

# **HIGH FIVE®'s Principles of Healthy Child Development and Program Design Guidelines: Review of Literature**

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## 01 // Background of Parks and Recreation Ontario's HIGH FIVE®

In 2001, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) launched its quality standard for children's recreation programs, HIGH FIVE®. This quality standard is now recognized for children's and youth's (hereafter referred to as youth) programs across the province. Prior to the development of HIGH FIVE®, no standard existed for quality standards of youth programs. However, there was a need for to help organizations enhance program quality and provide positive experiences for children. HIGH FIVE® aims to have long-lasting impact on children's lives through healthy childhood development and ensure the positive experiences in recreation programs. The standard provides organizations with a quality assurance framework that includes training, program assessments, policies, and other resources. In 2017 alone, over a million children participated in HIGH FIVE® programs in Ontario. The Ministry of Education recognize HIGH FIVE® as a mark of quality in children's recreation-based programs in the Ontario Child Care Service Management and Funding Guideline.

HIGH FIVE®, and the Principles of Healthy Child Development training, are guided by the following five principles and three guidelines of healthy child development:

**Table 1. HIGHFIVE® principles and guidelines of healthy child development**

<b>Five Principles</b>	
1. Caring Adults	The existence of a caring adult who provides supportive relationships is the one key attribute that stood out in defining quality programs for children. The establishment of caring, positive, and supportive relationships with adults can help children 6 to 12 develop positive social skills, self-esteem, and self-confidence. A program's quality is dependent upon effective interactions between staff and youth within the environment that staff creates.
2. Friends	Positive peer interaction is a key component of effective programs. Friends expand the child's world beyond one's family; share in humour; test loyalty; form their first audience; and offer support and criticism. Positive environments foster inclusion, acceptance, the opportunity for fun in constructive play, and the opportunity to develop and practice pro-social skills.
3. Play	Stressing fun, creativity, and co-operation, play lets children shape their environment using their imaginations. In addition, play is integral to the acquisition and development of motor and social skills, cognitive function, and creativity.
4. Mastery	Providing children with activities and tasks that enable them to feel special, important, and successful. This type of rich content-based learning, led by teachers and coaches who encourage mastery (both through structured and unstructured strategies) helps to promote learning.
5. Participation	Children need to make choices, have a voice, and do things by and for themselves, which supports positive self-expression, physical activity, and interaction with others.

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### Three Design Guidelines

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1. Developmentally appropriate	Research cited age-stage/developmentally appropriate programming as the second-most prevalent characteristic of quality programs for children, following the presence of a caring adult.
2. Safe	Higher-quality programs are likely to have better policies and practices related to children's physical and emotional health and safety. Quality programs also allow for adequate space for a variety of safe activities.
3. Welcoming of diversity and uniqueness	Research indicates the cultural sensitivity of staff and providing culturally appropriate activities are characteristics of quality programs.

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### PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide a review of the literature to update existing research and to explore best practices related to the HIGH FIVE® principles and design guidelines. Such a review is needed to ensure that HIGH FIVE® continues to grow and improve to meet the needs of children and youth. This report can also act as a starting point to identify opportunities to refine or modify the program to continue to support healthy child development.

### METHODS

The literature synthesized in this literature review draws on academic, peer-reviewed journals, as well as books and book chapters. Library databases (e.g., PsychINFO, PubMed, SportDiscus, Education Resource Information Centre), as well as Google Scholar were used in searching for relevant literature. Priority was given to recent studies (2013-present), though essential papers that were published within the past 20 years were included because of the continued and significant presence of this research in the literature.

## 02 // What Do We Know

To understand the prevalence of HIGHFIVE®'s principles and guidelines within the current literature, it is first important to review the main concepts associated with child and youth development and quality youth program delivery. This section will also include detailed reviews of each principle and guideline, based on current understandings within the literature.

### 2.1 // Overview of Child and Youth Development

Child and youth development requires the consideration of several dimensions. Development is characterized by processes of maturing physically, socially, and psychologically. Recreation programs may intentionally target one or more of these dimensions and seek to improve or enhance them through various physical, social, intellectual, or creative activities. Importantly, development looks different for people of various ages, genders, and abilities. As such, a broader understanding of development is important for recreation professionals.

Here, we review various stages of development and provide some key considerations for professionals working with children and youth. We present this information in the categories of early childhood, mid childhood, late childhood, and adolescence<sup>1</sup>. For each, we define the characteristics of the category to inform our discussion of the principles and program guidelines. Importantly, these categories should be considered flexible based on the biological age of individuals. While chronological age reflects the calendar age of an individual, biological age reflects their stage of physical development (Klavora, 2004). Biological age is typically measured based on various stages of physical growth, including growth rate and the onset of puberty. While biological age can roughly be attributed to chronological age, it is important to note that individuals' characteristics may vary widely and, as such, two people of the same chronological age, may have very different biological ages. Further, neither of these may be correlated with the social maturity of individuals, which further complicates the role of recreation professionals. Various environmental factors influence the way young people develop as well, and as such, social markers such as gender and socioeconomic status also influence the growth and development of children (Haywood & Getchell, 2018).

