

**BE SAFE**  
**Evaluation - Final Report 2009-2010**

**May 2010**

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## **Section 1. Overview**

### ***About BE SAFE***

The BE SAFE Initiative, founded in 2007, is a multi-year training, policy development, and resource collaboration that focuses on the interconnected issues of sexual and mental health, substance use, healthy relationships, and sexual violence and how they affect youth. These issues represent significant barriers to healthy adolescent development for many youth. The BE SAFE initiative is comprised of four main components: (a) changing systems that isolate youth health issues through work with partners and advisors, (b) training and policy consultation for Boston area youth programs in the BE SAFE topics, (c) youth leadership development through a youth leadership board, and (d) an external program evaluation. BE SAFE is a partnership among: AIDS Action Committee of MA, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, The City School, Community Advocacy Program of CCHERS, Inc., The Dimock Center, and Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts.

BE SAFE provides tailored programming and capacity building to out-of-school time (OST) programs that work directly with youth, many of whom are at-risk. In order to maximize the ability of OST programs to provide positive environments for youth, BE SAFE supports the existing work already underway at the programs and works to strengthen staff-youth relationships and staff knowledge and skills about the BE SAFE issues.

BE SAFE's strategy for Year Three focused in the following four domains and was adjusted as funding permitted:

1. *Scale-Up: Sustain a multi-level approach in work with programs including staff, youth, and site. Work with existing youth program networks in Boston to broaden reach. Create a fee-for-service delivery model. Investigate opportunities for joint fundraising.*
2. *Youth Work: Create curriculum for youth training in addition to supporting the Youth Leadership Board.*
3. *Dissemination: Re-tool evaluation to more tightly demonstrate impact and outcomes. Create products: Tool Kit on Policies & Procedures, articles, curricula, strategic presentations at conferences with workshops developed and handouts (youth conferences and those focused on BE SAFE issues). Finish upgrade for BE SAFE website.*
4. *Policy: Identify and work with efforts already underway to influence policy (rather than create own policy efforts). Provide customized policy development support to youth program sites.*

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time has been serving as the evaluator of BE SAFE for the past three years. Data for this evaluation report was collected through staff surveys, notes from a Youth Leadership Board (YLB) focus group, and findings from the development and pilot-testing of the BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool. It is hoped that the information and research findings described in this report will contribute to a deeper and fuller understanding of how BE SAFE investments can continue to support and facilitate the healthy development of young people, as well as safe and healthy environments in OST programs.

***Evaluation Plan***

The BE SAFE evaluation plan was adjusted as the year progressed due to funding variability. The final evaluation plan focused on the following goals:

1. *Develop and field-test a program assessment tool that specifically focuses on safe program climate (responsive to the BE SAFE issues).*
2. *Collect and analyze pre/post survey data from BE SAFE program staff trainings. Outcomes for staff include: self-reported change in practice, confidence, skill, knowledge related to BE SAFE issues.*

***Evaluation Activities September 1, 2009 – April 30, 2010***

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Period</b>
Background Research for Assessment Tool	September 2009 – October 2009
Focus Group with YLB	September 2009
Program Climate Tool Development and Field-Testing	November 2009 – April 2010
Program Staff Surveys Pre/Post	October/Nov. 2009 and April 2010
Debriefing Meeting with staff/youth (Program Climate Tool)	November 2009 – December 2009
Dissemination of Findings and Effective Practice	Spring 2010 and ongoing

Section 2 of this report describes the development and testing of the BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool. Section 3 of this report provides findings from the pre/post program staff training data. A summary of findings and recommendations are included in Section 4.

**Section 2. BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool Development**

***Program Climate***

BE SAFE staff, trainers, collaborators, advisors, and NIOST researchers discussed the development of a program climate observation tool, particularly focused on the BE SAFE issues. The purpose of the tool would be to help programs identify their own strengths and weaknesses

towards creating a safe, inclusive, and empowering program climate. Along with other measures, the BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool, eventually utilized as a self-assessment tool, could contribute to program improvement efforts.

The term “climate” as used in schools originally stemmed from organization and business models that describe climate as a set of internal characteristics that are unique to a particular organization (Anderson, 1982). Climate in a school setting has been referred to as: (a) the general atmosphere created at a particular school, (b) the feelings that are generated from the school’s culture that gives the school its character, (c) the result of how the relationships between the students, faculty, staff and peers are formed, and (d) a student’s sense of safety. Research literature suggests that successful schools experience harmony among staff, faculty, and youth, and are places where each individual feels safe, valued, and respected. Research on school environments has shown a strong relationship between a social setting and emotional well-being, and suggests negative behaviors can be attributed to a school’s climate and a student’s sense of safety.

Most current research investigates climate only at the school level, however administrators of youth programs are also looking for ways to create a safe program climate; a place that is socially stable where youth feel safe and want to spend their time in the after school hours. Quality programs strive to incorporate a positive youth development approach into their programs by incorporating program features that maximize positive and healthy development. These program features align with the key features of positive developmental settings established by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002): (1) physical and psychological safety, (2) appropriate structure, (3) supportive relationships, (4) opportunities to belong, and (5) positive social norms.

### ***Youth Leadership Board Focus Group***

Prior to developing the tool, a NIOST researcher met with members of the Youth Leadership Board (YLB) in September of 2009. The purpose of the focus group was to learn how youth describe “a safe space,” and what youth thought were indicators of a positive climate/safe space related to the BE SAFE topics, and what a “safe space” might look like or feel like.

Initially, the group experienced some difficulty defining specifics around program safety. They discussed an overall feeling generated within a particular space. They all agreed that a “safe space” should be free from judgment, cliques, bullying, and sexual harassment of any kind. Members from the YLB felt a “safe space” should also include diversity, acceptance of individuality in the forms of personal appearances; thoughts and beliefs without fear of put downs, negative side comments, or rejection. They described “safe space” as a place that provides an atmosphere in which any topic, especially the ones that you usually do not discuss at school, home or church could be discussed in depth and that would allow for everyone’s opinion and voice to be heard and respected. The YLB also felt that in a “safe space” they could receive honest sound advice from someone they trust. Some of their comments were:

“A safe space to me would be just like a judgment-free zone, a place where you could be from any race, or think or dress differently and everybody would just be cool with you, so it’s not like you’re being judged.”

“Feeling safe has a lot to do with the people who are in the space; a safe space is where we can make some group agreements and have discussions to share some of our personal experiences, get some questions answered from the group leaders.”

“A safe space is an environment that is welcoming, a place that allows everyone to speak up without being put down. A safe place offers guidance and advice from people who care and who are concerned about what they do and the people around them.”

