

“There is virtually no limit to what young people can do, no social need they cannot at least do something about. With a broad enough perspective, it’s hard to think of a positive social role teenagers have not at some time filled: from leading crusades, commanding armies, advising kings – being kings – to making scientific discoveries, composing symphonies, and exposing injustices. What youth can do is limited more by social and political convention than by capacity, energy, or willingness.”

– Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, 1991.

MORE REASONS WHY YOUTH ARE GREAT TO WORK WITH!

- 1. Role Models!** They often serve as role models to their peers and are successful in peer-to-peer facilitation and education – great for gathering information, recruiting their peers and getting a message across. Youth assess the relevance of the mission and messages of a group.
- 2. Young people are experts!** Young people know first-hand what youth need in their communities and schools. They are able to go to places and talk to people that are often overlooked by adults or are not receptive to adults.
- 3. Challenge conventional thinking!** Young people have great ideas and different points of views that adults may overlook.
- 4. Impacting adults!** Often youth are able to have a greater impact on the adults around them. Adults and elders can be easily swayed by the young people in their lives.
- 5. The media can love them!** Today’s media find the things that young people do interesting and unique, which is often why the media will choose to do a human interest story that was initiated by a young person.
- 6. They capture attention!** It can prove difficult for policy makers to ignore youth, the country’s next generation, when it comes to attention-getting problems.
- 7. Creative tactics!** Youth can often bypass the protocol system and gain entry in VIP areas. Using creative tactics like painted faces, costumes and other great ideas, youth can meet with the powers-that-be.

Reference:
Adapted from Lesko, W. Reasons for Maximum Youth Involvement. Youth Activism Project. http://www.youthactivism.com/Adults_Only.php. Accessed on July 12, 2007.

Adult Allies in Action 2007, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement.
Authors: Nishad Khanna and Stoney McCart.
Contributors: Virginia Beebe, Robin Bond, Blaise Rothe and Todd Ward.

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Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

www.engagementcentre.ca

The Students Commission

23 Isabella Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 1M7
(416) 597-8297
www.tgmag.ca

Core Partners

Brock University: Youth Lifestyles The Community University Research Alliance (CURA)

Brock University, Dept. of Psychology
500 Glenridge Ave.
St. Catharines, ON
L2S 3A1
www.brocku.ca

La Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF)

Dave Bourgeois
923 Robie Street
Halifax, NS
B3H 3C3
www.fjcf.ca

Tiny Giant Magazine / The Students Commission (TG/SC)

23 Isabella St.
Toronto, ON
M4Y 1M7
www.tgmag.ca

Youth Launch / Nutana Integrated School-linked Services

c/o Nutana Collegiate
411 Eleventh St East
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0E9

Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Psychology Program

c/o Department of Psychology
75 University Avenue West
Waterloo, ON
N2L 3C5

Youth Net / Réseau Ado (YN/RA) The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)

401 Smyth Rd.
Ottawa, ON
K1H 8L1
www.youthnet.on.ca
www.cheo.on.ca

City of Vancouver Youth Outreach Team

453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
V5Y 1V4
www.vancouveryouth.ca

First Nations University of Canada

#1 First Nations Way
Regina, SK
S4S 7K2
www.firstnationsuniversity.ca



CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Youth Engagement

ADULT ALLIES IN ACTION



IMAGINE living in a society where all young people were involved in decision-making and were supported and encouraged by the adults around them to build skills and practice decision-making. What does that society look like? What do we need to get there?



THE STUDENTS COMMISSION

Brock University • La Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF) • Youth Launch Saskatoon • Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Psychology Program • Youth Net / Réseau Ado (YN / RA) The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) • City of Vancouver • St. Mary's University • University of Regina • First Nations University of Canada



WHAT EXACTLY IS AN ADULT ALLY?

An adult ally helps youth have their voice heard through meaningful engagement. With support of an adult ally, young people can be meaningfully involved in every stage of an initiative. Being an ally to young people involves a combination of positive attitude, skill and awareness to help in advocating for a youth leadership and empowerment agenda.

Adult allies:

- Acknowledge and push aside any biases that they may have so that they enter into a partnership with an open mind;
- Move from the traditional ‘adult-as-mentor’ role to an ‘adult-as-partner’ role;
- Support youth to have ownership of a project and to take the project to new levels;
- Do not impose their judgments or ideas;
- Are willing to take risks; and
- Share power and accountability for success and failure.