**Early Childhood.** Early childhood begins once a child is no longer considered a toddler. That is, once children have the motor skills to walk independently and express themselves using language beyond a few words. Early childhood is a time of rapid growth and development both physically and socially. Children in this phase are typically very busy – constantly moving and seeking out interaction as they develop both motor and social skills. Cognition in early childhood is characterized by egocentric, concrete thinking – or simple thoughts mostly about themselves (Kipp, 2018).

**Mid Childhood.** Mid childhood typically spans from the chronological ages of about 6-10 years of age. Biologically, this phase involves slower growth but the development and refinement

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<sup>1</sup> Given the current understanding of development for infants and toddlers, it is highly contested how (if at all) programming for these ages should be structured. It is beyond the scope of this review to speak to programming for infants and toddlers. For a review of the issues and current knowledge regarding curriculum for these age groups, see Chazan-Cohen et al. (2017).

of motor and social skills. This is also an important time in the development of self-concept and self-esteem as children in this phase typically rely on external sources of information (e.g., feedback from a caregiver) to reinforce, direct, and/or encourage learning. During mid childhood, individuals begin to develop more complex understandings of themselves as they learn to distinguish between various domains (e.g., physical, academic, social) and integrate and compare diverse sources of feedback (e.g., parents, peers, coaches) into their self-evaluations (Kipp, 2018).

**Late Childhood.** Late childhood is used to describe another period of increased growth immediately before and while children experience puberty. This prepubescent growth is typically between 9-10 years of age for girls and 11-12 years of age for boys. Puberty is a period of rapid growth and physical development which involves the development of adult features and often quick changes in body composition (e.g., secondary sex characteristics and a development or redistribution of muscle and fat). This is an extremely important time for psychosocial development as young people are experiencing physical, emotional, and psychological changes of a rapidly developing body. Further, it is during this time that young people begin to attribute successes and failures mostly to the feedback of their peers, rather than adults and caregivers. Given the varying chronological ages at which children enter late childhood, this phase can be a particularly challenging time to navigate social relationships and development.

**Adolescence.** Adolescence refers to the time following puberty until adulthood. During this time, individuals' bodies fully develop and undergo many physical, psychological, and social changes. Here, individuals develop the ability to engage in more abstract and hypothetical thinking. Individuals also develop independence and social relationships during this phase that become increasingly important in their psychosocial development. For example, youth refine motor skills, learn to regulate their emotions, and develop important social skills throughout their adolescence as they approach adulthood.

## 2.2 // Quality Youth Program Delivery

Every year, youth development programs serve millions of youth across North America (National Collaboration for Youth, 2011), reportedly engaging 86% of youth across Canada. As youth-serving organizations and programs consistently offer the most out-of-school time programs (The Bridgespan Group, 2005), it is important to deliver quality programming, including key principles and guidelines to provide youth with environments they need to thrive.

Over the past decade, the influence of quality program delivery has received much attention, particularly with regard to afterschool programs. In particular, many elements of quality programs have been identified, regardless of program area (e.g., creative arts, sports). As such, growing consensus has emerged about what constitutes quality (e.g., Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). In 2002, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine outlined eight program setting features that have been foundational in framing youth development programs over the past two decades (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). When present in youth programming, these features can foster positive developmental outcomes (see Table 2). Eccles and Gootman (2002) emphasized that no single feature ensures positive development; thus, the more features incorporated into a program the greater chance for positive developmental outcomes for youth participants.

**Table 2. Program Setting Features Proposed to Foster Youth Development**

<b>Program Setting Feature</b>	<b>Description</b>
Physical and Psychological Safety	An environment that allows youth to feel both free from being physically harmed and accepted and respected
Appropriate Structure	Clear and consistent rules and expectations, including behavioral guidelines and age-appropriate monitoring
Supportive Relationships	Presence of adults and peers who demonstrate concern and support for youth
Opportunities to Belong	Providing experiences that allow youth to develop a sense of belonging; feelings of value as an individual and part of a group
Positive Social Norms	Fostering clear, healthy, ethical standards, beliefs, and behavior guidelines that promote prosocial behavior and minimize health risks
Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Providing opportunities for youth to develop leadership, efficacy, autonomy, mattering, and responsibility
Opportunities for Skill-building	Opportunities for youth to develop physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills that will prepare them for the future
Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts	Incorporating family, school, and community to increase opportunities for synergy and positive relationships

**Source:** Adapted from *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002, Washington, DC: National Academy Press

Over the past decade, empirical research has demonstrated how incorporating these features into youth programming can provide an optimal environment for positive psychosocial development outcomes (e.g., Bean et al., 2018; Ellis, Lacanienta & Freeman, 2018). HIGH FIVE® has adopted various components of these features into their national initiative to educate programmers on the skills necessary to ensure quality programming. Specifically, the following core principles are included in their programming: (a) caring adults (supportive quality relationships); (b) opportunities to play (fun, creativity, cooperation); (c) making friends (inclusion, acceptance, prosocial skills); (d) mastery of skill (success); and (e) participation (autonomy, self-expression; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; HIGH FIVE®, 2016).

## 2.3 // HIGH FIVE®'s Five Principles

The following sections provide an overview of the principles and guidelines framed by recent research.