“[A safe space is] realistic advice, not just “don’t do this or that,” but advice like giving us a reason why or why not to do something, give us the pro’s and con’s so that we can look at the situation and make the decision to say we’re not going to do that, rather than putting our questions down automatically.”

The YLB also described what a safe space might look like. They identified a “safe space” as clean, bright and relaxing, a space that gives you a warm feeling almost like being home. Although the appearance of the space is an important feature in creating a “safe space,” the general consensus among the group was that the people inside the space are what create a feeling of safety. Additionally, they suggested a “safe space” includes intellectual and positive messaging on the walls without targeting anyone specifically.

The YLB was clear in what they felt created an “unsafe space.” The group unanimously agreed that language including swearing or derogatory comments, voice tone of either staff or other program youth, and non-verbal facial expressions or body language could feel threatening and create an unsafe feeling to the program space. The group also thought that flirting and/or sexual advances in public spaces create uncomfortable feelings and increased insecurities in some youth.

“Flirting is almost like intruding on somebody else’s ideal safe space if they’re not feeling comfortable with what you are doing. It’s not quite there but it’s almost like dating/sexual harassment, so having consideration would be good.”

“Language could or could not make you feel safe. For example, swears or things like it might make you feel uncomfortable especially when it’s used to put someone down.

### ***Methodology for Tool Development***

Researchers from NIOST performed an extensive search of the current literature focused on school/youth program climate and existing tools used to measure climate. There are few tools that specifically address programs outside of the traditional classroom/school building or that address the BE SAFE topic areas. The most widely used assessment tools for identifying a school’s climate are surveys and interviews that gather individual user perspectives. These assessments are based on perceptions and feelings rather than observable features. While these assessments provide some insight into how individuals feel within an environment, they are limited in providing an authentic assessment of program climate based on measurable features.

Observation assessments can be useful in helping identify certain attitudes, body language, gestures, language and tone of voices heard throughout the space that contribute to feeling safe within the space. The rationale behind the development of the observation tool was to help afterschool programs identify the nuances and current program practices that contribute to a program's climate and youth's feeling of safety. The observation tool can help programs identify problem areas by assessing youth-to-youth interactions and staff-youth interactions in a non-school setting, and provide valuable information on the frequency and types of behaviors and mannerisms that can create an unsafe climate (Cushing, Horner, Barrier, 2003).

The observation tool is organized into 6 sections. There is one section for each BE SAFE topic: Sexual Health, Sexual Violence, Healthy Relationships, Mental Health, and Substance Use and one section that address General Program Safety. The tool includes a final section which consists of questions directed towards program directors related to program policy and policy development.

Researchers created a framework to guide the development of items for each section. This framework included four elements:

- Youth behaviors.
- Staff/peer interactions and relationships.
- Accessibility/visibility of program materials/messages specific to the BE SAFE issues.
- Feelings and emotions generated by participants within the program.

Items were also used directly from or adapted from published surveys including "Is your school an emotionally safe place" (Bluestein, n.d.) and from the Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT) (NIOST, 2004). After completing a draft tool, an electronic copy was sent to BE SAFE directors for their review and comments. Additionally, meetings with BE SAFE Board members, staff, and partners were held to review the tool and make changes prior to piloting activities.

### ***Field Testing***

Once the draft BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool was completed, it was field-tested at three locations: Squashbusters, City Schools, and The Boys & Girls Club. Squashbusters is a structured afterschool program that supports middle and high school level youth in academic enrichment, homework and physical activities. Youth are assigned a time for each activity during the program hours. The City School Program is a place for high school youth to work together to develop social and leadership skills. The atmosphere is unstructured, and the space provides opportunities for all youth to engage in conversation and team-building activities. Youth are free to move around the room, help with cooking, and are given opportunities to lead activities. The Boys & Girls Club is a semi-structured afterschool program that supports youth and teens in academic enrichment, homework, and physical activities and provides dinner. Younger youth are assigned to activities during their time at the Club. Teens have their own space and can choose the activities in which they wish to engage.

A NIOST researcher arrived at the start of the afterschool program at each location to field-test the tool and observed for a minimum of 1 hour and 30 minutes. The tool uses a four point rating scale designed to answer the question, "How true does this statement describe what I observed?"

The tool also includes an “N/A” for behaviors/practices the observer would not be expected to observe at any given time during the observation.

The observation tool worked well in helping guide the observer to identify program strengths and areas that needed improvement related to the BE SAFE topics. For example, staff-peer interactions play an important role in helping youth develop positive connections to adults and to the program. The observation tool guides the user to capture body language, facial expressions, cooperativeness of youth to staff requests, opportunities for leadership and youth problem solving/conflict resolution skills. Additionally, the observation tool asks the user to listen for affirmations, tones used by peers and staff and language that can have a direct impact on program/climate safety both negatively and positively. The tool directs the user to observe general program safety items that include first aid, security and private spaces where youth could go in secret. The tool also focuses the observer on messaging throughout the space in the form of posters, pamphlets or books that relate to the BE SAFE topics.

After the initial piloting phase of the draft tool, a NIOST researcher returned to each location to conduct a debrief with program staff and directors. A copy of the tool was delivered to staff at each program prior to our arrival. Some staff expressed concern that the climate features and BE SAFE issues did not reflect the youth [ages] within their program or their program’s overall goals. This exercise provided insight to the program directors as to some additional internal work that was still needed to continue to acknowledge and incorporate BE SAFE topics in programming.

Other staff and program youth participated in the discussion and felt the tool was valid and would be very useful for aiding programs in addressing or assisting with the BE SAFE topics. Program youth especially commented that they felt the tool would be great in helping programs create a feeling of safety and that the tool addressed the important issues that youth are facing today.

## **Section 3. Staff Surveys**

### ***Pre-Training Survey Summary***

#### ***Participants (Mass Promise Fellows)<sup>1</sup>***

A total of 29 surveys were completed by the Mass Promise Fellows attending the October 2009 training. The majority of staff, (61%) identify as Caucasian/White, 18% as Asian, 4% as African American/Black and 4% as Latino/Hispanic. Eighty-six percent (86%) of staff earned a Bachelor’s degree, 10% a Graduate degree, and 3% reported having some college but no degree. Staff were asked to respond to questions related to program interactions with youth, comfort level discussing sexual health, sexual violence, substance use, healthy relationships and mental health. Additionally, staff were asked about (a) challenges they faced in discussing the BE SAFE topic issues, (b) program policies and guidelines that support youth around the BE SAFE topics and, (c) program climate.