An adult ally is the adult half of a youth-adult partnership.

What is a Youth-Adult Partnership?

A youth-adult partnership results when youth and adults work together as a team to make decisions that affect their lives.^{1,2} Both adults and youth have the opportunity to make suggestions, decisions and recommendations. One is not valued over the other; it is a collaborative and mutual relationship. Mutuality is all about a two-way street, where both youth and adults are teaching each other, learning from each other, and making decisions and acting together. Youth-adult partnerships focus on nurturing, emphasizing youth and their contributions rather than their problems.

DEFINING YOUTH

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as all persons who are under 18 years. Many organizations looking to empower adolescents do not refer to them as children and use the word youth. In organizational literature, the word youth can refer to young people aged 12 through 26, sometimes higher. The research included in this publication includes people between 12 and 24 years of age. For some studies, there are variations within this range, and for others, the age is undefined.

(See “References” 1, 2, 3 and 4 on page 4.)

DISCUSSION

MORE QUESTIONS*

(Circle as many words as apply)

- As an adult working with young people I feel...
 - Pointless
 - Powerful
 - Effective
 - Useful
 - Like a partner
 - Misunderstood
- My role as an adult working with young people is mostly...
 - Time consuming
 - Fun
 - Exhausting
 - As a mentor
 - A learning experience
 - Expensive
- I am working with young people because I...
 - Love it!
 - Am concerned for their health and our future
 - Was told to
 - Wanted to learn new skills
 - Wanted to fix the ‘youth problem’
 - Needed to find a young person’s opinion
- Because of my involvement with young people, my attitude toward young people as a group has changed...
 - For the better
 - Not at all
 - For the worse
 - I don’t think of them as a group, but as individual people
- Through my work with young people I have learned...
 - About my capabilities as a person
 - Why not to have children
 - How to talk to young people
 - That I am better off doing things on my own
 - To share my experiences and power with young people

SELF EVALUATION*

It’s natural for people to want to continually get better at what they do. Well, it’s no different for allies. Here is a way for you to evaluate yourself and provide a guideline for where you can improve.

This is not meant for criticism, only improvement!

Circle the appropriate number for each statement with 1 being “Not At All”, and 4 being “I Do This Really Well.” Underline the items that need the most improvement. Circle an item you could start changing today.

I truly respect their ideas.	1	2	3	4
I continually give encouragement.	1	2	3	4
I provide resources for their activities.	1	2	3	4
I listen carefully to their ideas.	1	2	3	4
I promote active participation.	1	2	3	4
I model appropriate interactions with bureaucracies.	1	2	3	4
I am active in building community support.	1	2	3	4
I help youth get organized and empower them to get started.	1	2	3	4
I encourage critical thinking in young people.	1	2	3	4
I am open to alternative forms of communication and problem solving.	1	2	3	4
I include young people in all aspects of the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4
I share power with young people well.	1	2	3	4
I share responsibility for successes as well as failures.	1	2	3	4
My focus is on the process of engagement rather than the product.	1	2	3	4

COMMUNICATE™

*Adapted from Checkoway, Barry. (1991). *Adults as Allies*. School of Social Work at the University of Michigan.

PROMOTING REFLECTION AND OPEN

REFLECTION

To help yourself become a super ally, you can try answering these questions. They may help you reflect back to when you were younger, what it felt like and what you as a young person needed in an ally. After self-reflection, it might be useful to also do this activity with young people who you work with to learn about each other. For more useful tools, check out the Allies in Action workshop manual. (http://www.engagementcentre.ca/files/Allies_e.pdf).

Adult Allies

- What was it like being 15 years old?
- Where did you live?
- What made you different?
- What were you thinking about?
- How did you feel?
- Who were the young people who participated actively?
- What were they like?
- What did they do?
- What kept you from participating more actively?
- What could you have done to participate more actively?
- Who were the adults who worked well with young people?
- What were their qualities or characteristics?
- What could adults have done to help you participate?