### The Five Principles

#### 1. Caring Adults

The importance of a caring adult who provides supportive relationships to youth within programming has been well-documented in the literature (e.g., Bocarro & Witt, 2018). Within after-school programs, providing youth with access to caring non-familial adult is critical throughout childhood and adolescence (Armour, Sandford, & Duncombe, 2013). While important across the lifespan, the involvement of caring adults in early and mid-childhood is especially important. Out-of-school time settings often serve as the environment for developing and sustaining these relationships (e.g., Eddy et al., 2017) and strong youth-adult relationships are more likely to positively influence youth's lives, enabling young people to grow to be successful and thriving adults (Bocarro & Witt, 2018; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Youth are more likely to thrive within a social environment if they feel a sense of belonging and programmers can play a predominant role in fostering these relationships (Armour et al., 2013; Deci & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, programmers should be aware that the long-term impact of forming these relationships with youth may be profound and last well beyond involvement in a particular program (Bocarro & Witt, 2018).

To emphasize the importance that caring and supportive adults play youth programming, Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010) reviewed six tools for assessing quality youth programming delivery and found that all six tools addressed the importance of relationships (defined as connections between and among youth and adults in the program). Dawes and Larson (2011) further reinforced that program staff who create a welcoming atmosphere, balance project tasks with socializing, and provide youth support and encouragement are more likely to be successful at keeping youth engaged. Thus, ensuring that programmers provide opportunities to do formal or informal check-ins with youth, enabling individualized interactions, and creating personal connections with youth have all been identified as valuable strategies to help facilitate relational time and foster these positive relationships between programmers and youth (Bean, Forneris, & Halsall, 2014; Bean et al., 2016).

Researchers also argue that a supportive environment that is physically and psychologically safe provides youth with an opportunity to develop a range of competencies, such as skill-building (e.g., Bowers, Johnson, Warren, Tirrell, & Lerner, 2015; Vance, 2018). Youth programs tend to be more effective at enhancing development when youth can build supportive relationships with adult programmers. In a foundational review, Dubois and colleagues (2002) found that having frequent contact with mentors, emotional closeness, and lasting relationships contributed to significant and positive results for youth related to various outcomes, related to emotional regulation, problem/high-risk behaviour, social competence, academic/educational attainment, and career/employment. In a more recent meta-analysis of youth mentoring programs, youth-adult relationships were a strong predictor of youth avoiding high-risk behaviors (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014). This is important, as youth programs often have goals to

not only foster positive outcomes, but also reduce the likelihood of youth engaging in, or developing more negative outcomes (e.g., drinking, drug-use, teen pregnancy; Botvin, 2004; Damon, 2004). How these caring adults structure a program is also critical for youth engagement, retention, and overall development.

Integrating family (e.g., parents, guardians, siblings) into youth development programming has also been identified as another effective avenue for fostering positive adult-youth relationships (Melton, Hodge, McAninch, & Olschewski, 2018; Love, Mornecy, Miller, & Onyeka, 2018). Similarly, relationship-based programming is a framework that has been proposed in the youth development literature (e.g., Bocarro & Witt, 2018) that involves moving beyond constructing settings in which young people can have a good time. Program staff demeanor, a positive attitude toward youth, and the quality of relationships between participants and staff are critical for creating a successful programmatic atmosphere.

## **2. Friends**

Transitioning from early-mid childhood into late childhood and adolescence is accompanied by a transition where youth increase the amount of time with and value the importance of their peer relationships (Larson, 1997; Wentzel, 2009). Smith and d'Arripe-Longueville (2014) argued that relationships with peers become progressively more important as a source of validation and intimacy in late childhood through to adolescence. Peers may be “classmates, teammates, community members, and other same-aged adolescents who are connected by a setting such as schools, communities, or after-school programs” (Donlan, Lynch, & Lerner, 2015, p. 121).

Friends are considered to be one subset of peers who are individuals whom youth foster close, reciprocal relationships with that are characterized by trust, intimacy, support, and mutual respect (Bukowski, Motzoi, & Meyer, 2009). Friends often spend time together in a context, such as a youth program or team (e.g., Veenstra, Dijkstra, Steglich, & van Zalk, 2013), and tend to be similar to each other based on various demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity and/or interests; Hart, Laursen, & Cillessen, 2015). Thus, having friends within a program helps with youth motivation, active engagement, and maintenance of participation over time (Larson, 2000; Perkins & Le Menestrel, 2007). In a longitudinal study of older adolescents, those who had low friendship quality and loneliness reported benefiting more from program involvement than those who already had strong peer relationships (Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007). Therefore it appears that programmers should encourage youth to develop positive and meaningful relationships with a variety of program participants.

Similar to the role caring adults can play in fostering skill development in youth, friends can also play critical roles. Adolescents' peers can promote positive development by socializing one another toward positive goals (such as academic achievement and cooperation), as well as fostering well-being (e.g., Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder, 2003). For example, Knifsend, Camacho-Thompson, Juvonen, and Graham (2018) found that programs, and associated activities, can be structured to promote positive peer relationships that are linked with fostering academic engagement and achievement. In another study that took place within the youth sport context, youth discussed how the social support they received from teammates was critical in facilitating various developmental outcomes, including positive social self-concept, physical self-concept, and attitudes towards healthy living (Martin et al., 2009).

