agreed upon expectations.

Components of a Code of Conduct

A well-written Code of Conduct should include:

- ✓ A brief description of the purpose of the program
- ✓ Sections pertaining to participants, parents and guardians, and staff with required signatures from all three groups
- ✓ For participants- clear examples of behaviors you expect to see; also specific behaviors that are not allowed, including what behaviors may lead to dismissal from a program
- ✓ For parents and guardians- important program policies that need extra emphasis; also statements about how to support their child's success
- ✓ A stepwise process for addressing violations of the Code.



Incorporating a Code of Conduct into your program

These steps allow you to easily incorporate a code of conduct into your program:

1. Customize your Code so that it aligns in tone and substance with your program purpose, expectations and core values. Refer to sample Codes (appendix 1 & 2).
2. Incorporate Conduct Codes into your intake or orientation process.
 - a. Have parents send signed Conduct Codes with other paperwork, such as health information forms, prior to program start. Note on signatures: embedding signatures within Conduct Codes allows for a higher likelihood that the content will be read.
3. Train staff on the Code.
 - a. Discuss your expectations for how staff should address Code violations when they arise.
 - i. Practice following through with stepwise corrective actions using scenarios. (examples in appendix 3)
 - ii. Share your corrective action/behavior contract templates and discuss how to use them.
 - iii. Clarify staff roles in taking action on behavior problems. For example, some staff may be empowered to de-escalate situations or provide verbal warnings. Sending a youth home, contacting a parent/guardian or deciding to dismiss a youth altogether may be decisions that only a program lead can make.
 - iv. Describe internal documentation protocols for any incidents and/or actions taken by staff.
4. Seek ways to reinforce the key points of the codes throughout the program. Examples may include:
 - a. (younger youth) using the themes *listen, communicate, participate, and respect*, create catchy mnemonics, songs or games to remind youth of what is meant by these. Also consider doing mini-lessons about these themes throughout the program to continually keep these on everyone's radar.
 - b. (older youth) Begin your program by creating group agreements that allow youth to contribute their own expectations and values to a shared set of agreements. This can be used as a companion to the code of conduct.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1-Sample participant code of conduct_elementary

Appendix 2-Sample participant code of conduct_teen

Appendix 3-Conduct code scenario examples