



## Three Essentials for Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships

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### 1. Respect

#### *Respect Our Time*

Youth are on a different schedule than adults; we have school, sports, clubs, and other activities, and these commitments need to be considered when finding a time to meet. Don't assume that we have a ride or that our parents can provide one. Sometimes meeting daily or even weekly isn't necessary – try meeting less often but making those meetings more productive. Make sure we are present when you plan future meetings and events. There may be events or outside commitments we need to consider, and the best way to avoid conflict is to involve us in the planning process. Similarly, if your program has funding available, consider providing a stipend for youth workers; this shows us that you respect our time, what we bring to the table, and the sacrifices we are making to be present. Treat your time with us respectfully and we will follow your example.

#### *Respect Our Limits*

Sometimes we feel overwhelmed with the amount of work on our plate – just like adults. Make sure you talk with us to ensure that we are not feeling pressured to bite off more than we can chew. Sometimes it's hard for youth to say no to an adult in power, so double check multiple times to make sure we feel comfortable with the jobs at hand. Discuss all deadlines and required responsibilities with us before assigning them. This way we aren't surprised by the workload, which will ultimately prevent us from being unable to follow through. If we see our work as something we can do and do well, we will be motivated to try our best.

#### *Respect Our Differences*

Each group is different, and so is each one of us. Techniques that work with one group may need to be altered for another. Always keep in mind our age group and try to discuss topics that are relevant to us. Don't let past experiences with youth determine how you treat us. Take time to explain and understand. Sometimes you may not agree with our opinions, but it is important to understand where we are coming from and to let us know that even if you don't agree, you still support us. Make it clear that you are always willing to listen and talk to us without judgment.

*Examples: Respecting us can be as simple as rescheduling a meeting when we are feeling overwhelmed or when it's more convenient for us. Respect is all about communication, so be careful when making decisions without consulting us, as this can feel like you don't respect our opinion or our contribution.*

## 2. Trust

### *Trust Us To Get It Done*

As youth, we can handle responsibility, and you should feel free to delegate tasks within a group. Don't assume that we can't handle tasks that adults can – sometimes we're even better fitted to the job. If for some reason we aren't following through or we're resisting a responsibility, consider having one of our peers speak to us. It will be more powerful for a fellow classmate or group member to tell us to follow through on a commitment than if you continue to ask over and over. If this doesn't work, have an open and honest conversation with us. Sometimes there are circumstances out of our control that are preventing us from completing the task and a compromise or adjustment can be made that will work for both of us.

### *Trust Us To Be Mature*

We will surprise you. We are all unique individuals who are capable of more than many adults think. Although maturity levels will vary with age, treat us the way you would like us to act and we will rise to the occasion. Sometimes we can get rowdy or out of hand, but treat that like the exception instead of the rule. We can tell when adults expect the worst, and we tend to behave poorly in response. However, this can go the other way. If you treat us maturely and expect us to act responsibly and politely, we will respond to these requests positively.

### *It Goes Both Ways:*

Make sure you are a trustworthy adult. You can't expect those of us who work with you to follow through with commitments and responsibilities if you regularly fall short. We notice when adults act immaturely or irresponsibly and we soon realize that we can get away with acting the same way. It may seem like a good idea to let us take charge and run meetings or plan events, but only do so with our permission. Never let us feel as though you are abandoning us or putting us in a position to take over a task you said you would complete. It only takes one bad experience to teach us that you won't do your share, and this will make us less likely to trust you in the future. You want to create an environment that fosters responsibility among youth, so be a good role model.

*Examples: Giving us a special job that will challenge us is a good way to show you trust us to be responsible. Make sure we know that the job is important, but you know we can do it. Likewise, be careful when explaining why youth can't do a job. Using language like "not mature enough" or "not ready" undermines us and doesn't give us the chance to surprise you.*

*Trust can also be about the kind of relationship you have with us. One way to be a trustworthy adult is to make sure to treat everything we tell you with complete confidentiality. We will be more trusting of you if we know that the information we tell you is safe.*

### **3. Encouragement**

#### *Encourage When Things Go Well*

Don't forget to give praise when we are doing something well. It will make us more likely to want to do so again in the future. It is better and more effective to reward good behavior than to punish bad. Letting us know how well we're doing will help us feel closer to you and will make us want to continue earning your approval. Don't let a success pass by without celebration. It's tempting to continue chugging forward, but that extra time you take to reflect on a job well done or tell us you are proud of us can make a big difference.

#### *Encourage When Things Go Badly*

It's always disappointing when something doesn't go the way we want. Often the hardest part is knowing that we might have disappointed an adult or peers we admire. Make sure to offer encouragement, especially after a hard day or a failed attempt. It will lessen the blow and assure us that you support us on both good days and bad. It is also okay to show us that you are upset too; this helps us know that you care about us and about our successes. However, be a good role model; talk through your emotions with us and help us process our own. In the end, make sure we see what happened as a learning experience, one that can help us grow and be more successful in the future.

#### *Encourage Us To Push Boundaries*

Sometimes we need a little extra push when it comes to things like taking on more responsibility or embracing opportunities. Encourage us to try new things or take an extra step to improve an ongoing project. This will show us that you support us and believe in us. Even if we decide that the project or commitment isn't realistic, we will be glad you thought we could do it. So many youth credit their adult mentors as someone who "saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself." Try to be that adult for us.

Encouragement can come in many forms. If we're having a discussion, press us to go deeper, if we're planning an event, tell us you think it could have more impact, or if you find a scholarship or other individual opportunity, suggest that we apply for it. All of these are ways to show us that you believe in us and see us as successful partners.

Helping us to push our own boundaries will both help strengthen our relationship with you and help our group achieve things you may not have imagined.

*Examples: Well-respected coaches or directors have often mastered the ability to give positive encouragement when needed. Even if a game or performance goes poorly, they know to step in and point out what went well and what can be improved upon next time. This can be applied to almost any situation. We sometimes need a guiding voice when something doesn't go as planned to show us the silver lining.*