

Developing and Piloting an Adventure-Oriented Confidence- Building Curriculum for Youth

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Abstract

Youth are bombarded with a myriad of life stressors that impacts their self-esteem and ability to be resilient. Young people from diverse backgrounds across the state of Utah participated in a three-day camp structured around a newly developed confidence-building curriculum. Practical application and high-adventure activities reinforced the concepts taught in the curriculum.

Introduction

Today's youth are consistently exposed to various forms of media that influence them towards the use of substances, having sex at earlier ages, and having poorer body image (de Vries, et al., 2019; Villani, 2001). Additionally, they are likely to experience different forms of adversity in their lives, including social isolation from the COVID-19 and a generalized trend of spending more time inside than ever before (Cherlin, 2005; Larsen et al., 2018). These overall conditions and experiences may negatively impact the foundation on which young people build confidence, self-esteem, and resilience. Confidence is an evidence-based component of resilience and youth who have increased confidence may be better equipped to withstand adversity (Merenda, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for youth programs focused on building the confidence of youth.

Response and Target Audience

Our team at Utah State University (USU) Extension created a six-session curriculum called *Building*

Confidence that seeks to increase confidence in youth. The lessons contain instruction and hands-on learning activities that focus on at least one of the following six areas of confidence (Kay & Shipman, 2014); self-confidence, self-efficacy, connection, contribution, leadership, and teamwork. The Building Confidence curriculum was designed to be taught in six (6) one-hour sessions, and is intended to be used by any adult that works with youth.

The Bear Lake Adventure Camp piloted the Building Confidence curriculum during a three-day overnight camp during the summer of 2021. Each of the six lessons was presented as intended by a member of the USU Extension team. In addition to participating in the Building Confidence lessons, youth participants also attended adventure-based activities where they learned to overcome challenges. For example, one activity was a ropes course at Bridgerland Adventure Park, while a second was paddle boarding and kayaking on Bear Lake.

Participants in this program were males and females ages 12-18 from rural and urban areas of Utah. Twenty-two (22) youth from 11 of Utah's counties participated in the Confidence Building program. They were recruited from existing 4-H programs.

Outcomes and Impact

Following each of the six lessons, all camp participants took part in a 10 to 20-minute focus group facilitated by the team. The focus group sought to assess participants' satisfaction with the lesson content. They were asked the following questions: (1) What did you like most about the workshop, (2) What did you like least about the workshop, (3) What could be improved about the workshop to make it more helpful and fun?

The team took written notes during the focus group and later coded the responses. Participants' responses indicated the need to limit instruction time in favor of hands-on activities, incorporate music, as well as skits, and provide snacks and competition whenever possible. Participants also described they wanted to ensure an adult is accessible for clarification when in small groups and finally, provide ample time for reflection and writing in their journals. Based on the feedback received, the curriculum team made the suggested changes and edits to the individual workshops.

Youth participants in the camp also completed an anonymous post-camp survey which assessed their satisfaction with the camp, perceived skills, and knowledge gain. Overall, results from the survey indicated that 80%

of youth enjoyed the camp, and 90% would recommend the camp to their peers. Participants also reported skill acquisition in at least one of the curriculum's focus areas (e.g., self-confidence, self-efficacy). Specifically, 80% of the participants "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" that attending the camp (including workshops and high adventure activities) helped them develop one of the six core confidence characteristics. In addition, 75% of the participants "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" that the lessons helped them develop at least one of the six core confidence characteristics. Even though the program was only piloted, results showed 75% of participants were confident in their abilities to engage in peer mentoring after taking part in the camp. Finally, evaluation findings indicated that female youth participants reported higher increases in skills and knowledge gained compared to male participants.

Public Value/Next Steps

Qualitative data from participant focus groups were used to guide lesson and activity revisions, as well as to inform best practices for future confidence-building training programs. Data gathered from the six focus groups informed the following best practices:

1. Limit instruction/lecture time throughout the workshop and incorporate more on the hands-on learning activities.
2. For clarity of instruction, ensure that an adult is present when participants are divided into smaller groups.
3. Incorporate music, skits, competitions, and snacks throughout the workshop where possible.
4. Provide ample time for youth to individually reflect and write in their journals.

The revised *Building Confidence* curriculum has since been disseminated to several entities, including the Utah Women in Leadership Project, Utah 4-H Discover Clubs, and Be Epic youth e-cigarette prevention program. There are plans to adapt it to a younger audience and pilot in an after-school setting.

[Download PDF here.](#)

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