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<sup>1</sup> Some data not equal to 100% due to rounding.



### ***Program Staff and Youth Interactions***

In general, staff reported that youth do not often ask questions about the BE SAFE issues. Twenty-one percent (21%) of staff reported that the question was “not applicable” or that they do not work directly with youth. In regards to questions about sexual health, 3% of staff reported youth “sometimes” ask, 76% reported they are “seldom to never” asked. When asked the same question about sexual violence, 10% of staff reported they are asked “very frequently,” 14% reported “sometimes,” and 52% reported they are “seldom to never” asked. Staff reported that youth ask more questions about healthy relationships than any other BE SAFE topic. Seventeen percent (17%) of staff reported that youth ask questions “very frequently” about healthy relationships, 31% reported being asked “sometimes,” and 31% reported they are “seldom or never” asked. Seven percent (7%) of staff reported that youth ask questions about substance use “very frequently,” 24% are “sometimes” asked, and 49% reported they are “seldom or never” asked. Ten percent (10%) of staff reported they are “very frequently” asked questions about mental health, 14% reported “sometimes,” 55% are “seldom or never asked.”

### ***Staff Comfort Discussing BE SAFE Topic Issues***

Staff reported on their comfort level discussing the BE SAFE topics with youth. Thirty-one percent (31%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing sexual health, sexual violence, and mental health issues with youth. Forty-eight percent (48%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing healthy relationships and 28% reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing substance use with youth. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of staff reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” discussing mental health, 28% reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” discussing sexual health and healthy relationships, 41% reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” discussing substance use and 21% “somewhat comfortable” discussing sexual violence.

Thirty-nine (39%) of staff reported feeling “uncomfortable” discussing sexual violence, 31% felt “uncomfortable” discussing sexual health, 18% felt “uncomfortable” discussing substance use and 21% felt “uncomfortable” discussing mental health. Fourteen percent (14%) of staff felt “uncomfortable” discussing healthy relationships.

When staff were asked about their comfort level in raising the BE SAFE topics with youth, 41% of staff reported they were “minimally comfortable” raising the Be SAFE topics, 38% of staff reported they were “somewhat comfortable” and 21% reported they were “very comfortable” in raising the BE SAFE topics with program youth. A number of staff reported they “never” or “infrequently” raise any of the BE SAFE topics with youth at their programs.

### ***Challenges Staff Face in Providing Assistance Related to BE SAFE***

A majority of staff reported feeling they have strong support from their program and/or manager to have conversations with youth about the BE SAFE topics, and 15% reported little to no support. Despite the fact that the majority of staff felt supported, many face additional challenges that interfere with their ability to have the conversations.

Sixty-six percent (66%) of staff reported that having the right language is the biggest challenge they face in providing assistance to youth around the BE SAFE topics. Understanding youth development was reported by 42% of staff, understanding their own beliefs and biases, and

feeling intimidated by the responsibility were reported by 35% of staff. Additionally, 24% of staff reported that both creating a safe environment and developing trust were a challenge.

In addition to the challenges staff face, many were unclear about what are acceptable boundaries regarding programs policies. Staff were asked to rate their knowledge or understanding regarding program policies or guidelines. Thirty-five percent (35%) of staff reported being “unfamiliar” with program policies, and 34% reported only being “somewhat familiar” with their programs guidelines and policies supporting program youth related to the BE SAFE topics. A small percentage (14%) of staff reported knowing what type of situations are okay for them to handle or when they are required to ask for help and/or refer to others in the program or outside.

### ***Program Climate***

Fifty percent (50%) of staff reported feeling their program is “very safe,” 38% reported feeling their program is “somewhat safe,” and 10% reported feeling their program is “minimally safe.” Forty-five percent (45%) of staff “strongly agree” that the adults in their program adhere to the same standards of behavior they expect from program youth and their program works to create emotional safety by recognizing changes in behavior and supporting youth that may be in crisis.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of staff “strongly agree” they avoid humiliation, shame or ridicule when interacting with youth. The majority of staff (72%) reported feeling youth know that they can talk to staff or staff can refer them to someone who will listen. Forty-one percent (41%) of staff reported they “strongly agree” their program has and communicates boundaries and policies around acceptable and desirable youth behaviors.

### ***Participants (Mass Promise Fellows 2)***

A total of 22 pre-training surveys were collected from Fellows attending the Mass Promise training in December 2009. Representatives from nine youth serving programs were present. On average staff were working in their current positions for two or more years and working with youth for four or more years. Thirty-six percent (36%) of staff identify as Caucasian/White, 32% as African American/Black, 9% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9% as Hispanic/Latino. Fourteen percent (14%) of staff omitted this question. Fifty-two percent (52%) of staff earned a Bachelor’s degree, 38% earned a Graduate degree, and 9% reported having some college, but no degree.

### ***Program Staff and Youth Interactions***

Sixty-four percent (64%) of staff reported that youth “seldom” or “never” ask questions about sexual health. Five (5%) reported youth ask “very frequently” and 32% reported youth “sometimes” ask about sexual health. Fifty-four percent (54%) of staff reported youth “seldom” or “never” ask about sexual violence whereas 46% reported that youth “sometimes” ask. Twenty-seven percent (27%) reported that youth ask “very frequently” about healthy relationships, 46% reported youth “sometimes” ask, 23% reported youth “seldom” ask, and 4% reported youth “never” ask about healthy relationships. Fifty percent (50%) of staff reported youth “seldom” ask about substance use, 36% reported youth “sometimes” ask, 4% reported youth ask “very frequently” and 4% reported “never” being asked about substance use. Four percent (4%) of staff reported they did not work directly with youth. Thirty-two percent (32%) of staff reported they are “very frequently” asked questions about mental health, 46% were

“sometimes” asked, 14% reported “seldom” being asked and 4% reported “never” being asked (additional 4% did not work directly with youth).

### ***Staff Comfort Discussing BE SAFE Topic Issues***

Thirty-six percent (36%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing sexual health and sexual violence issues with youth. Fifty percent (50%) reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing healthy relationships, 41% reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing substance use and 46% of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing mental health issues with youth. Twenty-three percent (23%) of staff reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing sexual health, 14% reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing sexual violence and substance use, 4% reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing healthy relationships, and 22% of staff reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing mental health issues with youth. The only BE SAFE topic that staff reported feeling “not comfortable” discussing with youth was sexual health (4% of staff).