Youth

- What is it like being 15 years old?
- Where do you live?
- What makes you different?
- What are you thinking about?
- How do you feel?
- Who are the young people who participate actively?
- What are they like?
- What do they do?
- What keeps you from participating more actively?
- What could you do to participate more actively?
- Who are the adults who work well with young people?
- What are their qualities or characteristics?
- What could adults do to help you participate?

Adapted from the *What was it like being 15 years old?* exercise by Barry Checkoway.

WHERE WE WORK BEST?

Positive working relationships within a diverse group can increase the chances of creating successful and sustainable projects. Youth engagement often requires trusting a process rather than knowing exactly what will occur. As an adult ally, working with youth can involve operating outside your comfort zone. Identifying what levels of Agreement and Certainty you are most comfortable with can help you collaborate more effectively. Respond to the two statements below.

I like it when I don't know where we're going when we start.



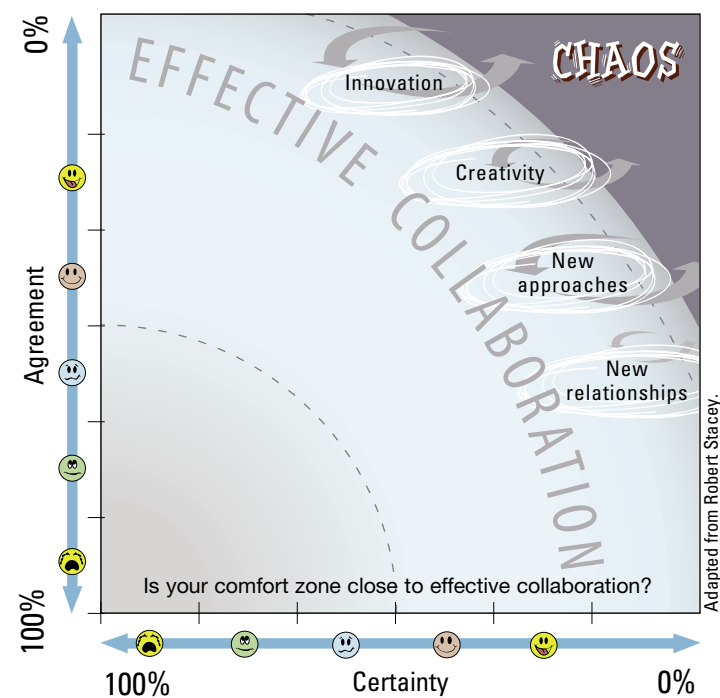
not at all a little bit so-so quite a bit totally

I like it when people don't all think the same way and challenge each other.



not at all a little bit so-so quite a bit totally

Use your two responses to identify your comfort zone.



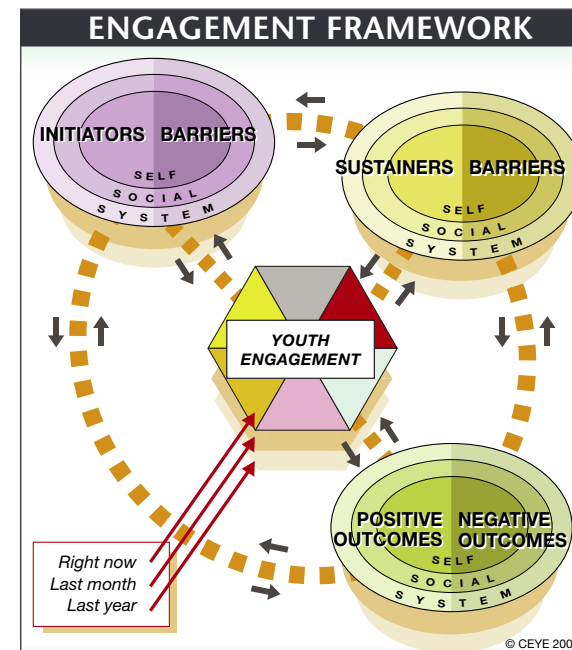
Adapted from Robert Stacey.

Setting the Stage for Engagement

We know that engaging youth meaningfully in adult-youth partnerships benefits youth, adults, and organizations. Why do young people get engaged in the first place? Why do they stay engaged? Forty-nine percent of young people say they don't get involved in volunteer activities because they have never been personally asked.³

Often, the answer is a super adult ally that taps a young person on the shoulder and invites them to be involved. Allies then continue the process by empowering youth to share decisions, listening to them with respect, and supporting them in a mutual trusting relationship. These are the initiating and sustaining factors in engagement that create positive outcomes.

