



Ramapo  
for Children

# The Ramapo Toolbox

*Creating Environments  
that Support Success*

RESPONDING,  
REFLECTING,  
REPAIRING

ADAPTING FOR  
INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS,  
STRUCTURES & ROUTINES

RELATIONSHIPS &  
ROLE MODELING



## Role Modeling

OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING AND ROLE MODELING ARE POWERFUL TEACHING TOOLS.

### 1 Demonstrate community values and expectations.

Be consistent in modeling the expectations of your community. Follow the rules you set.

### 2 Be the thermostat not the thermometer.

Set the tone, don't reflect it. For example, if you want young people to be positive and engaged, smile and demonstrate that you are excited to be with them.

### 3 Match your voice and body language to your message.

Modulate your voice: soft tones are calming; firm tones are directive; loud tones may be experienced as angry. Be mindful of your posture and gestures.

### 4 Model social and emotional skills.

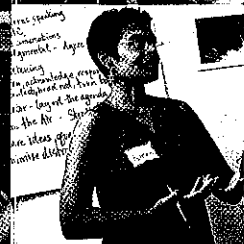
Demonstrate how to manage emotions such as anger, excitement, frustration and disappointment. Admit when you make mistakes; don't hesitate to apologize. Be the person you want young people to be.

### 5 Model professional skills.

Be on time, organized and prepared.

### 6 Model collaboration and communication with other members of the community.

Share ideas, suggestions and important information. Ask for help. Resolve interpersonal conflicts.



## Building Relationships

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL TO MOTIVATING BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AND THE SKILL OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE LEARNED.

### 1 Welcome young people into your classroom or program.

Greet young people by name. Try to make eye contact. Notice if a young person looks unhappy or withdrawn and find a time to check in.

### 2 Express interest in young people.

Ask questions, listen and let young people share their interests, experiences and aspirations. Find topics to talk to them about such as sports, music, food, pets, etc.

### 3 Identify and celebrate individual strengths.

Find, acknowledge and reinforce something each young person does well.

### 4 Have fun.

Be joyful. Laugh. Find opportunities to be playful and use games. Avoid teasing young people or using sarcasm.

### 5 Reinforce positive behavior.

Be specific. See it, name it and praise it. Highlight and label behaviors that reinforce community values and effective habits.

### 6 Have more positive than negative interactions.

Create connections with young people. Set aside time to check-in with the young people with whom you may be struggling to connect.

### 7 Share some of yourself.

Let young people learn about your own relevant interests, experiences and feelings.





## Clarifying Expectations

EXPECTATIONS CLARIFY BEHAVIORS THAT SUPPORT COMMUNITY GOALS AND VALUES.

- 1 Identify and promote community expectations.**  
Articulate and post standards for behavior to which all members of the community are expected to adhere. Remind young people (and adults) of expectations routinely.
- 2 Break down expectations into specific core behaviors.**  
Identify, label and model behaviors that are aligned with community expectations. Be specific about what desired behaviors look like and sound like. Teach and practice behaviors step by step. Give feedback on what to stop, start, or continue.
- 3 Take time to explain the purpose and benefits of community expectations.**  
Develop and use consistent language to reinforce and generate buy-in for community expectations.
- 4 Create agreements that ensure youth voice and input.**  
Include young people in the process of developing community expectations. Promote group goal-setting and problem solving. Have regular, short, structured community meetings.
- 5 Check for understanding.**  
Ensure that young people know what is expected and why, by observing their behavior, asking follow-up questions, and using non-verbal signals. Be sure to allow time to process.
- 6 Set individual and collective goals.**  
Encourage the development of core behaviors by setting specific, observable and achievable goals with individuals and groups. Track progress. Celebrate achievements.
- 7 Identify alternative behaviors.**  
Teach young people what they *can* do, not just what they *can't* do. Provide options for managing difficult feelings. Teach calming techniques.



## Establishing Structures and Routines

YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE IN ORGANIZED ENVIRONMENTS WHERE ROUTINES TEACH, REINFORCE AND CELEBRATE DESIRED BEHAVIORS.

