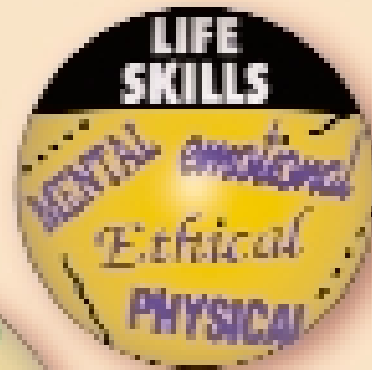


EXPLORING

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



Exploring is part of the Learning for Life career education program for youth ages 14 (and have completed the eighth grade) or 15 through 20. The program matches the interests of youth with adult expertise and the program resources of the participating organization.

Purpose

The purpose of the Exploring program is to provide experiences to help young people mature and to prepare them to become responsible and caring adults. Explorers are ready to explore the meaning of interdependence in their personal relationships and in their communities.

Exploring Methods

To achieve the mission and purpose of Learning for Life, the Exploring program is designed to meet the developmental needs of young adults by bringing them into **voluntary association** with responsible adults (Advisors).

Young adults learn **ethical decision making** through positive social interaction, leadership development, hands-on experience, refining problem-solving skills, service to others, and career exploration activities.

Exploring offers many opportunities to use experiences to promote the conditions that are necessary for the growth and development of adolescents. For example, there are planned **group activities** to give youth in a post the opportunity to interact with their peers and to experience a sense of belonging. Planning the year's program of activities and **individual activities** should involve Explorers in decision making. Engaging in activities that are challenging and fun encourages them to cultivate a capacity to enjoy life. By participating in the activities and the operation of an Explorer post, youth will have a chance to discover more about their identity, to relate to adults and peers, and to experiment with ideas and roles without having to commit themselves irrevocably.

Youth have a strong desire to be a part of a group, doing things together, and working as a group toward a common goal. Youth reach out for responsibility. They need to have input into shaping their destiny; the **democratic processes** and election of post youth leadership are important.

When young adults do well, **recognition of achievement** is important. A clear expectation of good behavior causes young adults to rise to and exceed our expectations.

When each of these methods is used by responsible adults in a safe environment for youth, Exploring can be a positive influence on the growth and development of young adults.

The protection of youth from child abuse is a great concern of Learning for Life. Resource materials are available to design a post program and activities that can create an

awareness on the part of youth. (See Youth Protection in the *Explorer Leader Handbook*.)

How to Make These Methods Work in Your Post

First, let's define a post. A post is a group of young adults who have been brought together because of a common interest. A post is made up of **people working and playing together**, enjoying and learning from one another. A post and its participants share common goals and basic ideals. They move together with the same purpose and commitment. A post is most successful when it meets the needs and interests of its participants. An effective post is the result of close cooperation between youth and adult leaders. If leaders are sensitive to post participants and respond with positive support, program, and activities that Explorers enjoy, success is assured. The post is the vehicle whereby young people will learn values, standards, and the discipline that will help them become good citizens and productive adults.

Quality Control

How do you know when your post is successful? Exploring has a built-in quality control system. **It's the youth participants themselves.** If they don't like the program, they simply don't participate in the activities or attend the meetings. Stable and growing participation is a sign of success. (See chapter 4, Explorer Advisor Section, *Explorer Leader Handbook*, No. 34637A.)

Key Elements to Program Planning and Development

Exploring is a **sharing experience** as responsible adults provide an environment whereby the developmental needs of youth are met. Post program design, planning, and implementation are critical. Youth participation is just as important.

Exploring is based on a unique and dynamic relationship between youth and the organizations in their communities. Local community organizations initiate a specific Explorer post by matching their people and program resources to the interests of young people in the community. The result is a program of activities that helps youth pursue their special interests, grow, and develop.