The youth engagement framework⁴ of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement can be used to look at individual, social and systems levels of initiators, sustainers and outcomes. All three levels are important in the engagement experience.



The things that initiate and sustain engagement are associated with positive outcomes. This supports that it's not only about "what" the specific engagement activity is, but also about how it is done, the environment in which it is done, and who is there supporting it. In other words, adult supports and the adult-youth relationship are crucial ingredients of youth engagement.

SO, HOW DOES ALLYING HELP...?

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

...Youth

Involving young people in decision-making provides:

- Challenge
- Relevancy
- Voice
- Cause-based action
- Skill building
- Adult structure
- Affirmation

Which lead to the following benefits:

- Mastery
- Increased social awareness
- Critical thinking skills
- Knowledge application
- Problem solving
- Health
- Compassion

...Adults

There are also vital benefits for adults in adult-youth partnerships.

- Enhanced commitment and energy
- Increased confidence in their abilities to work with youth.
- Better understanding of young people's concerns
- Increased sharing of their new knowledge with others outside of the organization
- Strengthened sense of being connected to their community
- Changed perceptions and stereotypes of young people by experiencing youth as competent, legitimate and crucial contributors.

SOCIAL LEVEL

Youth benefit at the social level from:

- Supportive personal relationships
- Expanded social networks
- Opportunities to meet and develop relationships with youth from outside their original peer network
- Opportunities to network with adults and learn about positive relationships through adult role models
- Greater social capital
- Greater peer, family and school attachment

SYSTEM LEVEL

...Organizations

Organizations benefit at the system level from:

- Integrating principles and practices of youth involvement into the organizational culture at all levels
- Clarifying and focusing the organization's mission
- Increased responsiveness of the organization
- Creating more effective youth programs
- Recognition of the benefits of diversity in decision-making
- Fostering a greater value on community inclusivity and representation
- Reaching out to the community in more diverse ways
- Increasing credibility in terms of being committed to youth development and increased funding

Organizations that included youth at all levels of decision-making demonstrated the most positive outcomes.

(See "References" 5, 6, 7 and 8 on page 4.)

RESPECT • LISTEN • UNDERSTAND



ADULT ALLIES PLAY A VITAL ROLE...

Finding the Balance:⁹

Adults tend to enjoy youth-adult partnerships, but some youth may prefer collaborations that are completely youth-led (where predominantly youth make decisions, with minimal adult inclusion). This is a difficult balance that youth and adults must constantly negotiate; like youth, adults need to be meaningfully engaged and receive benefits from the partnership.

What are necessary ingredients for effective youth-adult partnerships?^{10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15}

At the individual level:

- Communications skills
- Leadership skills
- Activities and goals fit with personal values and interests
- Adults and youth feel valued

At the social level:

- Honest and open communication
- Teamwork with flexible roles for youth and adults
- Coaching, providing legitimate opportunities for youth to take on meaningful roles in partnership
- Striving to be egalitarian
- Addressing issues of power and roles
- Gain clarity and consensus on the purpose of adult-youth partnerships

At the systems level, determinant factors of engaging youth as partners in organizations or institutions include:

- Top decision-making body is committed to youth governance and youth-adult partnerships and must change their operations accordingly
- Organizational change facilitated by an adult visionary leader (with institutional power and authority) to advocate for youth decision-making
- Adult attitude change occurs most readily when youth perform well in the boardroom or in other places regarded as adult turf

Youth-only leadership versus youth/adult leadership

Research indicates that effective youth programs have key ingredients, such as structure and opportunities for skill building. In youth-led projects, without adult ally support and expertise, the youth leaders may gain tremendously through “learning by doing” but the youth who are participants in the project are less likely to have the same quality of experience. Adult allies ensure that youth leaders and youth who participate benefit equally. In effective youth-adult partnerships, youth indicate that the presence of adults is a benefit. Youth indicate that their sense of leadership of the project is not threatened by the presence of adults, but, in fact, enhanced and supported.

Look out!

