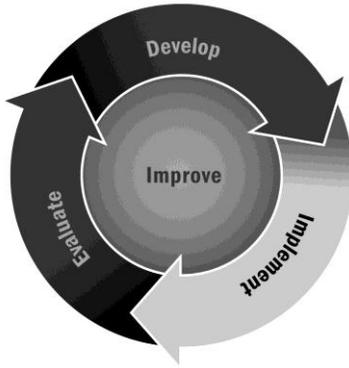


Structuring Activities for Skill-Building



A critical component of youth development involves structuring activities so that youth are building and reinforcing new skills. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) have identified four common elements in afterschool and expanded learning programs that are most effective in developing skills. These elements or characteristics, dubbed the **SAFE** features, are:

S = Activities are sequenced

A = Learning is active

F = Activities are focused on developing personal and social skills

E = Activities explicitly target specific skills and outcomes

Directions: Use the worksheet below to develop or review program activity plans to ensure that they are SAFE. An example is provided below, followed by a template for your use.

Skill-Building Activity Worksheet – Example

Anger Management: Just Breathe	
Description: As part of working with youth to self-regulate individual and collective behavior, this activity will be used to introduce a culture of calm and weave it into the program.	
What skills will you develop by conducting this activity?	Youth will learn how to calm down when they are angry to reduce anxiety, stress, and conflicts. They will learn self-regulation strategies such as deep breathing, counting to 10, and self-talk. Youth will also learn to identify emotions and their causes.
What ages are appropriate for this activity?	All ages; can be modified as necessary for younger or older youth
How long will it take to complete this activity?	Introduction: 10 minutes Discussion: 10 minutes Planning: 10 minutes
What materials are required for this activity?	Bell or chime Tranquil music Space to role-play
Have the young people in your program had experience with this topic before? (This will help you know how best to conduct the activity!)	Many youth (but not all) attended a three-week anger management course by ABC Community Services during school time earlier in the year.

Anger Management: Just Breathe

SAFE Principles

<p>Is the activity Sequenced?</p> <p>Is there a step-by-step approach for teaching the skill? Outline the process.</p>	<p>First, youth will discuss different situations that might make them angry or sad and the different reactions they might have to those feelings. Next, youth will engage in small group discussion about the cause and effect of different responses to anger and other negative emotions.</p> <p>Youth will then be introduced to different regulation strategies. They will begin with learning a deep breathing technique. In a large group everyone practices the breathing technique. Youth reflect or write down their experience. They will also discuss times when deep breathing is necessary, and they will share any tricks they use to calm down in their lives (and will record the results). Next they will learn a counting strategy, followed by self-talk strategies, and then engage in reflection and discussion.</p> <p>Next, youth will engage in role-play scenarios that could potentially evoke a negative response in the real world. Youth will role-play the scenario and practice using one of the regulation techniques they have just learned. Staff members will observe and provide feedback to all youth. Youth will discuss how it felt to engage with those strategies.</p> <p>Finally, youth and staff members will brainstorm ways to incorporate the various techniques into the program (e.g., every time the bell rings, stop and take a deep breath).</p>
<p>Is the activity Active?</p> <p>What opportunities will youth have to interact with and practice new skills? Describe those opportunities.</p>	<p>Youth learn an individual skill and come together to share feelings and coping strategies. All youth will engage in the practice of deep breathing, counting to 10, and self-talk. Youth will role-play situations in small groups where these strategies would be needed and discuss what it felt like to engage in self-regulation.</p>
<p>Is the activity Focused?</p> <p>Have you allotted specific time and attention for skill development? Describe when and how you will devote time to skill development.</p>	<p>This activity will take 30 minutes, and time has been allotted for this activity during the weekly program schedule.</p>
<p>Is the activity Explicit?</p> <p>Do youth know which skills they will be developing as a result of the activity? Identify the specific skills and describe a plan for sharing with youth.</p>	<p>Social and emotional competencies developed through this activity include self-management, emotion regulation, emotion identification, and understanding cause and effect.</p> <p>The instructor will first identify the goals of the activity and will then describe the skills that youth will work to develop. Youth will engage in small group discussion about the skills and goals of the activity.</p>

Anger Management: Just Breathe

Integrating Skills Into Other Activities

Youth need opportunities to connect newly developed skills to other areas and real-world experiences.

Highlight other areas of programming where these new skills can be embedded and further developed.

This activity will result in strategies to reinforce self-regulation techniques throughout programming. Use these strategies when youth are feeling stress, if a conflict arises, or after playing an energizing game in the gym.

This activity can be tied to science lessons on anatomy and bodily responses (e.g., how the heart works, why deep breathing calms us down).

Youth can read about different figures in history who have practiced self-restraint and peace.

Skill-Building Activity Worksheet – Template

[Name of Activity Here]

Description

What skills will you develop by conducting this activity?

What ages are appropriate for this activity?

How long will it take to complete this activity?

What materials are required for this activity?

Have the young people in your program had experience with this topic before? (This will help you know how best to conduct the activity!)

[Name of Activity Here]

SAFE Principles

Is the activity Sequenced?

