

PTSA Adviser Guide

Thank you for your dedication to PTSA. The PTSA Adviser Guide is meant to provide you with the essential elements to support your work. We also provide guides for PTSA student officers to encourage success in their roles. These guides are meant to encourage their success for next year. Each student group is to be led by a student committee consisting of the chair, vice chair, and secretary, with some optional positions of publicity chair and webmaster. These officers are selected through an application process, and then voted in by their fellow students, when possible.

As an adviser, you take on the responsibility to mentor PTSA students as they develop and practice skills, find and pursue interests, and become engaged in the world around them in meaningful ways.

To best mentor PTSA students:

- Let them lead. Students best learn leadership by taking the lead — even if it means they don't do it the way you would or could possibly fail. We can learn a lot from our mistakes. You can help students the most by helping them analyze what worked and what didn't.
- Practice and assess. Students learn to lead through practice and assessment. Review the officer guides, provide time for outgoing officers to work with new officers and let the latter practice taking on new responsibilities. Your role is to provide support, answer questions and cheer them on.
- Be a role model. Empower your student group officers to be the best leaders they can be by modeling the behavior and skill sets you want to see.
- Listen, then advise. Hear members and ask for their point of view before offering your opinion. Even better, guide them to find their own answer to a problem instead of solving it for them.
- Establish expectations and ground rules. Answer any questions members have about your role, explain how you plan to work with them and set a schedule on when and how you will connect. Be the mentor.

You also serve students by coaching them to be their best.

To best coach students:

- Build self-esteem. Great coaches inspire students to believe they are capable of more than they think they are. Always build students up. There is never a reason to embarrass a student to teach them a lesson.
- Teach them to keep things in perspective. Help students learn from setbacks instead of getting hung up on them. Mistakes are nothing more than feedback on what you can do better or differently the next time.
- Don't let your ego get in their way. PTSA's goal is to help students to advocate for themselves. Let students own their successes and failures.
- Treat everyone equally, but individually. Every student is motivated differently. Get to know students so you understand the best way to motivate and help each one.

- Be a great communicator. Communication works both ways. Take time to really listen. Ask questions when things are unclear. Be clear and concise when you speak. Address problems early so they don't fester.
- Be flexible. We don't all receive information or learn in the same way. If something is not working, don't assume it's the students' fault. Work with them to figure out a better way to communicate or accomplish what needs to be done.
- Challenge students to excel. Push them to set bigger, more difficult goals. No one becomes a great leader by reaching for mediocrity.

STUDENT COMMITTEE

As an adviser, you support your group's leadership through the election process. Begin this process in March so officers are elected and prepared to take office by May.

To set PTSA student officers up for success:

MARCH

- Spread the word about upcoming elections. Encourage student members to consider applying for a position.

APRIL/MAY

- Elect officers. The current Student Committee should oversee this process.
- Once elections are completed, connect current student officers with each newly elected officer and set goals. The Student Adviser should also meet with each officer individually and review their officer guide. Make sure they set personal goals for their time in office. Encourage current officers to mentor new ones. Create opportunities for new officers to shadow those currently in office.

MAY

- Install new officers. Thank retiring officers for their hard work and install newly elected officers.
- Establish group committees. Spread the workload and keep all students active. Suggested committees are outlined in the adviser guide.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

- If you were unable to install new student officers at the end of the previous school year, you will need to go through that process now. Contact incoming students and their parents at back-to-school events such as Back to School Nights, new student orientations, club rush week, etc. Then, schedule an opening social and/or meeting to elect your student officers and orient new members about upcoming trainings, meetings and events.

Possible Student Committees:

Here are a few possible student committees you could create. The Student Vice Chair will help oversee the student committee system.

Family Life Committee - Helps plan activities and projects to strengthen families. Works specifically on Healthy Relationships Month.

Public Relations Committee - Works to make PTSA a household name through group newsletters, school and local media, and marketing campaigns for service projects and events. The Publicity Chair will chair this committee.

Programs Committee - Brings interesting speakers, films and entertainment to PTSA meetings and events. Works specifically on specific programs like Reflections, Ribbon Weeks, Safe Driving Week & Battle of the Bands.

Projects Committee - Initiates and implements all service projects.

Social Committee - Plans and promotes fellowship activities (dances, parties, etc.), coordinates birthday celebrations and works with student group officers to recognize members for their hard work.

Membership Development Committee - Helps invite members into the group, encourage high attendance at all PTSA events and works with the Public Relations Committee to create materials for recruitment.