### ***Challenges Staff Face in Providing Assistance Related to BE SAFE***

The majority of staff (73%) reported receiving strong support from their program and/or their manager to have conversations with youth about the BE SAFE topics and 50% of staff reported being familiar with their program policies and guidelines. Despite the strong support and knowledge about program policies and guidelines, 68% of staff reported feeling “somewhat,” “minimally,” or “not comfortable” in raising any of the BE SAFE issues with youth. Fifty-five percent (55%) of staff reported they either “sometimes” or “never” raise BE SAFE topic issues with youth.

The majority of staff (86%) reported the biggest challenge they face in providing assistance to program youth around the BE SAFE topics is having the right language to use. Fifty-two percent (52%) of staff reported feeling intimidated by the responsibility to respond to the BE SAFE issues. Additionally almost of half of the staff reported developing trust with youth (47%) , and understanding their own beliefs and biases (43%) as challenges they faced in speaking with youth about BE SAFE topics. Thirty-two percent (32%) of staff reported creating a safe environment to speak with youth as a challenge.

In addition, 50% of staff reported being “somewhat” or “not at all familiar” with program policies and guidelines. Fifty-five percent (55%) of staff reported feeling “somewhat” or “minimally comfortable” knowing what type of situations are okay for them to handle or when they are required to ask for help/refer to others in the program or outside. Fifty percent (50%) of staff reported feeling “somewhat knowledgeable” about locating or accessing resources they could turn to for needed support for youth or other staff related to the BE SAFE issues.

### ***Program Climate***

Sixty-four percent (64%) of staff reported feeling their program is “very safe” and 36% reported feeling their program is “somewhat” safe. Staff in general (64%) “strongly agree” their programs work at creating emotional safety by recognizing changes in behavioral patterns, observe how students interact with one another and support youth who may be in crisis. Additionally, 76% of staff reported they “strongly agree” that their programs immediately respond to incidents or reported incidents that involve any form of bullying, harassment, or threats to student safety.

The majority of staff (81%) “strongly agree” their programs avoid humiliating, shaming, or ridiculing when interacting with youth. Sixty-five percent (65%) of staff reported they “strongly agree” that adults adhere to the same standards that are expected from youth, and 67% of staff reported they “strongly agree” their programs have and communicate boundaries that clearly describe desirable and acceptable youth behaviors.

### ***Participants (YLC Peace Fellows)***

A total of 15 surveys were completed by the YLC Peace Fellows attending training in December, 2009. The majority of staff (67%) identify as African/American/Black, 13% Caucasian/White, and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander. Thirteen percent (13%) of staff did not respond to this question. Fifty-three percent (53%) of staff have earned a High school diploma or GED, 20% earned a Bachelor’s degree, 13% reported having some college but no degree, and 7% reported having some high school.

### ***Program Staff and Youth Interactions***

Forty percent (40%) of staff reported they do not work directly with youth. Twenty-seven percent (27%) reported youth ask about sexual health “very frequently” and 27% reported youth “seldom or never” ask about sexual health. Staff reported youth asked about healthy relationships and mental health equally. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of youth “very frequently” ask, 13% “sometimes” ask, and 20% “seldom or never” ask staff about healthy relationships and mental health issues. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of staff reported youth “seldom or never” ask about sexual violence, 20% reported youth “sometimes” ask and 13% reported youth ask “very frequently” about sexual violence. Twenty percent (20%) of staff reported that youth ask “very frequently” about substance use, 27% reported “sometimes” and 13% reported youth “seldom” ask about substance use.

### ***Staff Comfort Discussing BE SAFE Topic Issues***

Forty percent (40%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing sexual health, substance use and mental health issues with youth. Forty-six percent (46%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing sexual violence and 60% reported feeling “very comfortable” discussing healthy relationships with youth. Thirty-three percent (33%) of staff reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” discussing sexual health and sexual violence, whereas 27% of staff reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” discussing healthy relationships, mental health and substance use. Thirteen percent (13%) of staff reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing sexual health, sexual violence, and substance use and 7% reported feeling “minimally comfortable” discussing healthy relationships and mental health issues with youth.

### ***Challenges Staff Face in Providing Assistance Related to BE SAFE***

Twelve staff responded to the question that asked staff if they felt supported in their programs to have conversations about any of the BE SAFE issues with youth. Of the staff that responded, more than half (58%) reported feeling “very supported,” 25% “some support,” and 17% reported feeling “little or no support” from their managers or organizations. Thirty-three percent (33%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable” raising any of the BE SAFE topic issues, 47% reported feeling “somewhat comfortable” and 20% reported feeling “minimally or not comfortable”

raising BE SAFE topic issues with program youth. Although many staff feel supported and comfortable raising the BE SAFE issues with youth, 27% of staff reported they “never” and 47% reported they only “sometimes” raise any of the BE SAFE issues with youth.

When asked about any challenges faced in having discussions with youth around the BE SAFE issues, 33% of staff reported creating a safe environment to talk as the biggest challenge. Twenty-seven (27%) reported understanding their own beliefs and biases, and 20% of staff reported having the right language and understanding youth development as challenges they faced. Forty percent (40%) of staff reported feeling “familiar or very familiar” with program guidelines and policies regarding communication with/supporting program youth related to BE SAFE issues. Thirty-three percent (33%) of staff reported they were “not at all familiar” with the policies. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of staff reported feeling “very comfortable,” 36% “somewhat comfortable,” 29% reported feeling “minimally or not comfortable” and 7% reported “not comfortable” knowing what situations are okay for them to handle or when they are required to seek assistance.

### ***Program Climate***

Ten staff responded to questions around program climate and safety. Of the staff that responded, thirty-three percent (33%) reported feeling their program is “very safe,” 56% reported their program is “somewhat safe,” and 11% reported feeling their program is “minimally safe.” Although 50% of staff “strongly agree” they create emotional safety by observing changes in behaviors, 20% reported they “strongly agree” their program immediately responds to incidents of bullying or harassment. Seventy percent (70%) of staff “strongly or somewhat agree” they avoid humiliation, shame or ridicule when interacting with youth. The majority of staff (81%) reported adults adhere to the same standards that are expected or required from youth. Additionally, 81% of staff reported their programs communicate boundaries and policies around acceptable behaviors. Ninety-two percent (92%) of staff reported feeling their program provides support for youth in crisis, and youth know that if they need to talk, staff are willing to listen.

### ***Post-Training Survey Summary***

#### ***Participants (Mass Promise Fellows)***

A total of 23 post-training surveys were collected following the Mass Promise training held in February 2010. Staff were asked if the BE SAFE training increased their familiarity with their program’s policies around the BE SAFE issues. Twenty-three staff responded and of these responses 57% percent of staff reported “yes,” 13% reported “yes, but were already familiar with the policies,” 17% reported “no, still do not feel familiar enough,” and 13% reported they do not work directly with youth.

