



I Think You Should Leave!

Managing Early Departures

Learning Outcomes

- Importance of defining and communicating the “essentials” of your program’s activities, participants, and outcomes
- Strategies and tools for avoiding unnecessary departures
- Strategies and tools for making necessary departures as obvious, efficient, painless, and beneficial as possible

Pair Share: Find a partner from a different organization and share stories

An experience where you kept a participant too long – where earlier removal would have benefited all involved





Pre-Program Essentials

What to do before people even sign up

Clear Program Goals and Expectations

- What *should* the program look like and include?
- What knowledge and skills do staff have?
- What is optional, and what is essential for program success? Activities, Physical/Social Environment, Program Goals/Outcomes



calvinball



Essential Eligibility Criteria

- Describe the functions a participant must be able to do in order to be successful

EXAMPLES:

- Can hike on uneven terrain, including off trail, for up to 7 miles and up to 2,000 feet of elevation change with a backpack up to 45 lbs.
- Can understand and follow instructions, including when staff are not present

Non-Negotiables & Decision-making

- Know what behavior/actions require immediate expulsion
- Get specific and detailed
- Know who makes the decision for removal



Communicating Expectations



- Are staff, families, and participants all getting the same message?
- Is marketing selling the product you are providing?
- Do staff know who they are expected to be able to serve?

A stylized landscape illustration featuring rolling green hills in the foreground, a white and light blue sky with wavy patterns, and a purple and pink flower-like shape on the left. The text is positioned on the right side of the image.

Program Design Strategies

*How do you set participants up for success
(and show you tried your best when you
have to send someone home)*

Invest in Group Development and Belonging

- Welcome, include, and invest participants in the experience
- Names, touch (appropriate and comfortable), eye contact, having fun (or “fun”) together, shared experiences
- Sharing of personal stories, knowledge, strengths, and skills
- Group agreements

Don't prioritize getting “things” done!



Equity and Inclusion: Self-Reflection and Audits

- **Assumptions:** Who was the program designed for? What knowledge, skills, or values does the program assume?
- **Relevance:** How does what you are doing connect to where your participants are coming from? What opportunities do they have to incorporate their own values, decisions, and life experience?
- **History:** What events, patterns, and trends have happened with participant removal or dissatisfaction in the past?

Equity and Inclusion: Supporting Participants

- **Population Knowledge**
- **Strengths-based Instruction**
- **Personal/Community Relevance**
- **Trauma Informed Practices:**
 - **Safety & Structure**
 - **Trustworthiness and Transparency**
 - **Support & Connections**
 - **Empowerment/voice/choice**



Rapport Building: Invest in Credibility & Influence

- **Key Principles:**
 - **Tone – Universal positive regard**
 - **Attention**
 - **Mutual Engagement**
- **Tools:**
 - **One-on-ones**
 - **Active care**
 - **Appropriate structure**



Predictable Challenges



- **Common Issues**
 - Homesickness
 - Motivation
 - Response to challenge
- **Psychological/Social Conditions**
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Self-harm
 - Suicide ideation
- **Bias**

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Recognition and Response

When and how to act

Level 1: Early Recognition and Response

- **Warning Signs:** Disengagement, difficulty acclimating, negative behavior, pushing boundaries
- **Leverage Rapport:** One-on-ones, continue to invest, universal positive regard (separate behavior from person)
- **Clarify Expectations:** For participants, staff, and parents (What must happen for you to stay? If XXX happens, it's time to leave)
- **Intervention Tools:** Meet needs! Information from families, group tools (e.g., daily restore, group agreements), behavior agreements/contracts, goal setting/revisiting

Level 2: “Last chance” and preparing for departure

- **Clarifying/refining expectations** – Staff, supervisors, participants, and parents should all know what is expected to stay and what will prompt removal
- **Importance of consequences** – Positive and negative, natural and/or logical
- **Laying the groundwork for exit** – No surprises, set realistic timelines and time goals, be aware of logistics

Game Over: Leaving is NOT failure

- **Framing** – Separate behavior from person, leaving early does not preclude learning, growth, and relationships
- **Communication** - Best option, not “failure”. Don’t negotiate once the decision has been made.
- **Closure:**
 - Modified graduation or completion ceremony
 - Reflection activities
 - Exit interview/questionnaire
 - Communication of learning and success to participant and/or family
 - Keep upholding expectations until departure
- **Re-Calibrating after departure** – Framing to group, revisit and utilize structures, expectations, and group agreements



Welcome to the Matrix

Create your own reality

Group up with anyone here from your own organization

Create your own response matrix

- **Participants**
- **Program design**
- **Program goals/essentials**
- **Staff knowledge, skills, and experience**
- **Program history and resources**



Time Period	Issues	Interventions	Supervisor Notes
Pre-program	Pre-existing conditions, low motivation, cultural challenges, history of behavioral issues	Research conditions, medications, etc. Intentional planning both for group as a whole and targeted for individual needs/concerns	Ensure Instructors have made reasonable predictions of needs/concerns and made a proactive plan for each one. Ensure there is rapport-building, structure, & group development plans
Early in program	Disengagement, trouble acclimating to social or physical challenges, behavioral issues	Early one-on-ones, follow through on plans, good structure, recognize early warning signs, and manage group culture.	Group visit in first 72 hours. Check-in with instructors on building rapport, establishing good structure, and providing appropriate support. Keep an eye on potential DEI issues. 1 st parent contact asking for resources/support for student.
First response	Non-participation, asking to go home, behavior requiring intervention	Behavioral contracts, meeting student needs, Supervisor support for ideas and strategies. Utilize consequences (including positive!).	Review Course Log and ensure documentation and communication is adequate. 1 st / 2 nd call to parents: share struggles and get information, letters of support, and strategies. Remind parents of expectations for participation. Ensure Instructors know terms of student staying/leaving
2 nd response	Ongoing non-participation, motivation, or behavioral issues	Direct supervisor involvement in discussions, behavioral contracts, and other intervention strategies. Clarify and refine consequences.	2 nd / 3 rd call to parents. Update on events, additional information gathering. Lay groundwork for exit – clear consequences. Ensure Instructors, family, and student know terms of student staying/leaving.
Decision to remove	Ongoing or severe issues that imperil program safety or quality	Clear expectations for remainder of time under NCOBS supervision. Deal with paperwork and belongings (don't forget to return medications).	parents and update on actions and arrange transportation. <u>Do not negotiate</u> once decision to remove has been made.
Post-removal	Potential effects of removal on group, customer service complaints, communication of incident across the organization	Deal with effects on group. Revisit tone-set & group agreements as needed. Complete documentation (Incident Report).	Complete all paperwork. Complete Incident Report, including detailed timeline and analysis. Follow up if necessary or if additional information is discovered

Time Period	Issues	Interventions	Supervisor Notes
Pre-program			
Early in program			
First response			
2 nd response			
Decision to remove			
Post-removal			

Remember...



- There are “successful” removals
- The same strategies that reduce removals, also reduce the harm and difficulty when there is a removal
- Successful removal starts before participants show up and continues after they leave

Reflection: Choose a prompt or two and journal or reflect silently

- What patterns have you noticed about who ends up leaving early from your program? Why might those patterns exist?
- What knowledge and skills do you and your co-workers have that support successful early departures? What additional skills or knowledge do you want or need?
- What is a tool, structure, or strategy that you might implement in your program to improve the removal process?

Thank You!
(now go away)

