

Tips for Building Relationships with Youth

Tip #1 Find things the young person likes and find ways to support these passions and activities

Examples: Attend sporting events, dance recitals, shooting sports practice, theater productions, music concerts and other activities young people in your club or group are involved with. Ask them to practice their speech demonstration or other presentation on you.

Tip #2 Notice things he/she does well and encourage the young person to pursue hobbies, interests, or trainings that emphasize and build these skills. Often young people are not consciously aware of their strengths. But when an adult they respect notices and comments, the effects can be profound.

Examples: *“I’ve noticed that you light up when you talk about drawing and painting and I’ve seen some of your talented work. A local artist is offering a class. I’d be happy to help you sign up and even go with you if you’re interested.”* or *“You’ve shared your leadership skills and talents at the club level. I want to encourage you to develop and share them further. There is a regional youth leadership conference this fall and the state conference next spring. I really hope you consider one or both of these experiences. I see in the newsletter that applications are due in a few weeks. I’d be happy to help and would gladly serve as a reference.”*

Tip #3 Share some of your own life challenges and lapses in confidence.

Example: *“I remember when I was your age, I was so nervous when I had to get up in front at a 4-H or scout meeting or in a class at school and talk. I’d get almost sick to my stomach at times. It still doesn’t always come easy to me. But each time I do it, I gain confidence and you will too.”*

Tip #4 Increase youth social capital by connecting them to people and institutions that he/she might not otherwise access.

Example: *“You have creative ideas around increasing bicycle safety in our community. I think the members of the city council might be interested in learning more about the problem and some possible solutions. What do you think about the two of us and anyone else you’d like to have join us, meet with councilwomen Berg from your ward and talk more about this important issue?”*

Tip #5 Create opportunities for the young person to feel his/her voice is being heard. All youth want to feel they matter. Use active listening skills such as eye contact, paraphrasing what you heard, asking for clarification, and using open-ended questioning techniques.

Example: *"You are pretty passionate about this. Tell me more about what you're thinking."*

Tip #6 Provide opportunities for the young person to make his/her own decisions and then support rather than second guess the decisions made.

Example: *"I can see you're wrestling with the decision of whether or not to miss football practice to attend the youth leadership retreat. I see the dilemma. Sometimes I find it helpful to list the pros and cons of each option. I'd be happy to help you do that, but this is your decision and I support whatever you choose."*

Tip #7 Model caring in your interactions with young people and your community. Caring is contagious; caring adults help develop caring youth.

Tip #8 Encourage youth to participate in causes that align with their interests.

Example: *"I hear the therapy horse program is in need of volunteers who are experienced with horses and like working with kids. I've watched you work with horses and younger members in our club and feel you would be phenomenal. What do you think?"*

Tip #9 Help youth find and tap into resources they need so their contribution efforts have a good chance of succeeding.

Examples: *"I heard you say that access to safe bike helmets is an issue for many youth. Any ideas on how/where to get helmets free or at a reduced rate? I'd be happy to help you develop a list and make a plan for contacting businesses."* or *"If transportation is a concern, I'd be happy to help develop a plan for you to get to and from the Horse Therapy site."*

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Sources:

Every Kid Needs Adults Who Care: What the Research Says (June 2013), Bolster Collaborative, Gorham, ME. The Important Role Non-Parental Adults Have with Youth Learning Leadership (October 2010), Journal of Extension.