Staff were then asked if the training helped to clarify which situations were “OK” for them to handle and which ones require help or other assistance. A total of 21 responses were received and of the responses, 67% of staff replied “yes,” 24% replied “yes, but were already familiar,” and 9% replied “no, still do not feel familiar enough.” When asked if participation in the training helped to identify steps that could improve or strengthen their programs physical and

emotional safety, 76% of staff replied “yes,” and 24% replied “yes, but they were already able to identify” steps.

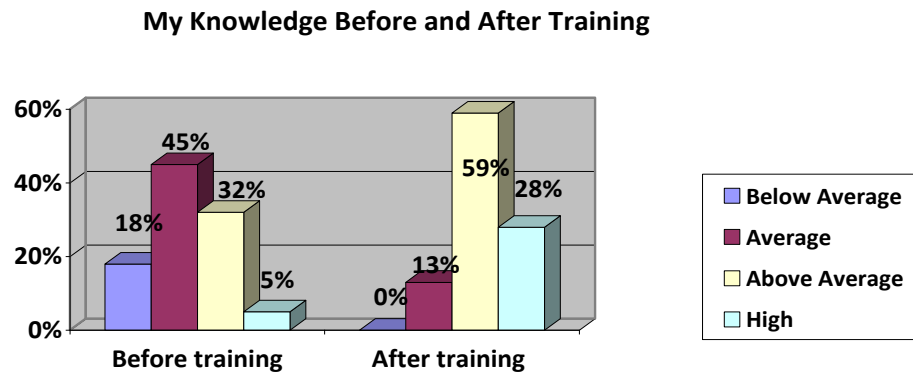
Staff were asked if participation in the training helped them to feel more knowledgeable about the available resources related to the BE SAFE issues and how to access them for support if they should need it within their programs. Of the responses, 35% of staff reported they felt “much more knowledgeable,” 48% of staff reported they felt “more knowledgeable,” 13% reported they felt somewhat more knowledgeable,” and 4% reported “no improvement” in knowledge.

### ***Knowledge of Training Content***

Staff were asked to rate their knowledge of the training content before and after the training using a Likert style rating scale with 1= “Low,” 2= “Below Average,” 3= “Average,” 4= “Above Average,” and 5= “High.”

Eighteen (18%) of staff rated their pre-training knowledge as “Below Average,” 45% rated their pre-training knowledge as “Average,” 32% rated their knowledge as “Above Average,” with 5% of staff rating their knowledge as “High.” Zero (0%) of staff reported their post-training knowledge as “Below Average,” 13% of staff rated their knowledge as “Average,” 59% of staff rated their knowledge as “Above Average” and 28% of staff rated their knowledge as “High” (see Chart 1).

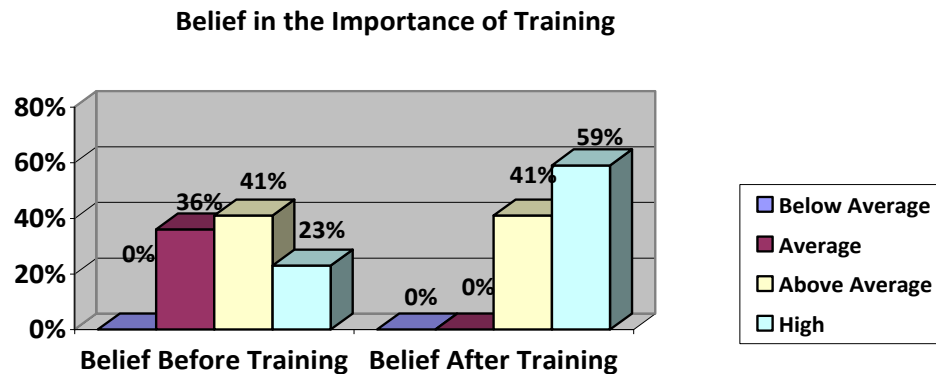
Chart 1



N=23

Thirty-six percent (36%) of staff rated the importance of the training prior to training as “Average,” 41% rated the importance as “Above Average,” and 23% rated the importance as “High.” Forty percent (40%) of staff rated the importance of the training at post-training as “Above Average,” and 59% of staff rated the importance as “High” (see Chart 2).

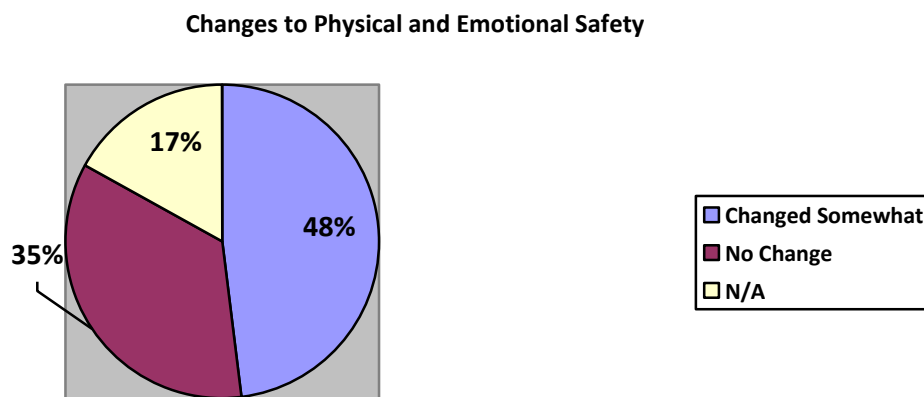
Chart 2



N=23

Staff were asked if their feelings changed regarding the degree in which their program is a place where youth feel physically and emotionally safe since attending the BE SAFE training. Forty-eight percent (48%) of staff reported their feeling has “Changed Somewhat,” and 35 % reported “No Change,” and 17% reported “N/A” as they do not work directly with youth (see Chart 3).

Chart 3



N=23

Staff were asked if their understanding, attitude, and/or values towards any of the BE SAFE issues changed as a result of participating in the trainings. The majority of staff (83%) reported “yes.” Staff comments included:

“I feel more comfortable and confident and appreciate the courage of youth who come and talk to me.”

“Although I have had training in these areas before, the Be SAFE training helped me apply the knowledge to youth specific situations.”

“The training helped me with concrete steps to create safe spaces and to be a resource for the youth in my program... We all need to be on the same page about creating safe spaces for program youth.”

“I now know how and where to locate related sources. My previous efforts were ineffective and I now feel motivated.”