STUDENT PROTECTION

- Except for a parent working with their own child, no adult should work one-on-one with any student.
- Remember the rule of three - try to include a third person in all texts, emails and communication with PTSA students.
- When transporting youth, best practice is to have at least three people in the car at all times.
- Prescription and nonprescription medications are only permitted at a PTSA event with the written permission of the parent/guardian.
- Adults are expected to refrain from using alcoholic beverages, tobacco (including e-cigarettes), marijuana and other substances at events and during any volunteer service. Use of these products is prohibited by students, even if prescribed for medical use.
- All documents bearing personal information of any youth should be treated as confidential.
- Treat interactions on social media as if you are speaking in a public setting. Prior to posting photographs, obtain permission from any and all individuals pictured (and their parent/guardians if they are minors).
- Keep all electronic communications with students on your official PTSA-related email or group text app.

PTSA FOCUS

The focus of a PTSA student group should be learning leadership skills and providing service to the school and community. We do that by engaging the students, helping them develop leadership and personal skills, and teaching them how to advocate for themselves.

By their nature, some student groups are simply social clubs, while others are narrowly defined around a particular function. In contrast, Utah PTA and your PTSA have the slogan of, “Every child. One voice.” A PTSA should find ways to include all students in their meetings and activities. This could be through working with other clubs on service projects, inviting other clubs to join your group for an activity, going to support less popular school events, or giving recognition to lower profile groups at school.

To help our student officers be more successful, we will encourage them to use a “shared leadership” approach.

Two Approaches to Leadership: “Shared Leadership” vs. Traditional Leadership

In a roomful of 30 to 40 students, how many would consider themselves leaders? If we were to ask them directly, only a handful would answer affirmatively. However, what would happen if we were to ask this same group a slightly different question: “How many of you are able to work well with others and get things done together?” Probably most would raise their hands. What’s going on here? Like most other Americans, students today have a stereotyped image of what constitutes a leader. According to this traditional approach, a leader is a strong and powerful individual — someone who makes decisions, commands many others, and speaks with charisma. A leader is the rare human being who embodies special qualities only rarely found in one person; in fact, from this very definition, most human beings are seen as followers and not leaders.

However, at the grassroots level of community groups — and increasingly in corporations — the quality of leadership that is most treasured is what we can call “shared leadership.” Shared leadership is the ability of a person to work well with others — as part of a team. Shared leadership requires strengths and abilities not normally associated with the patriarchal version of leadership: the capacity for nurturing others and bringing out their best talents, the ability to mediate conflict, the quality to both express empathy and compassion for others and educate others about the importance of these feelings, and the talent for encouraging different viewpoints while upholding one’s core values and principles. Shared leadership is based on a commitment to dignity, equality, democracy, and transformation in human beings.

The most effective way to help students learn these skills occur in everyday settings — i.e., in the course of a community group planning an event or a student group holding a meeting.

Some of the characteristics of a student group using shared leadership are:

- A) The group is comfortable with having many styles of leadership; no one style is defined as the most important style.
- B) The group provides a nurturing atmosphere, enabling all members to grow in their leadership skills and to learn new skills.

C) The group functions collectively—with a large number of leaders, each able to contribute specific skills, such as:

- 1) Serving as spokesperson (through speaking and writing)
- 2) Representing the group with other groups
- 3) Serving as a visible leader during meetings and activities
- 4) Developing long-term strategies for the group
- 5) Fostering intra-group harmony and the concept of teamwork
- 6) Recruiting new members
- 7) Managing tasks and overseeing group responsibilities
- 8) Fostering a “culture”—or atmosphere within the group—that promotes learning, membership development, and fun

Leadership Training Workshop

The following is a quick exercise you can do with your students to help them to think about their own leadership qualities, and to consider what they can do to further develop the skills they already have, and ways to gain additional abilities.

Leadership Exercise for Student Members

- 1) Self-evaluation
 - a) Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?
 - b) What is (are) your main strength(s) as a leader? What is your “leadership style”?
- 2) Self-development
 - a) Identify one new facet of leadership that you would like to develop this semester
- 3) Group activities (for discussion)
 - a) Based on tasks for the coming period, how can we assign people to effectively utilize their existing leadership skills and styles, and to help them to develop new leadership skills and styles?

Personality Test for Student Members

Another fun exercise would be to have your students take a free online personality test. This will help students to understand some of the differences they may have from others in their leadership styles and preferences.

One such test can be found at:

<https://my-personality-test.com>

And remember:

- Leadership training is an important part of an organization’s development. Groups that want to grow and succeed will always invest time in leadership training for their members.
- Students need to develop their leadership skills as a youth; it will be much harder to learn about different leadership styles as they get older.
- Leadership training — and organizational activities overall — should always be fun and educational.

*This Adviser Guide has been created using the Key Club Adviser Guide as a template. Refer to keyclub.org for more information.