

Youth Development Worker Competencies

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The following core competencies include knowledge, skills and personal attributes needed by entry-level youth development workers for effective youth development practice. Youth development core competencies are the “demonstrated capacities” that form a foundation for high-quality performance in the workplace, contribute to the mission of the organization and allow a youth development worker to be a resource to youth, organizations and communities.

Understands and applies basic child and adolescent development principles.

- Understands ages and stages of child development.
- Applies fundamentals of positive youth development.
- Takes into consideration trends and issues that affect children and youth.

Communicates and develops positive relationships with youth.

- Listens, in a non-judgmental way.
- Uses the language of respect.
- Exhibits concern for the well being of others and interest in the feelings and experiences of others.

Adapts, facilitates and evaluates age-appropriate activities with and for the group.

- Relates to and engages the group.
- Initiates, sustains and nurtures group interactions and relationships through completion of an ongoing project or activity.
- Teaches and models effective problem solving and conflict negotiation.
- Guides group behavior in an age-appropriate manner.

Respects and honors cultural and human diversity.

- Exhibits an awareness of commonalities and differences (such as gender, race, age, culture, ethnicity, class, religion, disability) among youth of diverse backgrounds and shows respect for those of different talents, abilities, sexual orientation and faith.
- Builds on diversity among and between individuals to strengthen the program community, and the community at large.
- Serves as a role model for the principles of inclusion and tolerance.

Involves and empowers youth.

- Actively consults, involves, and encourages youth to contribute to programs and the communities in which they live.
- Organizes and facilitates youth leadership development activities.

Identifies potential risk factors (in a program environment) and takes measures to reduce those risks.

- Identifies basic risk and protective factors in youth development.
- Designs and monitors emotionally and physically safe program environments, interactions, and activities for youth and intervenes when safety demands it.
- Identifies potential issues (and possible signs and symptoms) with youth that require intervention or referral (e.g., suicidal tendencies, substance abuse, child abuse, violent tendencies, eating disorders, obesity, sexually transmitted diseases).

Cares for, involves and works with families and community.

- Understands and cares about youth and their families.
- Actively engages family members in program and community initiatives.
- Understands the greater community context in which youth and families live.
- Communicates effectively with youth and their families – one-to-one communications as well as in group settings.

Works as part of a team and shows professionalism.

- Articulates a personal “vision” of youth development work (to co-workers, volunteers, and participants) and expresses current and potential contributions to that vision.
- Adheres to ethical conduct and professionalism at all times (confidentiality, honoring appropriate boundaries).
- Acts in a timely, appropriate, and responsible manner.
- Is accountable, through work in teams and independently by accepting and delegating responsibility.
- Displays commitment to the mission of the agency.

Demonstrates the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.

- Models, demonstrates and teaches positive values like caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.
- Incorporates wellness practices into personal lifestyle.
- Practices stress management and stress reduction.

Interacts with and relates to youth in ways that support asset building.

- Challenges and develops values and attitudes of youth in a supportive manner.
- Designs program activities, structure and collaborations that show evidence of asset building.