Staff were asked if the training helped them to learn and understand the ASK tool. A total of 20 staff responded and of the responses 95% responded “yes,” and 5% of staff responded “no.” When asked for ways staff have been able to incorporate the ASK approach to their work staff replied:

“ASK is a great tool, it is more focused on the process rather than jumping to an outcome or solution.”

“I haven’t been able to use it yet, however, it will help me with my non-verbal body language and facial expressions as well as providing more guidelines.”

“It has a purpose and helps guide where you want the conversation to go and learning the importance of assessing and supporting before offering resources.”

“A live document that I can use before or after encounters with youth, simple and efficient.”

Staff were asked to describe any changes they have made to either themselves or within their programs related to their participation in the BE SAFE trainings.

“I am energized to re-think about our space in a way that presents as positive, friendly and focused around youth’s needs.”

“I learned appropriate ways to have conversations with youth and appropriate ways of offering the right resources.”

“The staff training set clear expectations for me and program youth. Since having the training, I plan to review our policies and procedures and create program policies about concerning behaviors and policies around reporting 51A’s.”

### ***Participants (Peace Fellows)***

A total of 12 post-training surveys were collected from staff attending the Peace Fellows training in April 2010. Staff were asked if participation in the BE SAFE training helped them increase



their familiarity with their program’s policies around communication in support of program youth related to the BE SAFE issues. Twelve staff responded and of these responses 75% percent of staff reported “yes,” and 25% reported “yes, but were already familiar with the policies.”

Staff were then asked if the training helped to clarify which situations were ”OK” for them to handle and which ones require help or other assistance. A total of 12 responses were received and of the responses, 92% of staff replied “yes,” and 8% replied “yes, but were already familiar.”

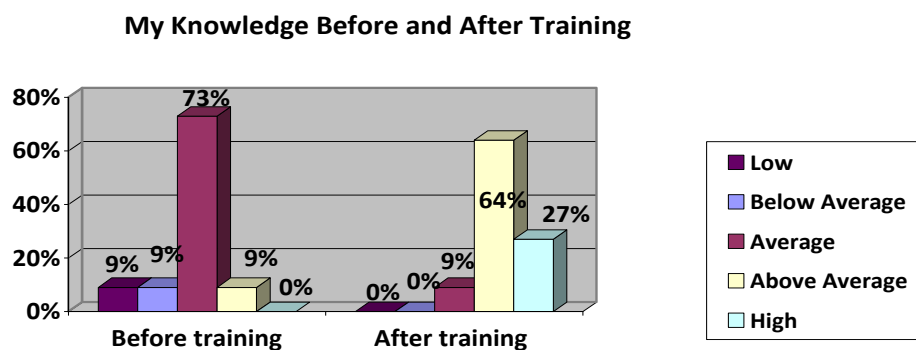
When asked if participation in the training helped to identify steps that could improve or strengthen their programs physical and emotional safety, 92% of staff replied “yes,” and 8% replied “yes, but they were already able to identify” steps.

Staff were asked if participation in the training helped them to feel more knowledgeable about the available resources related to the BE SAFE issues and how to access them for support if they should need it within their programs. A total of 12 responses were received and of the responses, 83% of staff reported they felt “much more knowledgeable,” and 17% of staff reported they felt “more knowledgeable.”

***Knowledge of Training Content***

Nine percent (9%) of staff rated their pre-training knowledge as “Low,” 9% rated their knowledge as “Below Average,” 73% rated their knowledge as “Average,” and 9% rated their knowledge as “Above Average.” Zero percent (0%) of staff reported their post-training knowledge as “Low” or “Below Average,” 9% of staff rated their knowledge as “Average,” 64% of staff rated their knowledge as “Above Average,” and 27% of staff rated their knowledge as “High” (see Chart 4).

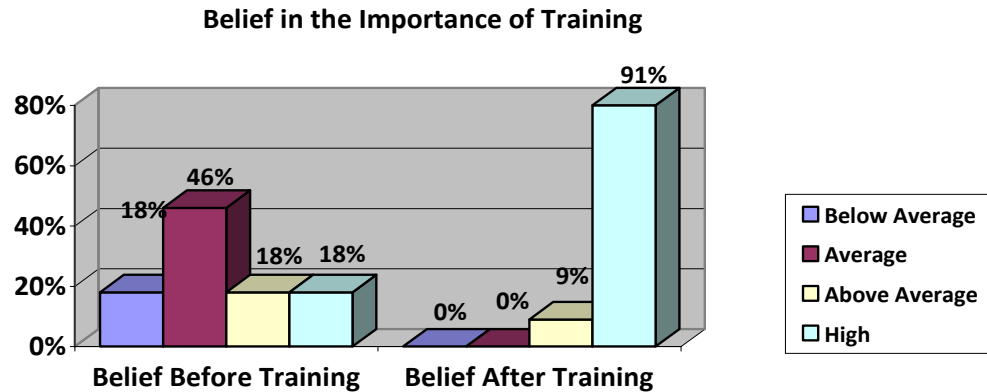
Chart 4



N=12

Eighteen percent (18%) of staff rated the importance of training at pre-training as “Below Average,” 46% rated the importance as “Average,” 18% of staff rated the importance as “Above Average,” and 18% rated the importance of the training as “High.” All staff reported a change in their belief about the importance of the training at post-training. Nine percent (9%) of staff rated their belief in training as “Above Average” and 91% of staff rated their belief as “High” (see Chart 5).

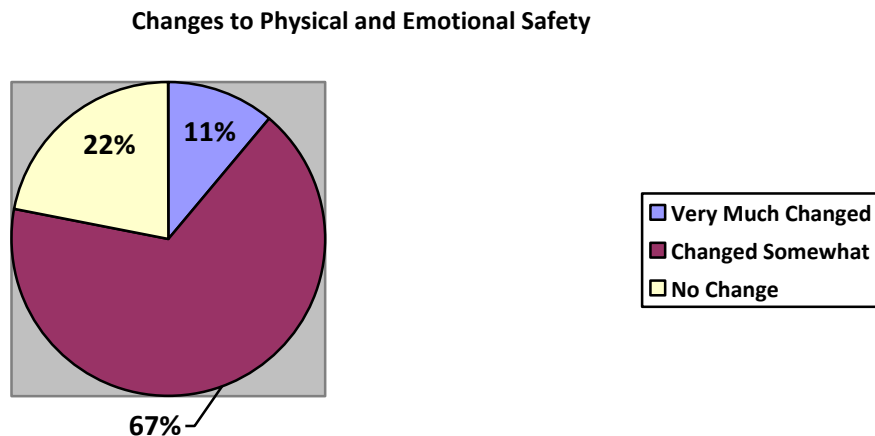
Chart 5



N=12

Following the training, staff were asked if their feelings changed regarding the degree in which their program is a place where youth feel physically and emotionally safe. Eleven percent (11%) of staff reported their feelings had “Very Much Changed,” 67% reported their feelings had “Changed Somewhat,” 22% of staff reported “No Change (see Chart 6).