- 1 Establish routines and procedures.**  
Make daily schedules and stick to them. Be consistent and predictable. Forecast changes. Plan carefully how to transition from one activity to the next. Use visuals to communicate steps and provide reminders.
- 2 Develop rituals that reinforce positive behaviors through shared experiences.**  
Create rituals—special events, cheers, activities—that are unique to your community and create a sense of belonging.
- 3 Plan opportunities to celebrate success.**  
Celebrate individual and group accomplishments at community meetings and special events. Give shout-outs, awards and appreciations.
- 4 Organize space, time, people and materials.**  
Create pathways that allow you to move around the space. Remove objects that are tempting or distracting. Position young people and adults in ways that facilitate success and minimize distractions.
- 5 Vary activities and pace to maintain engagement.**  
Create activities and lessons that address various learning and processing styles. Break activities down into segments. Provide choices and movement breaks.
- 6 Use visuals and non-verbal cues to communicate instructions and information.**  
If it's important—create a visual. Post schedules, reminders, sequences and step-by-step instructions. Use non-verbal cues when quieting youth or getting their attention.
- 7 Anticipate problems**  
Learn which parts of the day are challenging. Identify and anticipate triggers for problematic behavior; manage the triggers, not the behavior. Reduce downtime, over-plan and keep activities on hand for unexpected changes.
- 8 Use goals and incentives to motivate behavioral change and promote independence.**  
Identify specific behaviors of focus. Use visuals to track progress over achievable time increments. Celebrate success with rewards young people find meaningful.



## Adapting To Individual Needs

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE TO MEET COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS REQUIRE ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND TARGETED PLANNING.

### 1 Decode negative behavior into feelings and offer alternatives.

Read a young person's actions and body language. Explore and identify unmet needs and difficult feelings. Validate feelings even as you offer alternative behaviors for expressing emotions.

### 2 Engage young people in constructive problem solving.

Have a private one-to-one conversation with a child who is struggling to meet community expectations. Listen actively. Share specific and direct feedback focused on observable behavior. Avoid making assumptions or giving feedback on attitude, motives or personality

### 3 Develop tools for self-management.

Create visual reminders, schedules, contracts, images and checklists to help young people communicate their feelings, organize their responsibilities and practice independence.

### 4 Use pre-established visual cues and verbal reminders.

Create signals (nonverbal cues or code words) with young people to redirect their behavior in a non-embarrassing way.

### 5 Use "Antiseptic Bouncing."

Provide young people with opportunities to take a break from a task, a group or an environment. Ask an over-stimulated or stressed young person to deliver a message, complete a job, get a drink of water or run an errand.

### 6 Create a "Retreat" or "Cool Down Spot."

Identify a space or corner of the room with quiet and calming materials such as stress balls, art supplies, soothing music or a journal in which to write.

### 7 Use interests and abilities to motivate participation and engagement.

Find out what a young person is interested in and enjoys doing. Put it on the schedule. Use interests to motivate young people to complete less-preferred tasks.

### 8 Consider flexible scheduling, time shifting or partial participation.

If a young person is struggling to make it through the day safely or successfully, adapt his or her schedule. Identify times when you anticipate problems and provide breaks or alternatives.

### 9 Create an individual behavior plan.

Set aside time to meet with all staff who work with a specific young person. Use a protocol to clarify a specific behavior of focus, consider possible triggers and identify two or three specific strategies to address this young person's behavior. Revisit the plan periodically to assess effectiveness.



## Responding, Reflecting, Repairing

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES COMMIT TO RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES, REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES AND REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS.

### 1 Pick your battles.

Avoid confronting negative behavior that can be tolerated. When considering confronting a negative behavior, ask yourself: "is this behavior unsafe?" Utilize strategies other than direct confrontation for behaviors that do not pose a threat to safety.

### 2 If a behavior is unsafe, be firm in your words and actions.

Always address "Big No" behaviors—those that are emotionally or physically unsafe. Tell young people: "it is my job to keep you safe."

### 3 Confront privately.

Position yourself deliberately to calm a young person and redirect his or her behavior. When a child is escalated, avoid an audience. Use quiet tones or step aside with the young person.

### 4 Allow space and time to cool down.

When young people are escalated, allow time for them to drain off their negative emotions. Give space, time and quiet to cool down.

### 5 Drop the rope.

A power struggle is like a game of tug-of-war. Your best move is often to simply drop the rope. Remove yourself from an escalating power struggle. Later, when the young person (and you) are calm, follow through and address the issue involved.

### 6 Recognize your own triggers and angry feelings.

Moments of anger, frustration and other difficult feelings are opportunities to model and teach. Take space, deep breaths or a minute to think when you are feeling agitated. Enlist the help of other adults.

### 7 Use consequences carefully.

Whenever possible, caution young people about potential consequences. Consequences should be clear, consistent and connected to the behavior. Avoid giving consequences when you are angry.

### 8 Have a plan for processing conflict and allowing for restitution.

Develop structured responses to crisis and conflict that provide opportunities for young people (and adults) to reflect, repair and plan for the future.

### 9 Debrief critical incidents with adults and young people.

Set aside time to debrief and reflect. Provide information,

Through direct service programs and training for adults, **Ramapo for Children** works on behalf of young people, whose challenging behaviors put them at risk of being relegated to the margins of their schools and communities. We help all of the adults in these children's lives, including educators and caregivers, see challenging behaviors through the lens of unmet needs and lagging skills, and we provide a set of tools for creating environments in which all children can experience success.



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