Explorer posts can specialize in a variety of career skills. Exploring programs are based upon five areas of emphasis:



- Developing potential contacts that may broaden employment options
- Boosting self-confidence and experiencing success at school and work



- Developing physical and mental fitness
- Experiencing positive social interaction



- Encouraging the skill and desire to help others
- Gaining a keen respect for the basic rights of others



- Helping make ethical choices
- Fulfilling one's responsibility to society as a whole



- Developing leadership skills to fulfill our responsibilities in society
- Providing exposure to different leadership traits

Young adults in Exploring should be given the opportunity to participate in the program planning and implementation process. However, **the Advisor has the responsibility to generate enthusiasm** on the part of post participants about the potential of their experiences and activities in Exploring. Emphasis should be placed on **youth running the post**.

How Are the Five Areas of Emphasis Used in the Program Planning Process?

Life Skills

Positive life skill interaction may take the form of a formal event such as a dance, banquet, or party. Life skill activities can be informal gatherings, too, such as simple horseplay, a small caucus held before the meeting to deal with post business, or just talking about what's happening at school or in the community. Youth must be allowed time for formal and informal social interaction. To be successful, a post must establish and maintain relationships between group participants. A group is not successful if its participants do not like one another or continually put one another down. A group or post is successful when its participants enjoy one another's company, are committed to one another's success, and work cooperatively together. The cooperative games in the *Explorer Leader Handbook* appendix are excellent exercises that can be used to bring post participants together.

Formal and informal social gatherings or activities that cause all participants to interact should be a natural part of the post program.

Leadership Experience

The post theoretically is run by Explorers. The training and development of youth officers and/or the post leaders is critical. Leadership development can take the form of formalized training provided by the adult post leaders using the post officers' seminar. The post can also conduct training on an ongoing basis using the outline in chapter 3, *Explorer Leader Handbook*, Explorer Advisor Section.

Leadership is developed when each Explorer has an opportunity to experience being a leader. Leadership development in Exploring is action; a post officer learns about leadership by holding office in the post and by performing the duties and responsibilities of that office, or by leading an activity.

Leadership in Exploring is anything that a group participant does that helps the group accomplish a task or maintain relationships; leadership is also service to others in the post. A congratulatory remark, a pat on the back, and recognition for individual accomplishments and performance of assigned tasks are considered methods of leadership because they help to create quality, caring relationships within the group. Every participant in the group can experience leadership through the assignment of simple to sophisticated tasks that will result in a successful experience for the group.

Everyone in a post can be a leader. The climate must be created in the post whereby each participant will have an opportunity to experience leadership without the pressures of being an officer. (See chapter 3, Youth Leader Section, *Explorer Leader Handbook*.)

The Advisor's role is to ensure that power and responsibility are shared by all participants of the post. Post participants should be committed to one another's success and needs, as well as the goals of the post. For this to happen, all participants must have input and influence on group decisions and some control over group resources such as money or supplies.

An understanding of the leadership development process is very important. (See *Explorer Leader Handbook*, Initiative Games.)

Character Education

Program and activities that require manipulative as well as intellectual skills should be incorporated in the post program. Exploring is hands-on learning.

Learning for Life has developed a series of ethical controversy activities that allow Explorers to investigate and explore several ethical dilemmas. These exercises will help develop positive decision-making skills in regard to the ethical and moral decisions they encounter daily. (See *Explorer Leader Handbook*, or use *Ethical Controversies*.)

Service Learning

Leadership is service. To be a good leader one must learn how to give of oneself to and on behalf of others. Developing and participating in service projects is one way the post can ensure that service is an integral part of its program and activities. The post participants may come up with their own service project that will benefit the community or the post's participating organization. (See Youth Leader Section, *Explorer Leader Handbook*, How to Develop Service Projects.)

Career Opportunities

Opportunities for young adults to interact with business leaders is an important feature of the Exploring program. The use of consultants within the participating organization is a good way to expand this aspect of the post program. Giving youth an opportunity to visit and try out careers will provide invaluable information that can help them in choosing their careers.

