Tips for Working with Youth

Tips for approaching young people

Topics to touch on if unsure: “What are you most excited about [event or program]?” “What have you learned from [event or program] thus far?” Ask them what they’re excited about in the coming year. Ask them what they’ve learned from being a part of their service-learning programs. Ask them how they intend to apply what they’ve learned at the conference into their own lives and own service-learning project.

Things to keep in mind when working with youth

- In general be aware of your interactions, comments, discussions of sensitive topics/issues, and giving advice.
- If a young person asks you a question on a sensitive topic (sex, relationships etc.), let the young person know their questions are valid and redirect them to consult a parent, relative, family friend, school/religious leader.
- The National Youth Leadership Council prohibits the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use by young people and by adults directly responsible for young people.
- If you find yourself in a situation that leaves you feeling unsure, please connect with youth chaperone. As a first step, take notes on what you saw, heard, etc…

Tips from young people on good youth/adult relationships

- Make eye contact and shake their hand as you would any other conference attendee.
- Play and laugh a lot
- Learn from young people
- Value young people’s ideas
- Never believe that they don’t have an opinion about something
- Go to their space and turf
- Speak to young people with utmost respect
- Let young people be in charge
- Allow young people to feel discouraged
- Appreciate young people
- Be open about you
- Build one-on-one relationships
- Intervene
  — If you see a young person being harmful to herself or others or in need of some positive redirection, step in.

- Crisis situations can strengthen relationships
- Be aware of unintentional stereotyping of young people
- Professionalism keeps us separate
  — What is a “professional distance”? Young people are our friends and a real part of our lives.
- Make mistakes

Questions to consider

“Would I treat an adult this way?”
“Would I talk to an adult in this tone of voice?”
“Would I make this decision for an adult?”
“Would I limit an adult’s behavior this way?”
“Would I listen to an adult friend’s problem in this same way?”

“If we take the time to hear what the young people around us are telling us, we will learn new things every day.”

— From “Tips From Young People on Good Youth/Adult Relationships”
Jenny Sazama, Resource Center for Youth and their Allies