

SAFE-R Corners

This activity helps staff explore and share the ways that their programs are supporting SEL and brainstorm strategies for improvement. This activity is based on the SAFE features identified in research (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010). We added R for Reflection, another important characteristic of social and emotional learning cycles.

Why This Matters

- Youth programs are a great environment to support SEL, but it's not a given.
- Recent research found that after-school programs that follow four key practices are effective at promoting social and emotional development (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010). The four practices form the acronym SAFE (Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit).
- In other words, programs that guide young people through a sequential series of engaging activities focused on the development of specific social and emotional skills were shown to be most effective.
- We added R for Reflection, because integrating reflection activities as part of the learning process helps youth internalize social and emotional skills. Much of the effort put into designing SAFE learning experiences is wasted if youth don't have the opportunity to process their experience through reflection.

Getting Started

- Materials: Copies of the SAFE-R Corners Worksheet for each staff.
- Time: 20-30 minutes

How To Use It

- 1) Pass out the SAFE-R Corners Worksheet and explain that each corner of the room represents one SAFE feature, and the center of the room represents Reflection:

S - Sequenced: a series of steps or small skills that build upon each other. New skills cannot be acquired immediately; it takes time and effort and skills must be broken down into smaller steps and sequentially mastered. Staff should develop a coordinated sequence of activities that links the learning steps and provides youth with opportunities to connect these steps. Is there a planned set of activities that progressively challenges youth to build social and emotional skills?

A - Active: hands-on, project-based, real-life, or experiential. Young people often learn best by doing. After youth receive some basic instruction they should then have the opportunity to practice new behaviors and receive feedback on their performance. Do you use active forms of learning (e.g., youth lead discussions, contribute ideas, work together, take on leadership roles)?

F - Focused: time, resources, and a plan. Staff should designate time that is primarily directed at skill development. Do you devote sufficient time and attention exclusively to SEL goals?

E - Explicit: goals and SEL skills are named. Youth need to know what they are expected to learn. Staff should identify explicitly what skills youth are expected to learn (e.g., self-control, problem-solving, empathy). Does your program define and target specific SEL skills?

R - Reflection: skills are internalized. Opportunities for youth to evaluate what they have just experienced, consider their feelings about the experience, and connect what they are learning to their lives. Do you create opportunities for youth to process their experience through reflection?

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- 2) Ask participants to think about the SAFE-R features and go to the area that their program is strongest in. At each corner (or center), have the group share an effective strategy that they use. After 5-10 minutes, bring the large group together and have participants share several strategies from each corner.
- 3) Next, ask participants to go to the corner (or center) that their program is weakest in. With the group at that area, have them brainstorm ideas for how they could improve. After 5-10 minutes, bring the large group together and have participants share several ideas from each corner.

Take It Further

- For more on the SAFE-R features, see the *[Intentional Practices to Support Social & Emotional Learning](#)* issue brief.
- Read the research review which indicated that after-school programs that follow four evidence-based practices are successful in promoting young people's personal and social development (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010).

Tool: SAFE-R Corners Worksheet

SEQUENCED

Is there a set of activities that progressively challenges youth to build social emotional skills?

Strategies

ACTIVE

Do youth use hands-on, project-based or other active forms of learning to practice SEL skills?

Strategies

REFLECTION

Do you create opportunities for youth to process their experience through reflection?

Strategies

EXPLICIT

Does your program define and target specific SEL skills?

Strategies

FOCUSED

Do you devote sufficient time exclusively to SEL goals?

Strategies