Chart 6



N=12

Staff were asked if their understanding, attitude, and/or values towards any of the BE SAFE issues changed as a result of participating in the trainings. The majority of staff (82%) reported “yes.” Staff commented:

“From the training, I have much more understanding of the topics, and now have better resources and ways to support youth.”

“I feel that I can now assist youth better; providing support is more important than I originally thought!”

“BE SAFE topics are more complex than I originally thought, I have a much better understanding of the topics.”

Staff were asked if the training helped them to learn and understand the ASK tool. A total of 12 staff responded and of their responses 10 reported “yes,” and 2 staff responded “no.” When asked for ways they have been able to incorporate the ASK approach into their work staff replied:

“The acronym helps me to remember what role I should be in...learned it and will use it.”

“Helps to bring awareness to youth that you see them going through things and letting them know that you are aware of it and are there to help them.”

“I haven’t had any situations to use the tool yet, but just knowing certain ways to talk to youth to help figure out the problem is very helpful, I’ll keep it fresh in my head.”

Staff were asked to describe any changes they had made to either themselves or within their programs related to their participation in the BE SAFE trainings.

“I am trying to evaluate situations differently, because situations sometimes have more depth than originally reported or discussed.”

“The trainings will change the way I work with youth, I have a better understanding of how to identify issues and find the proper resources.”

## **Section 4. Summary and Recommendations**

Evaluation findings from this 2010 report and previous years have generally shown that youth infrequently approach program staff about the BE SAFE issues, despite the critical and overwhelming nature of these issues in their lives. Additionally, in most programs less than 50% of staff feel comfortable or prepared to discuss the BE SAFE issues with their program youth. Program staff regularly cite lack of appropriate language, absence of an established safe climate, and need for clarity about their own biases and beliefs as challenges to closing the information and relationship gap between themselves and program youth.

Youth development and resiliency research literature affirm the importance of caring relationships as a pathway to healthy development for youth. Authentic and needs-based communication between program staff and youth is an important component of positive relationship building, and it is in that domain that the BE SAFE supports have been focused.

Over the course of three years BE SAFE has contributed significant resources and knowledge to the local Boston afterschool and youth development program sector. BE SAFE identified a need in afterschool and youth development programs for youth-centered, developmentally-focused supports given in the form of relationship-building and policy-development activities. BE SAFE has emerged from its earlier training pilot work in five afterschool programs to a more system-wide approach, developing relationships with existing afterschool program and youth development partnerships and networks, in order to increase both depth and span of its knowledge-building activities.

Evaluation findings have demonstrated the impact of BE SAFE's work. Program staff participating in BE SAFE training have consistently pointed to positive change in knowledge and skills related to the BE SAFE issues. Programs have entered into policy analysis and policy development processes as a result of engagement in BE SAFE training and consultation activities. Taking a multi-level approach in its work with programs – that is including a focus on staff, youth, and organization improvement and involvement has proved a successful and appropriate strategy.

The BE SAFE initiative, which is anchored through a unique partnership of key Boston organizations specializing in health and human development, is currently undergoing transition between host organizations. Sustaining the Year 3 implementation strategy with a focus on building system-level relationships and developing training curricular and policy development tools would seem a worthwhile approach. The draft BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool warrants additional refinement and pilot testing. This task could be a priority for continued evaluation work, and would make a valuable and unique contribution to the afterschool and youth development program fields. BE SAFE's dissemination strategy should include nationally extending the BE SAFE training curriculum through NIOST or other similar national training organizations. BE SAFE has demonstrated meaningful benefits to programs and program staff and should continue to be a priority among the partners.

## Appendix 1

### References

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## Appendix 2

### BE SAFE Program Climate Observation Tool (Pilot) November 2009

Observer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

The observation tool offers a four point, “how true” rating scale. The scale is designed to answer the question “how true is it that this statement describes what I observed?”

The observation tool offers a four point, “how true” rating scale. The scale is designed to answer the question “how true is it that this statement describes what I observed?”

- 1=Not True**
- 2=Somewhat True**
- 3=Mostly True**
- 4=Very True**

#### Tip on Assigning Ratings:

- When rating staff items you will be factoring staff members who are in different roles (e.g. lead staff and assistant/teen helper). In general, staff interactions should be weighted equally and averaged overall when coding. However, the tool is intended to measure the quality of experiences for youth. Therefore, if one person really sets the tone (positive or negative) ask yourself, “What is the child/youth’s experience right now?” This will help mediate ratings where one staff person may overly influence the experience.
- **N/A= Not Applicable**  
When observers feel that a desired behavior/practice was not applicable (e.g. would not have been expected to be observed given the activities and interactions taking place) during observation period, a rating of “N/A” can be assigned. This code should be used **sparingly** and should be accompanied by a comment and/or explanation.

## Section I. Sexual Health

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Books, pamphlets and/or materials are easily accessible to youth that talk about safe sex practices, HIV AIDS, and or/ STI's and GLBT gender identity issues.	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. Posters about sexual health including teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and STI's, and GLBT gender identity are clearly visible to youth in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. When materials are available, they reflect a wide variety of cultures, ethnicities, races and or/ languages.	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Cards/materials are available with contact information or hot line numbers for program youth/staff relating to sexual health issues including teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and STI's.	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Information and materials go beyond the negatives and include normalizing sexuality.	1 2 3 4 NA	

## Section II. Sexual Violence

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Books, pamphlets and/or materials are easily accessible to youth that talk about sexual violence.	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. Posters about sexual violence including date rape, sexual harassment, threats, intimidation, peeping, taking nude photos and unwanted touching, etc., are clearly visible to youth in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. Program activities encourage positive and healthy interactions with and between gender groups.	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Youth use appropriate tone and body language when interacting with each other.	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Youth/staff use respectful and appropriate vocabulary that is free from sexual putdowns when speaking to each other.	1 2 3 4 NA	
6. Youth/staff regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity are treated with respect and equality.	1 2 3 4 NA	
7. When youth/staff interact with each other, they refrain from using punishment, shame or humiliation.*	1 2 3 4 NA	
8. Youth self correct peers who use sexually derogatory language.	1 2 3 4 NA	
9. Program does not have private spaces available where youth can go in secret (closed doors have a window; stairwells are open or have windows, other spaces are locked.	1 2 3 4 NA	

