Inclusion Checklist

INCLUSION CHECKLIST :: Things to consider

Thanks for your dedication to holding inclusive and nurturing spaces for young people!

A few things to note:

Firstly, this is not an exhaustive list of things to consider when running nurturing and inclusive programs and events for young people.

It's also NOT a substitute for learning, unpacking and doing the work to truly understand why these points are so important.

We created it to support our Certified Youth Mentors in integrating the learnings in our training but it is shared alongside guest expert sessions with inclusion specialists and lived experience advocates. Without that context and doing the work to listen to different perspectives, implementing the below will provide surface-level improvements at best. So we highly recommend investing in some training and continuing to read, listen to and learn about the ever-expanding world of holding space in a nurturing and inclusive way.

If you're already doing that work then we hope you'll find this checklist a handy tool in making sure you're doing all that you can to make the young people in your community feel welcomed, nurtured and that they truly belong.

Enjoy!

Amanda Rootsey
Founder, Shine From Within

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1. **Accessibility:**
    - **Ensure that the venue is physically accessible** for individuals with different abilities (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, seats that are big and strong enough, etc).
    - **Provide accommodations for participants with different abilities** or needs (e.g., sign language interpreters, large print materials, assistive technology). For example, if you're running a session over Zoom, it's easy to include automatic live captions for people that might struggle to hear or take some time to process, and you can ensure your website and PDFs are screen reader friendly for folks who are vision-impaired in some way (they usually are automatically!).
    - **Ensure you have a spot on your booking form for Accessibility and Learning Requirements** asking the adult booking them in if there's anything they'd like us to be aware of so we, as the mentors, can make any accommodations necessary.

2. **Neurodiversity and Cognitive Accessibility:**
    - **Provide a range of learning materials** and activities that cater to different learning styles and cognitive abilities (e.g., visual aids, hands-on activities, auditory resources).
    - **Allow for breaks, quiet spaces, and sensory-friendly environments** to accommodate participants with sensory processing differences or attention challenges.
    - **Offer clear instructions and structure,** while also allowing for flexibility and alternative ways of engagement.
    - **Be mindful of potential triggers** or sources of overstimulation, and provide appropriate accommodations or alternatives.
    - **Educate volunteers, other mentors and coaches on neurodiversity** and strategies for creating a neurodivergent-friendly environment.
    - **Collaborate with experts,** advocates, or organisations that specialise in neurodiversity and cognitive accessibility, especially if you find you're working with lots of neuro-divergent students.

3. **Trauma Awareness:**
    - **Offering choices and control whenever possible** (e.g. some might prefer the door open, to be able to opt out of conversations, to not make eye contact, to communicate non-verbally (some young people prefer to write or draw) or to have a calm space to retreat to if things feel overwhelming.
    - **Involving participants in decision-making processes** and encouraging shared power and responsibility.

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- **Being transparent about the program's processes,** policies, and expectations, and fostering an environment of trust and open communication.
- **Foster a culture of empathy,** understanding, and acceptance towards individuals who have experienced trauma.
- **Develop clear protocols and procedures** for responding to disclosures of trauma or distress in a compassionate and supportive manner.
- **Invest in additional training** on understanding trauma, its impacts, and trauma-informed practices.

4. **Language and Communication:**
    - **Use inclusive language** that avoids stereotypes, biases, and insensitive terms. For example, here's a section from our Code of Conduct: We must not use racist, sexist, ableist, gendered or appropriated language. For example, saying "ladies and gentleman," "Hey guys," "It's time to step up," "our self-love tribe," etc. All of these statements can omit or exclude some students and/or can be offensive. In our effort to do no harm, it's important to be very conscious of the language we choose and be quick to apologise and learn more if a young person lets us know we've said something harmful.
    - **Don't make assumptions on a student's gender and invite participants to share their pronouns** on booking forms and in sessions (and then remember to use them!).
    - **Encourage open communication** and create a space for participants to express their identities and perspectives *if they choose to.*
    - **Be mindful of different cultural norms and communication styles** and always approach communication with clients in a curious and open way. We're not expected to know everyone's cultural norms, but usually when we ask questions with genuine curiosity, people are very happy to share (though of course they are under no obligation to educate us and we can also make sure to go and learn more for ourselves).

5. **Representation and Diversity:**
    - **Incorporate diverse perspectives,** experiences, and examples into the workshop content and activities.
    - **Strive to have a diverse team** of mentors, volunteers, coaches, and facilitators representing different backgrounds, abilities, and identities where possible. AND ensure they have done some training or you've taken them through your own policies to reduce the risk of them causing harm when with your young clients.
    - **Celebrate and acknowledge different cultural traditions** and observances.

6. **Respect and Empowerment:**
    - **Establish clear guidelines** and expectations for respectful behaviour and interactions alongside the students.

- **Encourage participants to voice their concerns** or feedback regarding inclusivity.
- **Foster an environment that empowers** and uplifts all participants, regardless of their backgrounds or identities.

7. **Continuous Learning and Improvement:**
    - **Seek feedback from participants,** parents, and community members on how welcome and included they felt and if they have suggestions on how to improve inclusivity.
    - **Stay updated on best practices,** policies, and research related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, you might like to read books from different perspectives, attend conferences, listen to podcasts, etc that can all help to expand your knowledge and practice of holding inclusive spaces for young people.

8. **Community Partnerships and Resources:**
    - Collaborate with local organisations, advocacy groups, and community leaders that support marginalised or underrepresented groups.
    - Utilise resources and materials that promote inclusivity and diversity.
    - Invite guest speakers or experts from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives.

9. **Evaluation and Accountability:**
    - Develop a process for addressing concerns or incidents related to discrimination, harassment, or exclusion and a process for reviewing what you could do better after each event or session.
    - Regularly review and update your policies and practices.

Note: doing any of this without first doing your own work to unpack your biases, acknowledge your privilege, etc is not recommended. It must start with US as the space holders and leaders. If you are welcoming in folks who hold marginalised identities, have needs that might differ to our own lived experience and haven't done that work to ensure you can support them properly then it will cause more harm than good.

These things take time to implement and there will always be more to learn and do. So please be gentle with yourself too as you bring these points into your awareness and into your mentoring business.

There are countless resources online to start this journey, including specialised trainings, books and podcasts, and we of course provide many resources and lived experience trainings as part of our Youth Mentor Training certification.