

How-To Guide/Lesson Plan for Mentoring Older Teens: Supporting
Emotional Development

Toby R. Kirkland

Clemson University

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Toby
Kirkland, Youth Learning Institute, 698 Concord Church Road, Pickens, SC
29671. E-mail: tobyk@clemson.edu

Name of Activity:

The Great Debate

Age of Targeted Participants:

15-18 years old

Domain of Development:

Emotional Development

Area of Development Addressed:

Acceptance - degree of attachment and approval of others

1. Create a climate in which older teens feel comfortable expressing their emotions.
2. Bring in real-life scenarios so that older teens can write or speak about how they would react, and then discuss as a group and propose possible solutions.

Self –Evaluation - the process of examining thoughts and feelings about oneself, resulting in a person’s self-esteem

1. Provide opportunities for older teens to question themselves, reflect on their experiences, and express their feelings and philosophies.

Failure and Inappropriate Behaviors - not succeeding at something:

disobedience, antisocial behaviors, and behaviors that don’t respect the rights of others and their property

1. Ask older teens to help establish the behavior expectations and rules for the program.

Goal(s)/Purpose for Activity:

This activity is designed to support the emotional development of teens, ages 15-18. This support is achieved by concentrating on one major area of emotional development while also providing support for two additional areas.

Major Area: Acceptance - degree of attachment and approval of others

This is achieved by:

- Creating a real-life scenario that teens can discuss and debate while identifying solutions to problems they face.
- Creating a climate in which teens can express their feelings and emotions in a safe and healthy dialogue.

Minor Area 1: Self –Evaluation - the process of examining thoughts and feelings about oneself, resulting in a person’s self-esteem

This is achieved by:

- Providing opportunities for older teens to question themselves, reflect on their experiences, and express their feelings and philosophies.

Minor Area 2: Failure and Inappropriate Behaviors - not succeeding at something: disobedience, antisocial behaviors, and behaviors that don’t respect the rights of others and their property

- Ask older teens to help establish the behavior expectations and rules for the program.

Type: This activity is designed for groups of 4-12 participants.

Time: This activity should take about one hour to complete, including the development of the debate criteria that will be performed by the students.

Materials:

- Two notebooks or ten sheets of loose-leaf paper
- One pen/pencil for each group

Overview:

This activity is based on the concept that positive emotional development can be achieved through the encouragement of independent thinking and decision-making. Additionally, discussing and setting behavioral rules and their consequences with older teens can also achieve positive emotional development (Kearney, 2014).

During this activity, expect students to:

- Need help articulating their points
- Possibly be closed-minded, as they have less life experience than youth developers
- Need leadership to stay on task and on time
- Not want to argue a specific side, but it should be required

Instructions:

1. Split students into two equal groups. The leader should split the group into logical teams to debate each other based on the skills of the students in the group. (5 minutes)
2. Explain that the groups will be given a topic to discuss and that students will have to develop the rules for the debate. Allow the students to set the rules for the debate. (10 minutes)
 - a. Examples of some rules that students should consider are:
 - i. Time each group has to present a point/counterpoint
 - ii. How long the groups have to prepare
 - iii. How you will determine which group argues the pro/con points
 - iv. How a winner will be determined
3. Give the teams the debate topic. The topic in this lesson is, "Is there such a thing as right and wrong?" (5 Minutes)
 - a. A leader can choose any topic that he/she feels relevant, however the topic should prompt students to reflect on their behaviors and philosophies in such a way that may cause them to question their current attitudes.
 - b. The leader should have questions/scenarios prepared to lead the debate and be prepared to act as a moderator for the debate.

- i. Some example questions/scenarios are:
 1. Who determines what is right and wrong?
 2. Who should enforce what is right and wrong?
4. Have students debate the topic based on the rules they established. (30 minutes)

Ending the Activity

The activity should end with:

- Discussing the benefits of healthy dialogue and how it can lead to personal growth. The leader should cite examples of healthy dialogue that occurred during the debate. (10 minutes)

Implementation

The group that was used for this activity was larger than recommended. Over twenty students participated. That number of students was effective, but larger than is optimal. This is mainly due to the fact that less students have the opportunity to speak and it is slightly too chaotic to allow the students to define the rules. This activity proved to be very effective from a few different standpoints.

1. The students greatly enjoyed the process of the debate. I had many students express interest in doing the activity again with a new topic.
2. Students seemed to gain an understanding of the complexity of the issue and I saw many opinions change and develop during the process.
3. Allowing students to create the rules, and then struggle to follow them, gave them a better understanding of how hard it is to make rules that everyone appreciates.

I was unable to submit photographs, as parents were not available to sign release forms.

Reflection Questions

1. Why did you pick/create the focus activity? I picked this activity because it was a creative way to meet the criteria of advancing the emotional development of students and because I like to challenge students to think in creative ways.
 - a. What were the goals for the activity? The goal for the activity was to use the concept of acceptance to create a real-life scenario that teens can discuss and debate while identifying solutions to problems they face. This forced students to consider not only what they believe, but also why they believe it. I hoped it would help them form opinions about why rules exist and why following them may have benefits.
 - b. Why were those your goals? I chose those goals in an effort to promote independent thinking and reasoning among students, while improving their emotional development.
 - c. Why would this activity help you to meet those goals? This activity helps meet the above goals by causing students to make arguments to defend the topic and possibly argue a side of an issue of which they may not agree. Additionally, the activity promoted emotional development by creating an environment where teens felt comfortable in expressing ideas without adult judgment.
2. How does the activity meet the developmental needs of the target age group? This activity met the target age group by focusing on two areas of emotional development that are impactful for ages 15-18 as communicated by the E-QYP application. The two areas are acceptance and self-evaluation. Students at this specific age respond well to environments where they feel safe to express ideas and also activities that require them to question their beliefs and philosophies.
3. Was the E-QYP content relevant and useful for structuring and shaping the activity? Why or why not? The E-QYP content was relevant for shaping the activity, in that it clearly defined ways that a youth developer could positively affect youth at multiple age ranges. Additionally, the examples that were provided in the individual sections were great starting points for developing activities that were customizable to a group.
4. How did you assess whether the activity was successful? The assessment of the activity was based on:
 - a. The involvement of the students
 - b. The quality of the arguments made
 - c. The change of attitudes toward the topic
 - d. The timeliness of the activity
 - e. The openness of the students to express their ideas
5. Did the activity you designed serve the purpose you had intended? Why or why not? The activity was very successful. Students were more involved

than in other activities in which I had previously led them. They made very good arguments on both sides of the issue and were very willing to express ideas and opinions.

- a. Was the children's engagement and actions during the activity consistent with the E-QYP content? If so, how? If not, why not?
The actions were consistent with the E-QYP content. The samples that were given for activities were easily modifiable and the students showed results that were favorable, based on the activity.
 - b. What more did you wish you had known or had available to you? I was satisfied with the information that was available.
6. What recommendation(s) would you make to change or modify the activity to make it more successful? I would not make any changes to the activity, but I would make sure to limit the number of students to no more than twelve.
 7. Are there any tips for adjusting the activity according to the size of the group, the ages of the youth, and other characteristics that may be relevant to the activity? See question six.

References

Kearney, W.B. (2014). *Equipping quality youth professionals*. Cumming, GA: iUniverse LLC.