Is there a step-by-step approach for teaching the skill? Outline the process.

Is the activity Active?

What opportunities will youth have to interact with and practice new skills? Describe those opportunities.

Is the activity Focused?

Have you allotted specific time and attention for skill development? Describe when and how you will devote time to skill development.

Is the activity Explicit?

Do youth know which skills they will be developing as a result of the activity? Identify the specific skills and describe a plan for sharing with youth.

Integrating Skills Into Other Activities

Youth need opportunities to connect newly developed skills to other areas and real-world experiences.

Highlight other areas of programming where these new skills can be embedded and further developed.

Aligning With Learning Standards



Directions: Use or adapt this worksheet to ensure your activities and lessons align with learning standards. You may use this tool in conjunction with **Tool 73: Intentional Activities** to develop and implement learning components in every program activity or project. Staff should also reference the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts in addition to other state learning standards by visiting their local department of education website.

Standards Alignment Worksheet – Example

Component	Instructions	Example
Name of activity		<i>Cooking Club – “Being a Vegetarian” activity</i>
Grade level		<i>Fifth and sixth grades</i>
Description of activity	Identify the purpose and goals of the activity as well as how youth will meet those goals. What will youth learn as a result of this activity? What skills will they develop? How will they do that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This club focuses on reinforcing and improving the math and science skills of participants in the program through cooking. The club aims not only to develop the learning of participants but also to develop a deep appreciation of a healthy diet and lifestyle.</i> <i>In this activity, youth will first learn what it means to be a vegetarian by reading a magazine article. They will discuss what vegetarians do and do not eat in small groups and will brainstorm possible breakfast, lunch, and dinner options. Next, youth will work in small groups to prepare a vegetarian meal. Finally, youth will enjoy the meal they have made together.</i>

Component	Instructions	Example
List the learning standards that are integrated into this activity/project	A helpful first step is to identify the subject that this activity most likely aligns with. Next, locate the standards for the grade level of youth served in the content area you have identified. Think about the description and what you think youth will learn from this activity, and find standards that match or align.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings (CCLS for Informational Text 6–12).</i> • <i>Read and interpret a variety of math-related concepts (CCLS Math 5–6).</i> • <i>Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners (CCLS for Informational Text K–5).</i>
Are there opportunities to integrate skills or competencies (e.g., leadership, group work, critical thinking) or other “embedded” learning (e.g., applied learning, exposure to new topics, themes, or vocabulary) into this activity?	Are there other skills that youth will have the opportunity to develop as a result of participating in this activity? Think about how the activity will flow—how youth will interact with their peers or with the materials. Are there other related topics that you can integrate into this activity that will enrich the learning experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Budgeting and managing money</i> • <i>Applied chemistry (e.g., cooking temperature, pesticides, herbicides)</i> • <i>Applied biology (e.g., plant and pest classification)</i> • <i>Planning and making healthy choices</i> • <i>Team building via community dinners</i>

Standards Alignment Worksheet – Template

Component	Instructions	Example
Name of activity		
Grade level		
Description of activity	<p>Identify the purpose and goals of the activity as well as how youth will meet those goals. What will youth learn as a result of this activity? What skills will they develop? How will they do that?</p>	
List the learning standards that are integrated into this activity/project	<p>A helpful first step is to identify the subject that this activity most likely aligns with. Next, locate the standards for the grade level of youth served in the content area you have identified. Think about the description and what you think youth will learn from this activity, and find standards that match or align.</p>	
Are there opportunities to integrate skills or competencies (e.g., leadership, group work, critical thinking) or other “embedded” learning (e.g., applied learning, exposure to new topics, themes, or vocabulary) into this activity?	<p>Are there other skills that youth will have the opportunity to develop as a result of participating in this activity? Think about how the activity will flow—how youth will interact with their peers or with the materials. Are there other related topics that you can integrate into this activity that will enrich the learning experience?</p>	

Youth Development Checklist



Directions: Read the following list of youth development principles and practices and then indicate how well you think your program is addressing each one. When you have finished, review your checkmarks to determine the areas that appear strong and the areas that could be improved. This checklist can be completed and reviewed individually or discussed as a group.

