

Tips for Adults: Working with Youth Leaders

1. Be open to young people's insights and suggestions. Strive to be nonjudgmental. Let younger allies know that their involvement is important.
2. Take advantage of the expertise that youth offer. Young people know about the needs of their community, and should be encouraged to share this perspective. Affirm this input.
3. Make sure youth will participate in meaningful ways. Young people should be involved in making decisions from the beginning of the project. Actively ask young peoples' opinions.
4. Be honest about expectations for the project, what you want youth to contribute, and how you hope to benefit from their participation. Don't expect more from a young person than you would from an adult. Keep expectations realistic; hold young people to your expectations. Do not patronize youth by lowering your expectations.
5. Integrate young people into group and coalition efforts. Schedule meetings when youth can attend and in a location accessible to youth. Like everyone else, keep young people informed about plans and meeting times.
6. Treat young people as individuals. Don't assume one young person represents the views of many youth. Assure the young person that you are interested in her/his individual opinion and don't expect him/her to speak for an entire population.
7. Be prepared ahead of time to offer support. Think about kinds of support (financial, logistical, training, emotional, etc.) it will take to involve youth in the project, and who will be responsible for providing this support.
8. Make the work interactive, fun, and valuable. Like adults, youth are more likely to get involved and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling.
9. Many youth feel intimidated by adults and are not used to participating in discussions with adults. Some may feel they have nothing to contribute. It will require time and commitment to get the input of these youth. Be aware of this factor and work to overcome it.
10. Don't make assumptions about what individual young people are like.
11. Don't move too fast. Remember that it takes time to develop trust and rapport with youth because some youth are unsure about adults' intentions. Take the time and make the effort to develop a good relationship with youth *before* expecting much. Remember, too, that this work is often new to youth; take the time to explain why actions are being taken. Youth may interpret adults' being abrupt and hurried as a sign of disinterest in youth's participation; so go slow and explain what's going on.
12. Remember that there are times when youth need to say "no." They have many competing commitments and responsibilities in their lives (just like adults). Their education is important. Their relationships and communities are important. Having fun is important. They need time and energy for these interests and responsibilities



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Tips for Youth: Working with Adult Professionals

1. Most adults have good intentions. Remember that they are simply not used to working in partnership with young people.
2. Criticism doesn't necessarily mean condescension or that an adult doesn't value your contribution. It may mean the adult is treating you the same way he/she would an adult colleague. Remember that adults are used to critiquing each other's work and offering constructive ideas to improve a project. Just because an adult doesn't agree with someone, it doesn't mean that he/she disrespects that person.
3. Adults may not be aware of the capabilities of young people. They can be told a hundred times that young people are mature, but showing them is the best way to make the case.
4. Adults often feel responsible for the success or failure of the project. This is what makes it hard for them to share power. They may need reassurance that you are willing to share in both the successes and the failures.
5. Adults are just as uncertain as youth. They have just learned to disguise it better.
6. Sometimes adults use phrases and expressions, whether consciously or not, that annoy young people and are red flags that they aren't treating youth as partners. Like an annoying drip of water, these phrases and expressions can erode a relationship. Be prepared to call adults on their language (e.g. using words like "kids" to describe "youth.")
7. Adults often use words, phrases, and acronyms that you might not understand. Adults new to the program may not understand them either. The language of the sexual health world is riddled with terms that may bewilder any newcomer. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
8. Don't be afraid to say "no." Adults will understand that you have other important commitments, like your education, family, friends, hobbies, and sports.
9. Adult professionals often have studied the science of behavior change, thus their perspectives may reflect "what is really working in the field." At times, this "theoretical" framework may seem boring, but if you ask them to present it in a palatable way, it often makes a whole lot of sense in designing effective programs.



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