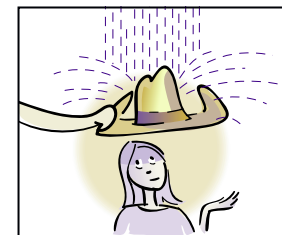
Assuming that youth should do everything of importance is a common pitfall of Youth-Adult Partnerships.¹⁶

Adult allies support, prepare

and adequately follow up with youth when they share their personal stories with others to ensure that they can build upon their personal experiences. If that is not possible, allies may need to help youth avoid such opportunities to keep them from being exploited.¹⁷

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A young woman reflects on her experience with an adult ally

My story began 10 years ago when, at the age of fifteen, I found out I was pregnant.

I told my school counsellor, who advised me to go to another school because teen pregnancy was not something common at my school. With that, I began my search to find some place that would not turn me away. After three phone calls and three humiliating conversations, the last ending with “you phone there; they know what to do with girls like you”, I called the recommended school and sure enough I got a meeting with someone who could “deal” with me. The most striking feeling that I remember was how fast I went from a person to a statistic with no respect. I made an appointment to meet with the school counsellor, told my mother and we went together.

This is where my life changed. In the counsellor’s office. In a matter of minutes. I met the lady who would turn out to be the reason why I made it to where I am today.

In those few moments there was a connection. (Initiator – social level: relationship with an adult ally). I was very nervous and shy, with suppressed hatred, looking for any reason to rage. I was wearing ripped jeans with a dark 80s band t-shirt with cut sleeves. She was wearing a peach button down shirt with dark pants and a smile. It felt like she could see right into my heart, and she could; she offered me a piece of candy that I had been eyeing since I had got there. In that short experience, I felt there was no bias in this woman’s heart. I felt safe. I did not feel trust at that moment or respect, those feelings came later. All I felt was safe. (Outcome: feeling safe).

★

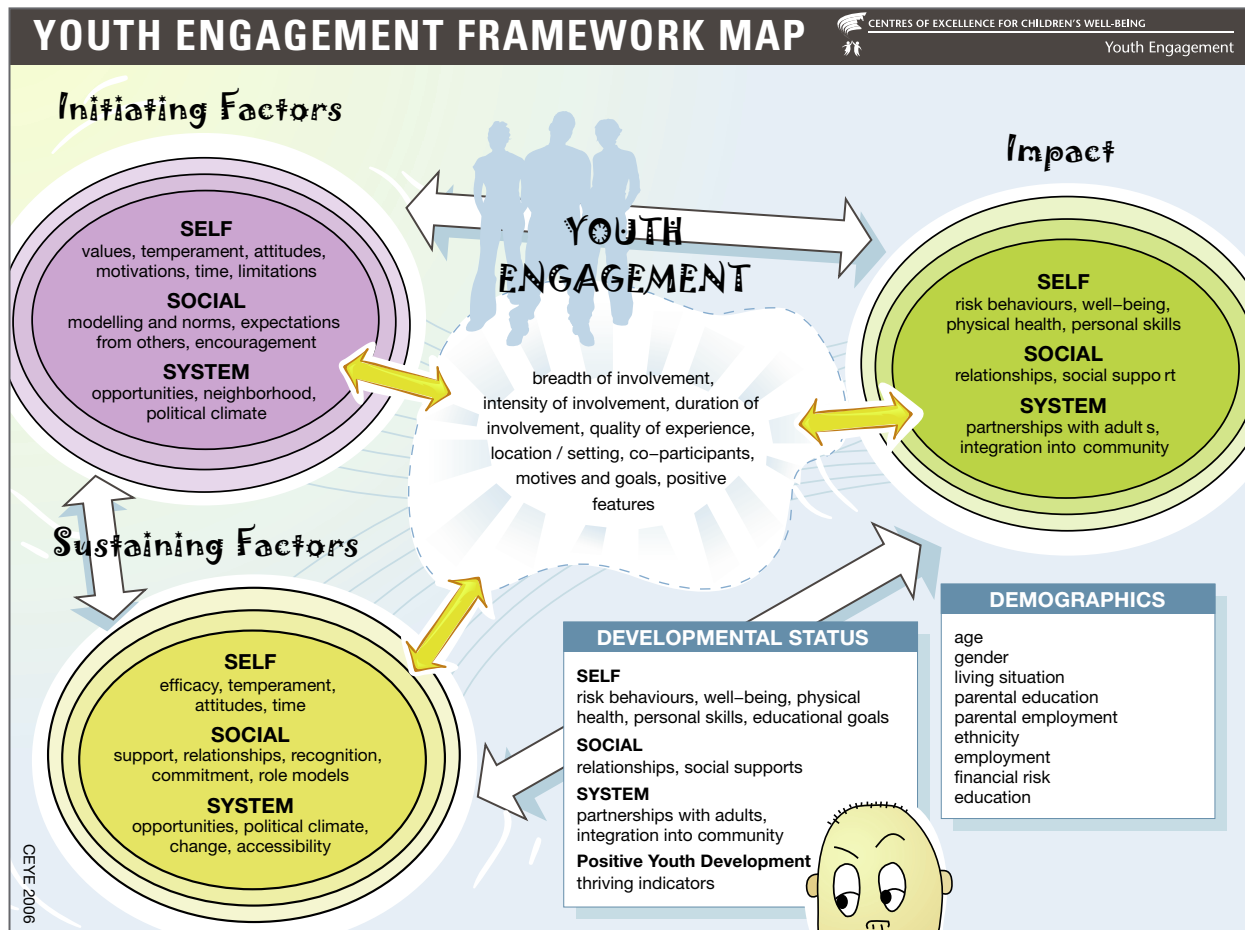
Fast forward to another experience when I was asked to speak to a grade nine class at a regular high school as part of a panel. To add context to this story, I will let you know a secret: I, as a teenager, was very, very mouthy. Thus, I was encouraged to talk about the realities of being a mother at 16 to about 100 grade nines. (Sustainer – individual and systemic levels: youth efficacy, support for engagement, increased responsibility, special event, relevant activity). There were a number of teen moms that spoke before me on the panel. They all talked about what a great gift