Staff within youth programs can work to optimize positive peer influences and work to protect against negative peer influences (Donlan et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2018). Programmers can use a variety of strategies to foster and/or enhance friendships and minimize negative interactions that can contribute to youth's overall psychosocial development. Within the context of youth sport, Weiss and Smith (2002) identified six distinct dimensions of friendship quality that can be present within youth program contexts: (a) companionship, and pleasant play, (b) self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, (c) loyalty and intimacy, (d) common interests, (e) conflict resolution, and (f) conflict. Staff within youth programs can use these dimensions as a starting point for facilitating friendships (Smith et al., 2018). For example, setting aside program time for unstructured play and interactions can enable youth fun opportunities to cultivate friendships (Smart et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2018). Moreover, as conflict is a natural feature of any relationship, the authors suggested that ensuring there are constructive attempts to resolve conflict that may arise. These strategies can be used in any youth program context. The main takeaway message for programmers is to work with youth to capitalize on existing positive relationships to maintain and further promote positive developmental outcomes and to use such relationships as to enhance the development of youth (Donlan et al., 2015).

### 3. Play

Researchers and practitioners have identified the importance of creating a fun and enjoyable experience for youth during programming (e.g., Barreiro & Howard, 2017). Youth participate in programming because they consider it fun and enjoyable (e.g., Barreiro & Howard, 2017; Wilson, Sibthorp, & Brusseau, 2017). Youth engagement is maintained when programming is considered fun, balancing between challenge and skill and appropriately matched to youth's abilities (Barreiro & Howard, 2017; Weiss, 2011). When youth are successful at optimally challenging tasks and receive positive feedback from programmers, youth have higher perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and self-determined motivation (e.g., Weiss, 2011). Conversely, program dropout is common when youth lack enjoyment and/or are bored while at programming and, thus, are not engaging in play (Witt & Dangi, 2018). The concept of *play* can be understood as unstructured (e.g., unsupervised youth-led activities), structured (e.g., organized activities during summer camp), and semi-structured (e.g., a session of free time during summer camp; Barreiro & Howard, 2017). Programmers can promote development of physical literacy, motor skill proficiency, muscle strength, and social skills through encouraging youth to engage in all three types of play.

Within youth sport literature, Visek and colleagues (2018) determined a successful program to include two key components: (a) youth participants' enjoyment and (b) addressing fundamental movement principles through physical activity programming. When programs address both key concepts, youth's physical competence and confidence are strengthened, and a balance is provided to ensure youth are challenged enough to sustain enjoyment and fun. Moreover, researchers have identified three dynamic elements that are essential for promoting an enjoyable environment, including: (a) providing opportunities for personal engagement in well-organized activities; (b) creating quality relationships between programmers, youth, and parents, as well as; (c) fostering an appropriate setting and climate that facilitates fun (Visek et al., 2018). Youth have also identified trying hard (e.g., setting and achieving goals, being strong and confident), positive team dynamics (e.g., supporting/being supported by my teammates), and positive coaching (e.g., a nice, friendly coach) as the most important factors for facilitating a fun environment (Visek et al., 2018). As

“fun” may be interpreted differently by youth, programmers should provide quality opportunities for youth to experience fun across multiple factors.

Encouraging creativity is considered another important aspect of creating an enjoyable environment for youth (e.g., Larson & Angus, 2011; Montgomery, 2018; Pfeiffer & Muglia Weschsler, 2013). Youth programs that support creativity and provide youth with opportunities to develop and express their creativity help to develop leadership skills, nurture psychological growth, and foster civic engagement (Montgomery, 2018). Engaging in creative thought also requires opportunities for co-operation and self-discovery, so youth can help shape the optimal environment required for their own development (Larson & Angus, 2011). Researchers have identified that youth’s learning and development can be enhanced when they have stake in the program’s environment and intentionally engage in active co-creation with programmers and peers (Walker, 2006). This co-creation enables opportunities for youth to co-operate with others, be creative, use their imagination, and create a fun environment for themselves and their peers.

#### **4. Mastery**

The concept of mastery has been well-researched within youth programming literature and is often described as a motivational climate that programmers intentionally create, which focuses on youth’s success through effort, improvement, and cooperative learning (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Weiss, 2011). Motivational climates provide youth with opportunities to experience developmentally appropriate tasks, which are associated with many positive outcomes, such as an enhanced intrinsic motivation, improved physical and motor skills, and positive self-perceptions (e.g., Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2006). However, personal interest and intrinsic motivation to complete these tasks are required to promote empowerment and freedom (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), as well as achieving a balance between the tasks being too challenging or too boring for youth (Larson & Walker, 2006). With support from programmers, youth can then adapt to challenges and complete tasks within and beyond the program context to support their perceptions of success and importance (Larson & Walker, 2006). Moreover, when youth believe that they have the ability to overcome challenging tasks, they become more motivated to tackle greater challenges in the future (Jacobs, Vernon, & Eccles, 2005).

