

Tips for Positive Youth and Adult Partnerships

Youth and adults working together presents exciting opportunities for powerful results. How these partnerships are initiated is crucial to their success. Working with young people may not come as naturally to adults working with their peers does - patience, flexibility, and genuine interest some of the most important tools adults need in these situations. Here are a few tips to think about:

Tips for adults

1. Meaningful Involvement

Assign meaningful roles to teens, not just a token seat on a board. This is meant to be a learning experience for them as well as an asset to your group. Giving youth the reins to drive some of their ideas forward and use their end to solve some of your situations.

2. Orientation and Training

Keep in mind that this is probably the first experience of its kind for your youth. Give them a little “101 course” about your group to help acquaint them with structure and inner workings of the group. Lay out clear-cut expectations for both the youth and adults involved, so everyone is responsible for acting appropriately.

3. Flexible Scheduling

Youth need responsibilities that will also take into consideration their school calendar and other activities. Their academics should always come first. Meeting times should be regularly scheduled, but also need to be flexible and allow time off for finals and families.

4. Set Goals and Evaluate

Help youth to grow by assisting them in setting goals and performing evaluations of specific events or an entire year of work.

5. Show that you care

Follow up immediately if someone does not show up for a meeting or event. Youth need to know that they are missed and that someone cares. Provide validation that what they're doing is meaningful and important to your group - they don't receive this type of feedback from their peers as much as adults.

6. Transportation

Transportation is perhaps the major deterrent to youth involvement. If there is any way that you can help with transportation, please do so.

7. Ownership

Build youth ownership in your group by allowing them to help with planning and decision-making in all areas of interest, not just in “youth issues.” Challenge them to new levels of commitment and leadership. A by-product of successful youth involvement is the development of leadership skills.

8. Food and Fun!!

If possible, try to have food or beverages at your gatherings. Above all, make your time together FUN! Who wouldn't want that?

9. Appreciate skills of the youth

Always lift up the unique individual, never the category to which the young person belongs (e.g. Maria, the great soccer player,” not, “Maria, the ‘at risk youth.’”).

10. Reward and celebrate

Celebrate every effort, every contribution made by young people. Young people can take the lead here.