their child was in their life and how they were adults and had immense responsibilities now. All this was true, but it was very hard for a young person to sit in front of their peers and talk about a ‘huge mistake.’

After that panel, my ally talked to me about honoring who I was so I would not feel so trapped by my life. She said that, in order to give my daughter a good life, I had to feel good about myself. (Sustainer – social level: adult support and encouragement). It felt great to let all the girls and boys know that having a kid was not a bowl full of cherries. I spoke about how emotionally draining it was to be a mother who was expected to play the game of life without even having the deck of cards. Each time I experienced love and affirmation that I was an individual and not a statistic I felt calmer and more in control of my own destiny. (Outcome – individual level: self-esteem, self-efficacy). My adult ally was there for me because she believed in me and also honored her own truths about how to live, love and care for children. She showed how to be authentic by sharing her life stories with me to illustrate her points rather than tell me what I should do with my life. (Sustainer – social level: adult support, shared trust, shared experience and knowledge). Each time I finished a presentation, I wanted to do it again. I wanted to feel my voice again. Through these experiences of practicing authentic participation in opportunities to be heard and affirmed by the reactions of my audiences in my truths, I was then able to seek opportunities to give back to the those who gave to me. (Outcomes - Individual: self confidence. Social: positive peers. System: education of others).

The biggest learning that I have had is that it was not just me; it was all those around me who were strong and ready to walk the talk that generated the success story. I went from being a woman who searched for a place in the world to a woman who helps others find it. I am successful because I had people around me who understood what partnership is all about.

The author is a young woman who works with Youth Launch, the Centre's core partner in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The Engagement Framework highlights her relationship with her adult ally and some of the elements that helped her get to where she is today. She has become a mentor and young adult ally for many young people, sharing her experience, humor and down-to-earth voice.



DEVELOP COMMON VALUES AND SHARED PURPOSE

Pillars (grounding values or principles) should be used by both youth and adults in order to get the project moving smoothly.

The Students Commission uses its Four Pillars, but any project can develop its own. The key is to live, breathe and refer to them daily and in each session. Use them in specific ways that deepen the understanding and integrate the use of them in the regular behaviour of staff, volunteers and participants.

Why Use Pillars?

This is how the Students Commission describes its pillars. The Students Commission pillars – Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate™ – are used not only when working with youth but also in our daily lives as well.