Learning and positive developmental outcomes are also encouraged when youth have the right mindset (e.g., Vealey, Chase, & Cooley, 2016). Programmers are encouraged to help youth develop and maintain a positive perspective or a growth mindset. A growth mindset can be described as perceiving the possibility of continuous improvement and refinement through effort (Dweck, 2006). Programmers can help develop a growth mindset by intentionally praising controllable achievements of youth (e.g., effort, persistence) rather than performance outcomes (e.g., scoring, winning), as well as educating youth that mistakes are part of the learning process and important for development. Similarly, programmers can also help foster youth’s passion, which will provide “high levels of attention, enthusiasm, effort, persistence, and pride in success” (Sullivan, Saito, & Chamberlain, 2018, p. 434). Developing passion can motivate youth to continue learning, help with their growth and development, and aid in academic achievement (Sullivan et al., 2018).

Programmers are encouraged to support youth’s development of efficacy and mattering within youth programming (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). As previously noted, support for youth’s efficacy

and mattering is one of the eight setting features outlined to foster youth development and is referred to offering programming that empowers youth and supports autonomy, while taking youth seriously and acknowledging their presence as valuable contributors toward the quality of a program. Similar to creating a mastery motivational climate, Eccles and Gootman (2002) encourage programmers to support this setting feature by providing opportunities for youth to develop responsibility, experience meaningful challenges, and focus on improvement. Empirical research has acknowledged that support for efficacy and mattering can also occur through the provision of leadership roles, and informal and formal public recognitions of appropriate behaviours (e.g., Povilaitis & Tamminen, 2018).

Finally, mastery can be promoted through the development of youth's competence and confidence (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2015; Vealey et al., 2016). Importantly, youth's understanding of their level of competence changes as they age, in that younger children (ages 3-7) often inflate their perceived competence while older youth (8-18) become more realistic and mature in their ability to assess perceived and actual competence (Horn, 2004). Youth also understand confidence differently as they age, which suggests that programmers should intentionally focus on fostering a mastery motivational climate so that youth develop realistic and intrinsic understandings of confidence (Horn, 2004; Kipp, 2016). Within the youth sport literature, coaches have been identified as supporting youth's confidence through role modelling, words of encouragement and feedback, offering rewards for positive behaviours, developing trusting relationships, and providing opportunities for leadership (e.g., Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011).

## 5. Participation

Researchers and practitioners have often acknowledged the importance of providing youth with opportunities for choice, voice, and in the facilitation of their autonomy and independence (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; McGuire et al., 2016; Mitchell, Gray, & Inchley, 2015). Within the positive youth development framework, it is very clear that youth become active agents within their own growth, thus driving their own development (e.g., Larson, 2006). For example, exploring youth's motivations for program participation, McGuire and colleagues (2016) found that youth most frequently participated in programming when it was important to them, when they learned new things, and when they enjoyed it. Within the youth development literature, these concepts are often grouped together to refer to an autonomy-supportive climate or environment (e.g., Braithwaite, Spray, & Warburton, 2011; Zarrett et al., 2018). An autonomy-supportive environment can be defined as a climate that "provides a sense of inclusion and belonging for youth through program traditions that cultivate inclusion and youth ownership" (Smith, Peck, Denault, Blazevski, & Akvia, 2010, p. 359). These environments are intentionally created *with* youth to foster a shared construction of program processes and purposes, alongside the opportunities for choice, voice, planning, and reflection (Smith et al., 2010). Youth may experience positive developmental outcomes and benefits when their voice is respected beyond autonomy, such as an enhanced sense of efficacy and agency, enhanced problem-solving and communication skills, and academic achievement (Sullivan et al., 2018).

Similar to the promotion of youth engagement, in supporting youth's choice and voice, programmers can inherently support youth's three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Researchers have identified that when after-school youth programs include contextual features to support youth's basic needs, there are significant

differences regarding positive developmental outcomes (e.g., Dawes & Larson, 2011; Zarrett et al., 2018). Support for fostering youth's basic needs are also recognized in the leisure literature. For example, Caldwell and Witt (2018a) outlined that in order for leisure contexts to provide opportunities for positive developmental outcomes, the program context should support youth's autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Specifically, programs should engage with youth's voice, support autonomous and intrinsically motivated actions, authenticate decision-making and youth's independence, include skill building opportunities, be challenging, establish strong youth-adult relationships, and provide opportunities for the development of social capital (Caldwell & Witt, 2018b).

There are various choices that youth can be offered within a program to experience positive developmental outcomes. Youth who attend quality programs of their own volition are seen to attend programming frequently and are identified as being in a position to enjoy and benefit from their participation (Akiva & Horner, 2016). Riciputi and colleagues (2018) identified that ownership and enjoyment within a youth program was promoted through providing choice on group members, activities, and by encouraging youth to self-govern rules during games. Choice has also been studied within the context of youth mentoring. Programs that have facilitated intentional opportunities for youth to choose their own mentors have enhanced youth's empowerment, autonomy, and strengthened the bond and trust within youth-mentor relationships (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016; Spencer et al., 2016). Mitchell et al. (2016) identified that girls who were able to choose a girls only physical education class, that included their friends, increased their comfort, competence, confidence, and facilitated the experience of an autonomy-supportive environment. Importantly, Mitchell et al. (2016) recognized that the choices provided to the youth must be perceived as *meaningful* to increase their experiences of volition, a concept that applies across program types and contexts.

