

Evidence Brief

Three Strategies & Seven Practices for Delivering Effective Group Programming for Black Youth

How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub, Google Scholar, and Google using the following key terms: “group programming”, “youth-led practices”, “critical social capital”, and “meaningful programs for Black youth”.

Summary of Evidence

1. Create a space where Black youth feel included, connected, and valued.

Group sessions should focus on cultivating friendships and support systems, and providing opportunities for community engagement (Harvey & Hill, 2004). Programmers can foster a safe space when they:

a) Understand Black youth in terms of their strengths, assets, and excellence.

Programs can better serve youth by adopting a strength-based approach and recognizing their assets. This differs significantly from the deficit-based approach that many programs, organizations, and mainstream institutions adopt. Black youth must be seen as experts and their leadership, expertise, and skills must be supported (YouthREX, 2019). Ideally, programmers should respect the knowledge that youth bring to the table, while also providing the support they need (Glass, 2018).

b) Make space for young people to bond over shared experiences.

When young people are able to identify similarities in their experiences, they will not only be able to better connect with the group, but they will also *want* to engage and contribute to discussions (Ren et al., 2012).

c) Encourage informal socialization.

Foster cohesion by making space for members to socialize informally before or after group sessions (Ren et al., 2012). Making space for members to exchange contact information, such as social media handles and phone numbers, can facilitate connection (Ren et al., 2012).

2. Cultivate critical consciousness to build a collective racial identity.

Critical consciousness refers to a way of thinking that encourages Black youth to critically reflect

on their experiences and struggles as a collective, and to create change in their communities (Ginwright, 2007). This process has three main components:

- i) **Critical reflection** is the process of identifying and understanding how social inequities can constrain individual rights and opportunities (Watts et al., 2011). Youth who engage in critical reflection may begin to understand the systemic roots of their ‘individual’ challenges.
- ii) **Political efficacy** refers to one’s perceived ability to create social change that addresses societal shortcomings (Watts et al., 2011). If youth feel that they have the capacity to reshape their environments, they are more likely to take action, both as an individual and as a collective (Watts et al., 2011).
- iii) **Critical action** is when an individual (or group) participates in a form of activism that is meant to target an unjust aspect of society (Watts et al., 2011). Such actions may include community rallies, community awareness events, and other forms of community involvement (Watts et al., 2011).

In the context of group programming, facilitators can draw on these principles to promote the development of a collective critical consciousness, which can also promote a collective racial identity:

- a) **Encourage critical reflection** by striving to make connections between young people’s experiences and broader societal issues (Watts et al., 2011). Facilitators can foster connection between participants by asking about culturally-specific experiences, such as racism and police interactions (Ginwright, 2007). Given that many racialized youth internalize the daily microaggressions or acts of racism that they experience, youth workers can reinforce the idea of a “collective struggle” by encouraging group members to reflect on their common experiences (Ginwright, 2007). For example, Black youth who are struggling to find a well-paying job may blame their own personal shortcomings, rather than recognizing the systemic roots of employment inequity, such as hiring discrimination and spatial isolation (Ginwright, 2007).

Facilitators might consider beginning each group session by asking youth to share their personal struggles by identifying a “high” (positive experience) and a “low” (negative experience) (Ginwright, 2007). This activity can promote broader participation by making each member feel valued, but not singled out (Ginwright, 2007). Sharing personal experiences allows youth to empathetically connect with other group members, as many may find themselves in similar circumstances. Encouraging this type of storytelling can surface, and work towards healing, experiences of racial trauma (Hardy, 2013). These shared

struggles have the potential to unite the group under a common racial identity, which can mitigate the impacts of racism (Ginwright, 2007). Black youth may be able to better understand that their personal “lows” are actually part of a collective struggle, and that they do not have to face these challenges alone (Ginwright, 2007).

- b) Build political efficacy** by encouraging youth to share their thoughts, feelings, and reactions, which may spark an interest in engaging in activism (Ginwright, 2007). These conversations will **foster a sense of community**, enabling meaningful engagement and discussion, and group members who bond over their shared experiences may continue to engage in political discussions and reflect on the unjust societal forces that affect their lives (Ginwright, 2007), leading some to engage in **critical action**.

3. Facilitate opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Evidence suggests that strong representation and the meaningful involvement of Black youth in programming is critical (YouthREX, 2019). Meaningful engagement invites Black youth to leadership roles on conversations about their development, gives them access to mentors and role models, and exposes them to activities and environments to which they wouldn't normally have access (YouthREX, 2019). When combined with a focus on critical consciousness, meaningful engagement can spark an interest in, and prepare young people for, community engagement and activism.

- a) Invite youth to leadership roles.**

Evidence suggests that youth-led programming can promote skill development, foster a sense of belonging, and allow young people to discover their talents (Hopper et al., 2019). A *flexible hybrid approach* (a combination of adult-led and youth-led programming) can be effective, as it makes space for young people to develop and lead activities with the support of adult facilitators (Hopper et al., 2019).

- b) Incorporate activities that reflect young people's interests.**

Youth have a unique voice and are finding imaginative and creative ways of telling new stories, participating in political activity, responding to complex social problems, and advocating for change (Anucha et al., 2017). Programming that is culturally relevant and allows youth to gain an appreciation of themselves and their abilities can increase self-efficacy and self-esteem (Harvey & Hill, 2004). Research suggests that storytelling can be an effective way to engage and hear Black youth voices (YouthREX, 2019).

References

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