How to Develop a Quality Post Program

The *Explorer Leader Handbook* includes information on planning a quality post first meeting and post programs. Also, there is a how-to section in your new *Explorer Leader Handbook*, chapter 5, Youth Leader section:

- How to Earn Money
- How to Generate Publicity
- How to Brainstorm
- How to Develop Service Projects
- How to Plan Your Superactivity

These sections are important. Be sure to become proficient in these exercises. They can prove invaluable as you help the youth in your post become efficient and successful leaders.

Problem-Solving Skills for Explorers

A post Advisor's and post youth leader's ability to solve problems and involve every post participant in the planning and implementation of quality activities is a challenge. Positive relationships must be established with participants of the post. These relationships should develop trust and openness.

Problem-Solving Process

Every individual and every group faces problems that must be solved. People working to plan and develop projects face new problems all the time as they draw input from group participants. The following simple process shows one way to solve problems that arise during post meetings:

- Step 1:** Define the problem. This includes understanding the problem thoroughly by finding out all the facts about it. Once those facts are clear, decide on the goal or goals to be reached. As you do so, state the values that are implied by the goal as the post or group defines it.
- Step 2:** State all possible ways to reach the goal. Rather than stating only one way, put down as many as possible, even though some of them might not seem very practical. If the post works through a number of committees, several proposed solutions will probably develop automatically. You might divide the post into small groups and assign small parts of the problem to each for solutions and recommendations.
- Step 3:** Evaluate the possible effects of each of the proposed solutions. Take each proposal in turn. Then say, "If we do that, what will happen?" Trace the probable effect of each proposed action as carefully as possible. Solicit responses from participants who are not very outgoing or vocal.

Step 4: Choose the policy or solution that seems most likely to achieve the goals that the post has set. These goals should be the consensus of the group.

Additional problem-solving processes are found in your *Explorer Leader Handbook* appendix.

Program Development Resources

There are numerous publications available through Learning for Life.

The post's program possibilities are limited only by a post leadership unwilling to be adventurous and innovative. The keys to a successful post are a well-planned program and fun activities.

The Explorer Leader Handbook

The *Explorer Leader Handbook*, No. 34637A, serves as a storehouse of information for the Advisor and youth leaders. It is divided into two sections; the first describes the Advisor's roles and responsibilities, and the second provides an overview of essential information youth leaders need to run their post.

Exploring Literature

Learning for Life publishes Exploring literature that can help inspire your post adult leaders and youth participants to develop a quality, exciting post program. You can order these items through your local Learning for Life office:

Adult Explorer Leader Basic Training, self-study course, No. 99-214

*Career Achievement Award Program (CD-ROM)

*Character Education Activity Scenarios (CD-ROM)

*Character Education in Exploring (CD-ROM)

*Congressional Award Program (CD-ROM)

Explorer Leader Handbook, No. 34637A

**Explorer Post New Advisor Kit* (includes all items marked with an asterisk), No. 99-209

Explorer Post Program Guides for arts and humanities, aviation, business, communications, engineering, fire and emergency services, health, law and government, law enforcement, science, skilled trades, and social services career clusters: www.learning-for-life.org.

**Exploring Program Development Guide*

Facts Every Teen Should Know About Sexual Abuse, No. 99-249

*Instructions for Character Education Activity and Forum (CD-ROM)

*Law Enforcement Proficiency Awards (CD-ROM)

*Leadership Award (CD-ROM)

Learning for Life Web site, www.learning-for-life.org

**New Posts Start-Up Orientation (Advisor Fast Start)*

*Russell Hill Award (CD-ROM)

Scholarships for Explorers in aviation, fire and emergency services, health, law enforcement, and skill trades career clusters (CD-ROM and on www.learning-for-life.org)

**What's In It for Youth?—Exploring*

*William Spurgeon III Award (CD-ROM)

*Young American Award (CD-ROM)

"Youth Protection Guidelines" in Chapter 5 of the Advisor section, *Explorer Leader Handbook*, No. 34637A

*Included in the *Explorer Post New-Advisor Kit*, No. 99-209