Within regard to youth voice and choice, Caldwell and Witt's (2018b) recommend that the programmers work in collaboration with the youth participants to promote empowerment and choice, considering that genuine involvement in decision-making and honouring youth's opinions may be just as rewarding as participating in the program. Youth voice has also been encouraged through the inclusion of intentional opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills (e.g., Bean et al., 2014; Bean et al., 2015; Caldwell & Witt, 2018b). Programs that incorporate a youth-centered approach that prioritizes youth's voice and autonomy include opportunities for youth to provide input on the program's processes, structure, and content; therefore, encouraging youth to become a voice for the quality of the program (Arnold, Cater, & Braverman, 2016).

Youth engagement is also important for fostering positive developmental outcomes. Engagement is defined as situations where youth are "actively involved in cognitive and social endeavors that promote growth" (Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005, p. 24). Youth can benefit from engagement through the development of problem-solving skills, developing a sense of purpose and agency, experiencing cultural connection, and establishing commitment to a community beyond oneself (Sullivan et al., 2018). To support youth's empowerment and engagement, researchers have acknowledged the benefit of designing programs with the SAFE protocols, including (a) Sequential activities, (b) Active and participatory learning, (c) Focused programming on personal and social skills, and (d) Explicit goals and desired outcomes to support intentionality (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Program settings that include the SAFE protocols have been recognized as supportive of youth's choice, voice, mastery, and competence (e.g., Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

## 2.4 // HIGHFIVE®'s Three Design Guidelines

### 1. Developmentally Appropriate Programming

Developmentally appropriate programming occurs when the characteristics (e.g., age, maturity, interests) of participants match the features of the program in which they are participating (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Thus, the program climate must meet the developmental needs and interests of all youth. Programmers should consider the physical, psychological, and social characteristics of youth participants in determining how programs can provide appropriate contexts for various types of development. Eccles and Gootman (2002) expressed the importance of developmental appropriateness in particular with regard to program structure and opportunities for skill building.

As outlined above, the various stages of development should be reflected in programming for various biological ages. Physically, motor development should be developed through a range of physical activities which provide opportunities to develop gross and fine motor skills (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013; Haywood & Getchell, 2018). Psychologically, activities should reflect participants' stages of psychosocial development and engage, to varying degrees, appropriate support and interaction with caregivers, peers, and community members in order to facilitate the development of self-concept and self-esteem (Erikson, 1993; Kipp, 2018). Socially, participants should be given appropriate opportunities to engage with others, develop social skills, and a sense of identity and belonging in an environment where they feel safe (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Below, an overview of the literature surrounding each of the phases of childhood development is overviewed to illustrate what developmentally appropriate programming may reflect for these phases.

**Early Childhood.** As young children are rapidly developing physical, social, and psychological skills, it is debated how much (if at all) programming for this age category should be structured. With this age group, it may be more important to consider *how* a program is delivered as opposed to *what* is achieved or covered in the program (Chazan-Cohen, et al., 2017). Children in this phase are likely developing motor, language, and other social skills. As such, programming should focus on engaging participants in play and social activities (with parents, peers, and programmers) through which participants can develop gross and fine motor skills (e.g., jumping, throwing, grasping), as well as the skills for basic social interactions (e.g., communicating, sharing, playing) in safe and welcoming environments (Kipp, 2018). Programs may provide an important context for learning how to understand and follow basic rules and routines (Rink, 2009) through various activities/structures (e.g., unstructured play, partner work, songs, games, or other group activities) which will be valuable as children enter their school years.

**Mid Childhood.** Throughout mid childhood, youth participants should be provided with the opportunity to develop and refine their motor skills (often referred to as fundamental movement skills; Balyi et al., 2013) as well as relevant psychological traits such as confidence, self-esteem, and self-concept (Erikson, 1993). During this time, program participants should receive ample direction and feedback from programmers/supervisors as they typically rely strongly on input from adults in learning. Given their developing language and comprehension skills, young learners often mimic skills which are demonstrated for them – particularly if the skill is more complex and physical (Rink, 2009). For children in this phase, language and instruction should be provided in small, accessible, and instructive increments in order for them to understand and experience

improvement and successes. As children in this stage are learning to distinguish between various domains of learning, providing varied, encouraging, and instructional feedback during activities is valuable as it will allow for all children to experience some success and improved feelings of competence (Kipp, 2018).

**Late Childhood.** Given the important physical and social changes experienced during late childhood, and the variety of chronological ages at which this phase can begin, this age group can be particularly challenging to navigate for programmers. These children will have more developed physical skills and given the importance of peer relationships, may be interested in competitive rather than playful activities. For physical activities, learning may require correction of established movement patterns and can be communicated using more specific and sophisticated language (Rink, 2009). Programmers should be cautious of the way activities are presented and how feedback is communicated in order to ensure that young people do not feel targeted or vulnerable in front of others. Individual and/or private conversations may be useful and more effective than group feedback. Programmers should attempt to foster contexts where young people feel motivated and empowered to positively contribute to their experiences and those of their peers.