### Section III. Healthy Relationships

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Books, pamphlets and/or materials are easily accessible to youth that talk about healthy relationships, including trust, respect, support and positive communications etc..	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. Posters about healthy relationships are clearly visible to youth in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. Youth seek out positive contact/interactions with staff (e.g. youth initiate dialogue, ask their opinions, initiate friendly verbal or physical interactions, stand close to staff when talking).**	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Youth are cooperative with staff's requests or directions. (Older youth may probe or even challenge staff directives before agreeing to go along with staff plans. 1= refuse to comply or get into power struggle).**	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Youth listen to each other (e.g. pay attention, don't interrupt).	1 2 3 4 NA	
6. Youth cooperate with each other (e.g. share materials/space, help each other). **	1 2 3 4 NA	
7. When staff talk, youth listen attentively. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
8. When minor conflicts occur, youth are able to problem-solve together to resolve conflicts without adult interventions. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
9. Staff use a neutral (or positive) tone of voice. (1= Staff use a negative, punitive, or harsh tone of voice).**	1 2 3 4 NA	
10. Staff are relaxed and respectful in their interactions with youth. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
11. When youth behavior is inappropriate, staff use simple reminders to redirect behavior. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
12. When addressing behavioral issues, staff use time-out, loss of privileges and other consequences sparingly. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
13. Youth are kind and respectful to each other.	1 2 3 4 NA	
14. Youth have a low degree of conflict.	1 2 3 4 NA	
15. Staff serve as good role models by showing respect and support to each other and youth.	1 2 3 4 NA	
16. Youth appear relaxed and in control of themselves and enjoying each other's company. **	1 2 3 4 NA	
17. Youth do not spend the majority of their time together in cliques to the exclusion of others.	1 2 3 4 NA	



## Section IV. Mental Health

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Books, pamphlets and/or materials are easily accessible to youth that talk about mental health issues (i.e., depression, anxiety, etc.).	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. Posters with proactive messages about mental health issues are clearly visible to youth in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. Program utilizes strategies or approaches that build youth self-esteem (youth autonomy, youth leadership).*	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Staff encourage youth by using affirming language.	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Youth appear happy and involved in activity or engaged in conversation.	1 2 3 4 NA	
6. Youth are not discriminated against because of physical differences or appearances, racial, sexual orientation, gender identity or religious differences.*	1 2 3 4 NA	
7. When youth appear withdrawn or seem unhappy, staff take the initiative to engage youth in conversation.	1 2 3 4 NA	
8. When youth are acting out staff try and engage youth in conversation.	1 2 3 4 NA	
9. When youth are disengaged, staff help youth to join in a group or activity.	1 2 3 4 NA	

## Section V. Substance Use

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Books, pamphlets and/or materials are easily accessible to youth that talk about the negative effect of drug and alcohol use.	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. Posters about a drug/alcohol/tobacco use are clearly visible to youth in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. When materials are available, they reflect a wide variety of cultures, ethnicities, gender or social identities.	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Youth do not engage in drug culture jargon.	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Cards/materials are available with contact information or hot line numbers for program youth relating to drug/alcohol/tobacco help and treatment locations.	1 2 3 4 NA	

## Section VI. General Program Safety

Item	How True?	Notes
1. Interactions between youth are free from putdowns and power struggles, profane language, and gestures.*	1 2 3 4 NA	
2. When negative peer interactions occur (that are not resolved constructively by youth), staff intervene by speaking to youth privately.	1 2 3 4 NA	
3. Staff pay attention to changes in tone of voice and/or body language (between youth) and intervene before situation escalates.*	1 2 3 4 NA	
4. Youth/staff are not engaging in affectionate behaviors in public program spaces.	1 2 3 4 NA	
5. Mechanisms for programs to track tardiness and absenteeism are in place.	1 2 3 4 NA	
6. The doors to the program are secure and monitored.	1 2 3 4 NA	
7. Programs have check in, checkout/pick up procedures.	1 2 3 4 NA	
8. Programs have lighting in and out of the building.	1 2 3 4 NA	
9. First aid kits are filled and visible at program site.	1 2 3 4 NA	
10. Computers are in open spaces where staff can see what youth are viewing.	1 2 3 4 NA	
11. Staff/youth refrain from using language containing slurs and putdowns (i.e., that's so gay, etc).	1 2 3 4 NA	
12. Programs are free of private spaces where youth can go in secret (i.e. Closed doors w/o windows, back stairwells etc).	1 2 3 4 NA	
13. Program has gender neutral bathrooms.	1 2 3 4 NA	
14. If program does not have gender neutral bathrooms, there are doors on all stalls in both male and female bathrooms.	1 2 3 4 NA	
15. Youth participate in leaderships roles. (Help distribute materials, help lead projects, etc.).	1 2 3 4 NA	
16. There are enough staff present to meet the needs of youth.	1 2 3 4 NA	
17. Staff appear to enjoy being with program youth.	1 2 3 4 NA	
18. Youth appear comfortable with staff.	1 2 3 4 NA	

## Section VII. Policy and Program Activity Supplement

This section includes questions that are to be asked of the program director or other appropriate lead staff before or after conducting the program observation.

Policy Question	Response	
1. There are written program policies regarding:		
(a) Touching and personal space between peers/staff and staff to peer contact (hugs, handshakes, and boundaries).	Yes	No
(b) Known mental and physical challenges.	Yes	No
(c) What to do if youth appear under the influence of drugs/alcohol.	Yes	No
(d) Youth/staff and youth/youth engaging in romantic behaviors while on program grounds.	Yes	No
(e) Procedures for mandated reporting/51A.	Yes	No
(f) Sexual bullying and inappropriate sexual behaviors.	Yes	No
(g) Sharing/distributing condoms/ birth control information to program youth.	Yes	No
2. During this current program year (Sept. – June) program staff (some or all) have participated in training related to one or more of the following issues (sexual health, sexual violence, healthy relationships, mental health, or substance use).	Yes	No
3. The program provides a copy of all program policies and procedures to participating families (not just to the youth).	Yes	No
4. Staff have access to hotline numbers for referring youth.	Yes	No
5. Youth are included in developing program rules and policies.	Yes	No

\* Used or Adapted from J. Bluestein’s survey “Is your school an emotionally safe place” at Janebluestein.com

\*\* Used or Adapted from Afterschool Program Practices Tool (APT), NIOST