Respect is our first pillar and is known as the foundation of all the pillars. When treating people with respect (especially young people), you usually get it back. This creates the core or beginning of the partnership or relationship between the adult and young person.

Our Second is **Listen**. When you truly respect a person, we learn to listen to that person. We listen not just with our ears, but with our heads, hearts and our other senses.

From listening comes **Understanding**. We process what we have heard (Listening). Understanding creates new knowledge and new skills, and opens one's horizon when thinking or when having a conversation.

If people really understand each other, then they can **Communicate**, our fourth pillar. This pillar builds the partnership and ensures the relationship between an adult and a young person or any two individuals.*

Good communication is the first action in a series of actions. Teams work well when there is a shared purpose and a concrete product or series of products that help achieve the shared goal. For example, the production of a poster that leads to a conference to help reduce bullying.

* Reprinted with permission from the the Students Commission.

SHARED EXPECTATIONS
– A good place to start –

- 1 DISCUSS** “What makes a healthy environment for collaboration?” Respect the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of the youth involved by giving each a chance to speak.
- 2 UNDERSTANDING**: Listen to gain a better understanding of the groups shared values and expectations.
- 3 CONSENSUS ITEMS AND ACTION**: List the expectations the group can all agree to and post them in a prominent spot. These guidelines can aid group communication.

Helps shape future activities.

**RESPECT • LISTEN
UNDERSTAND • COMMUNICATE™**

Allies are relationship builders

While there is no absolute right or wrong way for youth and adults to collaborate, allies can work with youth to actively reduce the barriers that negatively affect their engagement. Take every opportunity to build trust in each others abilities and achievements and have fun doing it.

Websites

- To learn more about adult allies and youth engagement check out these useful sites and tools:
- Allies in Action workshop manual:**
www.tgmag.ca/centres/e/resourcesdb/pdf/Allies_e.pdf
- Youth Activism – Advice for Adult Allies:**
www.youthactivism.com/content.php?ID=15
- Fight Hate and Promote Tolerance – Being an Effective Ally:**
www.tolerance.org/teach/current/event.jsp?cid=372
- Good things to know about working with young people:**
www.tgmag.ca/resbank/start_e.htm
- Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships:**
www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/transitions/transitions1401_7.htm
- Working with Youth:**
www.marininstitute.org/Youth/working.htm#3
- What are Youth-Adult Partnerships?:**
cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/content.cfm?content=YAPartners
- Adults as Allies (ideas workbook):**
www.wkkf.org/pubs/YouthED/Pub564.pdf

Being involved in extracurricular activities is associated with reduced risk behaviours and increased academic, health and career success.¹⁸ Adult Allies play a critical role in whether young people are involved or not. They are the “social” bridge in the Centre’s framework between the individual young person and the system. They need to be skilled at working and moving between the worlds of young people and systems. They need to work to understand the various positive and negative factors influencing a young person’s involvement or non-involvement in any activity, including the complex interplay of the factors affecting both the adult ally and the young person.

For example, temperament of the adult ally may be as critical a factor as the temperament of the young person. The match or mismatch between people and activities may play a role in how an engagement experience unfolds. Matching temperament to the right types of activities and the right length of the activity is also an important factor to consider and observe. The Centre’s Framework Map is a multi-purpose tool, which helps adult allies with increased

awareness and ongoing reflective observation and evaluation. The Centre’s partners also use it in their daily practice, without any of the factors filled in — an open “bubble” map. Young people and staff deconstruct, forecast and/or evaluate programs and experiences they have. This has provided partners with valuable program and planning information. The story on the opposite page is one such example.

In terms of the quality of engagement experience, positive programs have eight features: physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive caring relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building and integration of efforts with community synergy.¹⁹ Adult Allies work as advocates in the system to try to ensure that all these ingredients are present in youth engagement opportunities for young people. When they are not, adult allies work hard to mitigate the impact that the lack of some of these features might have on the young people involved.

(See “References” 18 and 19 on page 4.)

CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

Often, structured institutions are not designed to support a partnership approach to working with youth. Teachers and other leaders in similar institutions require support and resources to challenge conventional adult roles of authority and power over young people. However, there are always possibilities to develop spaces and opportunities where youth can be more engaged, and where adults can step into a partner role.^{20, 21, 22}

For example, teachers as allies may:

Arrange the classroom in a circle to diffuse the power base from the front of the room.