**Adolescence.** The shift into adolescence represents an important change for programmers. Psychosocial maturation of adolescents leads to the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically. During this time, youths may begin to excel at creative pursuits and as a result of these changes, young people will likely begin to consider possibilities and plan for their future (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Further, this is an important time for the development of empathy and the ability to make decisions based on more complex ideas such as morals and values (Kipp, 2018). In this phase, social and emotional relationships become increasingly important in young people's development – particularly as romance and sexuality become important aspects of social life. As such, programmers should be aware of group dynamics and intentionally manage environments to remain safe and encouraging of participation. Adolescents are more independent and can work and act individually and in groups, however skill development may require thorough and/or specific explanations and feedback in order to overcome previously learned habits or practices (Rink, 2009). As the forming of close friendships is an important part of adolescence, programmers should intentionally engage activities which encourage adolescents to meet new peers and bond with others in their environment (Kipp, 2018).

## 2. Safe

Safety has been a foundational element of quality youth programs for many years (Gambone & Arbretton, 1997; Quinn, 1999) and encompasses both physical and emotional elements. Safety involves having environments that are free from violence, fear, physical health risks, as well as verbal, sexual and physical harassment because of the direct impacts on one's physical health and well-being (Culp, 2015; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Thus, program contexts should allow youth to feel safe and be held within health-promoting facilities that involves safe peer interactions and have safe equipment so they can explore themselves in relation to a wide range of activities and people (Culp, 2015; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Safety has been well-recognized in recent literature (e.g., Arnold & Cater, 2011; Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016; Smith, Akiva, McGovern, & Peck, 2014; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Many program frameworks (e.g., Connell & Gambone, 2002; Eccles

& Gootman, 2002; Hellison, 2011) also emphasize the importance of youth safety. Similar to what was outlined in the *Caring Adults* section, within the six tools that assess quality youth programming by Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010), all of the tools reviewed encompassed an element of the program environment, including various aspects of the program climate and setting relating to physical and emotional safety. Such a review, reinforced the importance of this design principle as a foundation element.

It is important to recognize that an often-cited reason for offering a youth program is to keep youth safe (e.g., Forneris, Whitely, & Barker, 2013) or to offer a safe space for youth to be within their community (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997). This may be due to various external factors present within one's home or community (e.g., social, political, economic). Thus, in providing a safe environment for youth, it is important to acknowledge where they are coming from when arriving to a program. In recent years, trauma-informed approaches have been integrated into many staff training and youth program curricula (e.g., Walkley & Cox, 2013) as a way to provide programmers with valuable tools for interacting with youth who have experienced physically or emotionally harmful events (e.g., violence, abuse). Such events may have resulted in adverse effects on youth's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2012). A trauma-informed approach is a strengths-based approach that can be beneficial for all youth interactions, regardless of their experience with trauma (Berger, 2019). A core principle of trauma-informed frameworks include promoting safety, whereby "throughout the organization, the staff and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety" (SAMHSA, 2012, p. 5). Many youth organizations have adopted a trauma-informed approach due to the prevalence of youth who experience trauma (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014) and can offer an environment where youth can feel safe and begin the healing process.

Physical and emotional safety are prerequisites to all other principles and design guidelines of positive development and can direct or indirectly influence youth's allocation of effort to intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Having a safe environment is the foundation upon which other critical program elements can then take place (The Forum of Youth Investment, 2012; Bean, Kramers, Forneris, & Camiré, 2018). For example, an assessment tool of quality within youth programs outlines that a program is deemed safe if: (a) psychological and emotional safety is promoted, (b) the physical environment is safe and free of health hazards, (c) appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present, (d) program space and furniture accommodate the activities, and (e) healthy food and drinks are provided (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2012).

Fostering a safe environment is a precursor that enables youth to develop relationships with adults and peers, feel comfortable to play, work toward mastery, and use their voice. For instance, if youth feel physically and psychologically safe in their afterschool program, they will be more willing to try new things, take risks, and ultimately foster skills. Findings from a validation study using the aforementioned tool (Youth Program Quality Assessment), youth's self-reported feelings of safety were related to their feelings of engagement and quality of interactions with others (Smith & Hohmann, 2005). What should be noted is the important and reciprocal role that positive relationships can play in establishing an emotionally safe environment. Thus, providing youth with

a physically and emotionally safe environment can extend beyond being a safe haven for youth, as they can work toward maximizing positive developmental outcomes that (Paluta et al., 2015).

### 3. Welcoming of Diversity and Uniqueness

Respect for diversity and attempts to foster social inclusion of marginalized groups have recently emerged as imperatives in many sectors including sport and recreation. A program that is structured so that all youth feel safe, comfortable, supported, connected, and respected, can influence the likelihood of participants remaining the program (Ellis et al., 2018). In some cases, programs that are targeted for specific groups of youth (e.g., girls' only, for LGBTQ youth), based on similar interests (e.g., chess club, dance program), and/or have programmers who are relatable to you youth (e.g., role models of similar backgrounds) can be valuable (e.g., Bean & Forneris, 2016; Theriault, 2018). For example, within programs for female youth, the importance of a supportive girl's only environment, with female leaders, has been recognized as a main ingredient in helping female youth enhance their self-esteem. Moreover, these contexts can enable psychological safety and help foster confidence in skills and development (e.g., Bean et al., 2014; Markowitz, 2012).

