

# LEADERSHIP DEFINED

## Essential Knowledge & Skills (TEKS)

The student understands the basic concepts of leadership. The student is expected to:

- Define leadership
- List and describe basic leadership skills
- Explain hazards and problems of leadership.

Ask a roomful of 20 to 30 students how many consider themselves leaders and probably very few would raise their hands. If you change the question and ask the same group “How many of you are able to work well with others and get things done together?” probably most would raise their hands.

What does it mean to be a leader? What do leaders do? Most people have a stereotyped image of a leader as a strong and powerful individual, someone who makes decisions, commands others, and speaks with charisma, but in an effective group, any member can be the leader when he or she influences the others to help the group reach

its goals. It is unlikely that a single person can provide the necessary leadership in all situations and for all issues a group will face. It is essential to recognize the many different leadership styles that exist within a group and to cultivate the idea that all members contribute to the leadership of the group.

Our definition of leadership encompasses two main ideas: that the most successful groups have more than one “leader” (participatory and shared leadership), and that most people can learn to exercise leadership.

## KEY CONCEPTS

- There are many definitions of leadership, but in general, leadership involves helping a group to define a common purpose and to work together effectively to achieve it.
- Participatory leadership means empowering group members and treating them as active stakeholders, not passive followers.
- Groups thrive if they have many members who are willing to exercise leadership and take responsibility for the success of the group. But those leaders must be authentic—that is, they must be as interested in achieving the good of the group and community as in meeting their own needs.
- Qualities of character such as personal integrity and responsibility are qualities that can be encouraged and even learned.
- Skills are learned through study and practice. Leadership is learned the same way and also through mak-

ing mistakes and through experience.

- Leadership may be regarded as a series of functions that:
  - Build and maintain the group
  - Get the job done
  - Help the group feel comfortable and at ease
  - Help set and clearly define objectives
  - Cooperatively work toward these objectives.
- Shared leadership requires abilities not usually associated with the stereotypical version of leadership: the capacity for nurturing others and bringing out their best talents; the ability to mediate conflict; empathy and compassion for others; the ability to encourage different opinions and tolerate dissent.
- For shared leadership to work, there must be a balance of power, a shared purpose or goal, shared responsibility for the work of the group, respect for the skills and ideas that each person brings to the group, and a sharing of the workload.
- There is always a need for more leaders in our society. Democratic societies can not have too many leaders. If you look closely at the most successful groups, you will find that many, if not most, of their members exercise leadership in one way or another.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Leadership Is...

*Purpose:* To develop a working definition of leadership.

Ask each student to write a definition of leadership that begins with the words, “Leadership is....” After 1–2 minutes, ask students to team up with two others, share their definitions and agree on one definition for the work group. Next, ask each group to join with another one, share their definitions and agree on one definition.

Have the expanded work groups share their definitions with the total group. Write a master list of definitions for everyone to see.

Conclude with a discussion in which you ask students:

## Resources

### The Leadership Hub

The world’s online leadership community.

[www.theleadershiphub.com/](http://www.theleadershiphub.com/)

### The Little Book of Leadership

[www.theleadershiphub.com/files/ebooks/The-LittleBookofLeadership.pdf](http://www.theleadershiphub.com/files/ebooks/The-LittleBookofLeadership.pdf)

### Leadership 501

A collection of excellent articles and links of all aspects of leadership.

[www.leadership501.com/](http://www.leadership501.com/)

### Concepts of Leadership

[www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadcon.html](http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadcon.html)

### Leadership Definitions and Quotes

[www.koreview.com/Leadership%20defined.html](http://www.koreview.com/Leadership%20defined.html)

### The Practice of Leadership

[www.thepracticeofleadership.net](http://www.thepracticeofleadership.net)

### Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

Sponsors the Youth Engaged in Leadership & Learning (YELL) program.

<http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu>

### Youth on Board

Prepares youth to be leaders and decision makers in their communities.

[www.youthonboard.org](http://www.youthonboard.org)

### Youthleadership

A youth leadership development information clearinghouse.

[www.youthleadership.com](http://www.youthleadership.com)