

TIP SHEET

Engaging Youth

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to engage with young people—whether you want to share your career journey, present material in a school setting, facilitate a hands-on activity with students, organize a learning experience at your company, or serve as a career coach. No matter the role, exposure to diverse role models—other people whose actions, examples, or successes can be emulated by others—is critically important and can supply powerful messages to youths. Role models are especially important for girls and young women.

The tips and strategies listed below can help first-time volunteers—as well as those who would like a refresher—prepare for, engage with, and inspire youths.

- **BE PRESENT.** Focus your full attention, thoughts, and energy on the young person and what he/she is saying. Silence your cell phone.
- **USE A YOUTH-CENTERED APPROACH:**
 1. **Authenticity:** Be genuine, communicate sincerely, and form authentic relationships.
 2. **Empathy:** Understand an individual youth's point of view (thoughts, feelings, behaviors) and communicate that understanding back to the person; this will help foster a positive relationship.
 3. **Unconditional positive regard:** Accept, support, and respect young people as they are; avoid judgement. Be mindful of unchecked assumptions about youth.
- **BE CONFIDENT, BUT NOT OVERPOWERING.** Smile! Maintain eye contact. Be neutral. Always be honest, but mindful in your delivery.
- **ASK FOR AND RESPECT YOUTHS' OPINIONS.** Young people bring unique perspectives. Their past experiences, family life, and other factors and/or barriers have helped shape their opinions. Consider their ages and possible insecurities or struggles they may be facing.
- **OFFER MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES.** Activities should be youth-friendly and responsive to their interests and needs. This allows you to meet the young people where they are in terms of their knowledge and development. Expose youths to new things; this will help them discover and develop their passions.
- **ENCOURAGE YOUTH LEADERSHIP.** Allow youths to assume active roles; this means that adults do not lead, but rather support. Involve young people in planning and support their ideas and suggestions.
- **ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS.** Ask questions that require a full response or explanation. Avoid questions that elicit simple yes/no responses. Ask follow-up questions to get clarification when needed.



Sample open-ended questions:

Where do you see yourself in five years? What is your dream job? How did you solve the problem? What did you expect to happen?

Sample yes/no questions (questions to avoid): How was your day? Did you like the activity?

- **ASK ONE QUESTION AT A TIME.** Give the young person the opportunity to respond to each question. Too many questions at once, especially when followed up with advice, tend to cause people to shut down or limit their responses.
- **PROVIDE SUPPORT.** Be an advocate. You may be the only advocate some youths have. Suggest resources and learning experiences, when and where appropriate.
- **MOTIVATE.** Promote a positive mindset. Set high expectations and challenge youths to surpass their own goals.
- **ENCOURAGE REFLECTION.** For many youths, opening up to an adult can take them outside their comfort zone. Any time a young person you're working with shares personal information, discusses something meaningful to them, or mentions a risk or challenge they are facing, be sure to acknowledge the youth's feelings and take the time to allow reflection.

! **Sample response:** It sounds like you have a lot to do. I can only imagine how hard it is, trying to balance school, work, and helping to take care of your siblings. How do you keep track of everything?

Sample response to avoid: Wow, I'm really sorry to hear that. Let's move on to something more positive.

- **CELEBRATE.** Celebrate different capacities and achievements, but also help youths cope with their failures.
- **HAVE FUN!**



TYPES OF LISTENING

There are two types of listening:

- **Active listening:** listening to understand and paying full attention to the speaker—conscious of and focused on the speaker's needs and wants, rather than one's own personal preferences; wanting to understand the young person.
- **Passive listening:** simply hearing the speaker.

STRIVE TO BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER!

ACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES:

1. **Encourage.** Create an opening for a young person to say more.

! **For example, ask:** What additional ideas or thoughts do you have? Is there another perspective on this issue? Can you give an example? What questions does this raise for you?

2. **Paraphrase.** Use your own words to say what you think the young person said.

! **Consider phrases such as:** It sounds like ... What I am hearing you say ... Tell me more about ...

3. **Intentional silence.** A pause, lasting no more than a few seconds, can give young people a little extra "quiet time" to discover what they think and organize their thoughts. This also gives youths a chance to figure out whether they want to talk.

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