

Foreword

SMART Moves broke ground in the 1980s as a part of a wave of research-based prevention programs developed specifically for implementation in youth organizations using a positive youth development approach. The full name of the program, Skills Mastery and Resistance Training, reflects the program's underlying premise that the best way to reduce risks is to build youth's competencies and sense of agency. This premise has been validated repeatedly over the decades and is now the accepted cornerstone of the learning and development sciences. Regardless of the terminology or acronym used – whole child, positive youth development, social and emotional development – there is broad agreement on three points.

1. Young people's social, emotional and cognitive skills are developed over time, well into adolescence, and can be accelerated through intentionally crafted opportunities to name and use the skills and reflect on their value.
2. Young people's capacity and motivation to use the content information (academic or otherwise) requires the use of these skills. Hence the call to integrate social, emotional and academic development.
3. These skills, once "owned," enhance young people's ability to not only acquire and use knowledge but also to make decisions across multiple fronts.

The revised and restructured SMART Moves program suite reflects these points. SMART Moves: Emotional Wellness is a targeted program that focuses on helping young people build positive coping strategies by strengthening their capacity to self-regulate, control impulses and manage stress. SMART Moves: Core focuses on building general social-emotional skills associated with effective communication, critical analysis, decision-making and refusal (a particularly critical skill in health promotion). SMART Moves Modules can then be used to dive deeply into specific health behaviors and health risks, bringing in more specific information, examining public and personal attitudes associated with the risks, and building specific skills if needed.

The scaffolding of the skill-building components, from basic self-regulation and stress management to decision-making and critical analysis, and the prioritization of general skill building over specific content delivery reflects major research advances. Imagine if schools took this approach!

This scaffolding also aligns well with research-based approaches to program improvement. Gone are the days when program quality is measured only by attendance and achievement. We know that optimal skill growth only occurs in high-quality programs.

High-quality youth programs include careful attention to practices that support positive youth development. Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) has committed to building internal systems to support ongoing continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts looking specifically at these practices. We are especially proud that BGCA partnered with the Forum for Youth Investment, and specifically the Forum's Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to build this capacity. Since it was designed with quality youth experiences in mind, many Club staff will recognize practices from the Weikart Center's Youth Work Methods training and the Youth Program Quality Assessment.

In sum, SMART Moves has important balance that many social-emotional learning-informed curriculum fail to achieve: building from a foundation of quality positive youth development work, it merges explicit social-emotional competency development with learning content (in this case, knowledge and skills to promote health and wellness in youth and address specific health risks). This careful attention to process and content, and the progressive sequencing of the activities and learning goals, sets the stage for staff to deliver a rich social-emotional learning experience for young people that prepares them for the multiple decisions, challenges and opportunities they will face.

For all of these reasons, SMART Moves is a tremendous resource for staff and practitioners who are intentionally pursuing quality practices in their youth program. Congratulations to the team at BGCA for it putting together. We expect that Club staff will appreciate the work that went into it, and young people will benefit from its implementation.

Onward,

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