More broadly, understanding diversity and inclusion in the context of recreation programming involves a critical perspective and acknowledgement of both terms in order to fully understand how safe and welcoming environments can be facilitated (Spaaij & Scholenkorf, 2014). In this section, we review the current literature which has addressed issues related to diversity – in particular a need to understand multiple and intersectional identities, as well as inclusion – and a need to critically assess the extent to which programs address social factors which exclude participants from participating in the first place.

**Diversity, intersectional identities, and social justice.** Diversity can be discussed with regards to many factors such as race/ethnicity, cultural background, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, socio-economic status, etc. Peoples of many different identities and backgrounds come together in and through recreation programming. As such, understanding and respecting diverse identities/backgrounds and the implications these identities have on recreation and leisure programming is imperative for recreation programmers. Rather than tackle each of these factors individually, this review will focus on ideas of social justice (Allison, 2000; Long, Fletcher, & Watson, 2017) and the ways that social practices influence access, fairness, and diverse experiences in recreation programming.

Scholars studying social justice in the context of recreation analyze the way that groups of people are either explicitly or implicitly constrained or marginalized with regards to access to and experiences in programming. Although many forms of old-fashioned or overt injustices have been addressed within recreation organizations, many implicit or institutionalized structures continue to influence access to programming as well as experiences in those programs. For example, Trussell, Kovac, and Apgar (2018) discussed the subtle ways that same-sex couples experienced stigma around the assumption that young people in programs have heterosexual parents. These experiences were identified around the language used on registration forms listing mother and father as opposed to parents) as well as in gendered activities (e.g., a father-son game or mother's day activity). Further, identities should be considered as intersectional, meaning that we all hold multiple identities and express them differently in various contexts (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore it is important for programmers think about the different ways that people can be included and

excluded despite our best attempts to foster safe and/or inclusive spaces. For example, despite participating in a “girls only” sports program, a young women may feel excluded if her socioeconomic position does not afford her the ability to purchase new, or brand name equipment.

Much of the literature examining the more practical implications of diversity within sport and recreation has discussed the importance of the organizational culture of organizations. For example, in a large scale study on the handling of various forms of diversity within Australian sport clubs, Spaaij and colleagues (2018) found that clubs with a focus on performance-oriented results (i.e., those with a more competitive orientation) were less likely to be committed to providing participation opportunities to diverse people. Although programmers in these clubs valued the ideas behind supporting participants of diverse backgrounds, they felt overwhelmed and under-resourced in terms of implementing changes to their policies and practices. Rich and Giles (2014) discussed the ways taken-for-granted cultural assumptions within leadership development programs may be problematic in the way they communicate norms and values through programming. They drew from a cultural safety approach whereby instructors learned about diversity by reflecting on their own beliefs and assumptions and their implications on the way they approach and interact with diverse participants within programming (e.g., see Blanchet Garneau, Farrar, Fan, & Kulig, 2018; Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2011). Further, Rich and Giles (2015) noted the difficulties faced by instructors who navigated multiple organizational cultures and expectations of multiple training organizations (e.g., their programming organization as well as their place of employment).

Effectively, the literature indicates that engaging diverse participants within program development and leadership training processes is a promising practice for improving the accessibility and experiences of diverse populations within recreation programs (Golob, Giles, & Rich, 2013). Further, in order for recreation to be an effective mechanism through which to support social inclusion, it must also intentionally be engaged to address the systematic issues which prevent diverse people from accessing programs and services (Suzuki, 2017). That is, in order for diverse participants to equitably access programming, be included, and feel safe and comfortable in recreation contexts, and realize development outcomes, recreation programmers must go beyond simply providing participation opportunities and advocate for the social, cultural, and political conditions under which diverse people can be supported.

As alluded to above, a more complex and contextualized understanding of inclusion/exclusion is particularly relevant in the current socio-political context. In Canada, several important happenings will likely have implications for recreation organizations and their engagement of diverse people. Firstly, increased number of migrants are required to maintain our population growth and development. Despite this reliance, public opinion and the political treatment of diverse people in Canada is contentious. As communities likely become more diverse and multi-cultural, recreation programmers will need to be prepared to re-examine policies and practices to engage the public and continue their important work in and for communities (Stodolska, 2018). Secondly, as Canada moves through processes of Truth and Reconciliation and a re-thinking of relationships between Indigenous and settler people, there are increasing calls to consider the way sport and recreation can be decolonized (e.g., see Arellano & Downey, 2018; McGuire-Adams, 2018; Rovito & Giles, 2016) and/or play a role in the shaping of these relationships (Denis, 2015). Both of these processes may require recreation as a field to engage more explicitly with a conversation around social justice and how fundamental ideas (e.g., gender, ethnicity, migration, socio-economic status, sexuality, ability) are treated in programs and organizations.

## **03 // CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this document was to provide a review of literature to update existing research and explore best practices related to the HIGH FIVE® principles and design guidelines. Based on the findings presented within this report, programmers have an invaluable role to provide a quality program that promotes positive developmental outcomes and positive experiences for youth. Delivering quality programming that meets the standards established by HIGHFIVE® requires adopting an intentional approach to program design and delivery. As participation rates for youth programming continues to grow within Ontario, a review of the literature will help future HIGH FIVE® training to support trainees, programmers, and staff to grow and improve to meet the needs of children and youth.

## 04 // REFERENCES

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