Create opportunities for students to share decision-making in the classroom where appropriate (e.g. ground rules, deadlines, assignments, etc.).

Recognize that students can both learn and educate (e.g. peer education).

Encourage students to become engaged in their learning (e.g. recognize that it just as important to foster a positive concept of learning as teaching content).

Support rather than direct (e.g. ask questions rather than provide answers).

Focus on making lessons interesting, fun and exciting for both themselves and their students to be engaged.

References

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Watch out for Adultism!

When will you grow up?
How would you know, you're only 15?!
It's just a stage, you'll outgrow it.

These are just a few examples of comments that are all too common to the ears of some young people.

Adultism refers to behaviors or beliefs related to the assumption that adults have more value and rights than children and youth, rather than recognizing the value and potential contribution people of all ages can make. Adultism is a form of ageism.

Adultism is a serious roadblock for successful youth-adult partnerships as it assumes the superiority of adults and supports the belief that youth need to become adults before they can contribute meaningfully to their community. It can create a bitter, stressful, non-productive and even destructive atmosphere.

To determine if a behavior is adultist, ask yourself, "Would I treat an adult like that?" or "Would I talk to an adult in this tone of voice?" Either way, a bit of self-assessment can go a long way. Adult allies can support each other to explore the roots of their own behaviours. However, this isn't a one-way street. Ageism – discrimination based on age – can also be directed towards adults due to false assumptions and biases that youth have about adults. As an adult ally, it is important to not overreact, build a thick skin and recognize the two-way barrier of youth-adult dynamics.

When experiencing "ageism" from youth, it can be helpful to initiate a discussion around stereotypes and how youth are stereotyped, then expand the discussion to include stereotyping of adults.

WHEN WORKING ON A PROJECT

REMEMBER:

Partnership between youth and adults is the core of engagement.
Relationships between teachers, students and ideas make things happen.
Ooops. Mistakes are part of learning.
Jumble and mix. Bring different people together.
Effective engagers are adult allies.
Create opportunities for youth to lead.
Talking is not enough. Take action!

ADULTS AS ALLIES

SOME TIPS²³

ASK

Be an asker not a teller.

BOUNDARIES

Develop mutually agreed upon guidelines for the group.

CHALLENGE

Support youth to take leadership and responsibility for their own learning

DEMOCRACY

Share decision-making

ENGAGEMENT

Especially of the disengaged: create opportunities for youth who do not usually participate

Youth-adult partnership – what are you thinking?...

We should **ask more youth** to get involved.

... but I don't have enough time to train the young people required.

How is what we're doing **meaningful to young people** involved?

At their age they don't see the importance of what we're asking them to do.

We should **acknowledge our biases** and give youth a chance...

Young people can do the less skilled jobs and that will free us up to focus on the big picture stuff.

We need to **be more supportive and positive**.

Having young people around with no clear role is unavoidable.

But that's **tokenism**.

Try to be easygoing – **take positive risks** to allow youth to lead and make decisions.

For their sake it's important that nothing goes wrong.

It's unfair to have youth interact with the media when they have no role in the things that they are talking about.

As a reward we'll have all the young people come for the press launch – it'll be great.

Youth-adult partnership is about **collaborating as equals**.

This makes me uncomfortable.*

* See the "Where we work Best?" activity on page 10.

A genuine youth-adult partnership involves shared decision-making power where youth feel empowered and involved.

Bad working conditions arise when youth-adult partnerships revolve around tokenism. Tokenism can come in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

WHAT DO ADULT ALLIES DO?

Adult allies take on many roles as they work in partnership with youth. These may include:^{8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17}

- Facilitating opportunities for youth to contribute meaningfully
- Checking in with youth
- Navigating expected and unexpected challenges within youth-adult relationships
- Linking youth experiencing personal difficulties to appropriate support services
- Showing genuine concern for youth and being available when youth need emotional support
- Sharing personal motivations for being involved
- Posing guiding questions so that youth can work through problems themselves rather than providing answers
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Focusing on both youth and adult development
- Providing boundaries and structure
- Providing intermediate structures to breakdown tasks to be manageable
- Ensuring safety for youth
- Providing experience and expertise to contribute to the collective partnership