

Youth Friendly Criteria Descriptions

For the purpose of this recognition program, 'youth friendly' means that youth (ages 13 to 19) are actively supported and provided with opportunities for their growth and development through 'play.' The youth friendly list of criteria was developed by Play Works, in consultation with youth groups and youth serving agencies from across Ontario. The descriptions include examples that show how each of the criteria might be met.

1. **Youth have options for play.** The community offers a consistent and varied mix of play opportunities for youth over the age of twelve. Play includes recreation, sport, arts, drama, dance, civic engagement, youth activism, volunteerism, social clubs and youth leadership. It is structured and unstructured, facility and non-facility based, competitive and recreational, active and passive and it is adult-led and peer-led. It is offered by public service, not-for-profit agencies, and private enterprise or through informal groups.
2. **Youth are formally connected to the community.** The community has ways in which youth can have their voices heard. These can be neighbourhood or municipality-wide, such as youth advisory committees or councils. Formal opportunities for youth involvement could include having designated seats for youth representatives at decision-making tables such as business improvement associations, recreation committees, staff hiring committees and/or selection committees for recognition awards.
3. **Facilities are dedicated to youth play.** The community has dedicated public space for youth play programs and/or events. Youth feel a sense of ownership and belonging for these facilities. Dedicated space is not limited to one location, but includes a variety of settings, such as park areas, meeting rooms, sports and arts facilities and social areas. Municipalities, not-for-profit groups, schools, churches, private businesses or service clubs may provide space. Space is made available at the times and locations suitable to youth participation.
4. **It is easy for youth to find information about play activities in the community.** The community has a variety of youth-friendly information vehicles, such as websites, newsletters, bulletins, brochures, newspaper advertisements and articles, and community bulletin boards. Municipal services, community agencies, clubs, private businesses, schools and other service providers cooperate to provide easy ways for diverse groups of youth to access this information.
5. **The community supports public youth events.** The community ensures youth events, such as celebrations, dances and tournaments, are regularly planned. Community groups and departments, such as health, police, recreation, culture, service clubs, and accessibility groups, work together to organize and support events. Through outreach and networking, the community involves isolated and disenfranchised youth to ensure they are connected.
6. **The community celebrates and recognizes youth.** The community offers youth awards and/or scholarship programs to recognize youth participation and contributions. This recognition can be for youth only (e.g. during a "youth week") or can be part of a broader community recognition program.
7. **The community commits funding for youth play.** The community has established a fund that is accessible to organizations and/or directly to youth to help offset the cost of youth involvement in local activities. This funding opportunity is well known to groups who work with youth in the community and it is promoted through these groups and through the school system. Systems are in place to help youth to also regularly access these funds. Some youth play programs are free or have minimal costs. The community commits funding for current and long-term capital for diverse facility development and improvement, such as indoor/outdoor parks, skate parks, creative arts spaces, dance studios and/or drop in centres.

8. **The community supports positive youth development.** Staff and volunteers of youth service providers are offered opportunities, and are actively encouraged to participate in orientation and training sessions on positive youth development. Staff and volunteers are recognized for their work as positive role models and mentors of youth.
9. **The community supports youth volunteerism and leadership development.** The community recognizes the connection between youth volunteerism and leadership development. Older children are sought out to fill junior leadership roles in sports clubs, youth groups, day camps and/or faith groups. There are systems to help youth get connected to volunteer opportunities, and youth are familiar with these systems and can access them. Appropriate training about volunteerism and leadership is provided for youth. The community has programs to recognize the efforts of youth leaders and volunteers.
10. **The community has models of effective community partnerships.** Local government departments work cooperatively with each other and with community groups to provide the best menu of opportunities for youth play. Specific attention is given to the needs of hard-to-reach, isolated, vulnerable and disenfranchised youth. Community partners include not-for-profit agencies, cultural groups, housing cooperatives, youth associations, sports clubs, arts groups, justice, social services, the faith community, private business, health, and education.
11. **Youth activism and advocacy for play is nurtured.** The community ensures that youth actively participate in program and service planning, promotion, implementation and evaluation. Youth efforts to actively speak out and advocate for their needs are supported by the community and the local media.
12. **Youth feel comfortable in their community.** The community encourages businesses, recreation centres, malls, theatres and other locations to understand the needs of youth and works to recognize and engage youth as contributing citizens within the community. Spaces are promoted as 'youth friendly,' and youth are provided opportunities to interact with others in a positive and mutually respectful way. Staff who work in facilities where youth play receive an orientation about the needs and interests of youth, and how to build positive adult/youth partnerships.
13. **Youth can get to the play programs that are offered.** The community has explored innovative ways to physically connect youth with play opportunities. Examples include: responsive transit systems with routes to dedicated youth play spaces, and that operate on days and times to maximize participation by youth; lighted bike paths and/or bike lanes on major roads; and mobile outreach into isolated areas. Activities have been specifically located or relocated to be closer to youth and to increase access for youth.
14. **School support the youth friendly approach.** Schools are recognized for their contribution to the community's youth friendly approach. In addition to circulating information to students on play activities, the school works with local service providers to offer opportunities for the larger community to become involved with school-based play activities and actively participates in, and has a presence at, community-based youth play events. Schools work to adjust bussing to assist in getting students to play areas and work to increase access to school facilities through the Community Use of Schools Agreement with the Ministry of Health Promotion and through reciprocal agreements with local governments.
15. **Adults champion the cause for youth play.** The community has adult leaders who recognize the need for positive youth play. They publicly support youth by ensuring elected officials, police, local celebrities and media are involved in local youth events. For their part, youth regularly share their experiences of positive play with adults and at adult-led events, such as service club

meetings, school board sessions, annual general meetings and professional association meetings.

16. **Play is accessible to youth with disabilities.** Every youth in the community has the opportunity to participate in programs, if they want to. Programs are set up to specifically include youth with both physical and mental disabilities. Activities are adapted, facilities are accessible, additional assistance is onsite, and the participation of youth with disabilities/special needs is a seamless part of the program. Participating youth are part of program planning and evaluation phases.