Youth Development Checklist

	Yes	In Process	No
Warm and Welcoming Environment			
Procedures are in place to ensure young people’s safety (e.g., emergencies, security).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult supervision is provided at all times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency and contact information is available for all youth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy snacks are offered daily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The program’s hours of operation are based on families’ schedules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural and linguistic differences are respected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The program or activity has a name that youth can identify.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth are respected for their individuality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programs are available for all youth who want to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support for Positive Behavior			
Youth understand the expectations of the program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members regularly offer sincere praise with specific comments and feedback for positive behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth participate in setting program or activity rules.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rules are clear, consistent, and fair.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rules address cooperating, sharing, caring for materials, participation, behavior strategies, and conflict resolution.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	In Process	No
Youth and staff members define and implement strategies for resolving conflicts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When conflicts arise, they are minimized and resolved quickly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Program expectations are communicated to families regularly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supportive Relationships and Opportunities to Belong			
Staff members engage youth and consistently call each person by his or her name.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members intentionally build and promote relationships characterized by warmth, respect, honesty, and caring.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members respond to youth with respect, acceptance, and appreciation; they listen to what youth have to say.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members are cooperative and respectful; they model positive adult relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The program offers a mix of one-on-one interactions and small- and large-group activities on a weekly basis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth are involved in the community, and community members are involved in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities allow all youth to interact in a variety of ways.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programs meaningfully involve families, schools, and the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation for long periods of time is encouraged.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff members emphasize belonging and membership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for Youth Choice, Decision-Making, Leadership, and Reflection			
Youth are given choices of a wide variety of activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth are given choices within activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth have authentic leadership opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth are encouraged to take on meaningful challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth can articulate their goals and their progress toward achieving those goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth and staff members are given frequent opportunities to reflect on activities and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth have opportunities to showcase their work, learning, growth, and development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Opportunities for Learning and Skill Development			
Activities build on the strengths of youth in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	In Process	No
Activities are age/development appropriate and align with the styles, abilities, and interests of youth in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities reflect the local context/culture of the program and participants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities intentionally build on school day learning and expand learning opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities are targeted at skill development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities are active and employ hands-on approaches to learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities promote basic skills, higher order thinking, exploration, and practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coaching and feedback strategies are implemented to build skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Checklist Results

Were you surprised by your checklist results? What areas appear strong? What areas could use improvement?

Academic Enrichment Activity Planning Tool



Directions: Use this tool to plan your academic enrichment activities or projects to make sure they meet academic learning goals and also to present information in a way that draws on recommended youth development practices. Staff members can reference **Tool 53: Aligning With Learning Standards** to help strengthen the connections between the activity or project and explicit learning outcomes.

Activity Name

Give the activity or project a name.

Description of the Activity

Provide a general overview of the activity.

Desired Outcomes for This Activity

List the desired learning outcomes from the activity. Be sure to address which academic standards will be strengthened by the activity or project. Also list the various skills and competencies that will be explicitly targeted. Plan your academic enrichment activities based on participants' academic needs, social needs, and interests. For example, two possible goals for a business development activity might be:

- *Example: Improve arithmetic skills (budgeting, making change)*
- *Example: Encourage youth to use creativity in advertising (research marketing strategies)*

Is This an Enrichment Activity?

Check the appropriate boxes below for the activity you have chosen:

- The activity integrates academic content.
- The activity links to subjects youth are currently studying.
- The activity teaches academic concepts through methods that differ from typical school day instruction.
- The academic learning happens as an intrinsic part of a fun, engaging activity.
- The activity encourages youth to apply the learning they are doing to their own experience or to witness how academic concepts are used in real-life situations.
- The activity encourages youth to take on leadership roles.
- The activity promotes positive relationships among youth (across different ages) and between youth and caring adults.

The more boxes you have checked, the more likely it is that the activity can be characterized as an academic enrichment activity. If you believe that this activity does not promote academic enrichment, use the space below to describe how it could be modified to do so.

What Is the Academic Content of This Activity?

In the space below, describe how this activity encourages youth to apply and deepen understanding of academic concepts. The following prompts may help you get started.

- Is the academic content intrinsic to the activity, or could it be removed without affecting the activity?
- Is the learning explicitly aligned to the Common Core State Standards and local learning standards by grade level?
- How does the activity make the academic content relevant, interesting, or fun for youth?
- Is the content appropriate for the age and abilities of youth?

What Opportunities Does This Activity Present for Authentic Decision-Making?

In the space below, describe how this activity presents youth with authentic decision-making opportunities. The following prompts may help you get started.

- How are youth encouraged to take ownership of the activity?
- Do youth make real decisions with real outcomes?
- How do these decisions have a demonstrable impact on youth experience?
- Are the decision-making aspects of the activity age appropriate?
- How do you provide insight or feedback to help drive the activity?
- What are some ways in which the opportunities for authentic decision-making in this activity could be strengthened?

What Opportunities for Youth Leadership Does This Activity Present?

In the space below, describe how this activity provides the potential for youth leadership. The following prompts may help you get started.

- Are there particular roles available for youth? What are they?
- Are youth given the opportunity to take responsibility for their part of the activity?
- Does the activity encourage the opportunity for rotating leadership roles equitably with all participants?
- Has any part of the activity been influenced by youth input?
- What are some ways in which the potential for youth leadership in this activity could be strengthened?

How Does This Activity Create Strong Relationships?

In the space below, describe how this activity helps to develop strong relationships between youth and staff members and among youth. The following prompts may help you get started.

- How does the activity encourage cooperation and teamwork?
- What grouping strategies are used to establish a culture of inclusion?
- How does the activity encourage the development of strong relationships?
- Are youth exposed to positive role models other than staff members?
- Are the relationships created during the program ongoing and long term?
- Do adults in the program show that they are invested in the growth of specific youth? How?
- Are both strong youth-adult and peer relationships developed by the activity?
- What are some ways in which the development of relationships in this activity could be strengthened?

Additional Notes

Use this space to reflect on how the activity has gone in the past and list suggestions and strategies for improvement.
