



## Youth Inclusion Workshop Guide: Using Relational Strategies

**Workshop Description:** The activities in this workshop strive to provide the opportunity to develop the skills to form positive relationships with youth. These skills are necessary not only for building adult-youth relationships, but for respecting youth's confidentiality, making connections with the youth's peers and family members, and actively including youth in activities.

**Preparation Time:** The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This time allows for the background reading on the Youth Inclusion Training website, the background information in this workshop, collecting and printing required materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

**Instruction Time:** It will take approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour to complete all activities within this guide.

### Materials:

- Printed copies of the handout, *Your Role as a Youth Worker Worksheet* (enough copies for each staff member).
- Whiteboard space or two large sheets of blank white paper.
- Pens (one for each staff member).
- A variety of newspapers and magazines.
- Scissors.
- Pieces of construction paper.
- Glue sticks.

**Preparation Instructions:** You should read the content related to this topic on the Youth Inclusion Training website, specifically the content related to Supportive Adult-Youth Relationships. In addition, you should review the background information in this module and any others related to the topic (e.g., Developmental Levels and Inclusion, Responding to Youth's Questions, etc.). In addition, you should familiarize yourself with sample responses for the activities, specifically the *Building Trust* activity.

### Knowledge: Understanding Relational Strategies for Supportive Adult-Youth Relationships

It is not always clear how to establish a supportive adult-youth relationship, because each supportive adult-youth relationship forms and develops differently.<sup>38</sup> However, program staff can take intentional actions to grow positive, trusting relationships with youth through relational strategies.<sup>39</sup> These intentional investments of a youth professional's time and effort to develop a bond with a youth can promote positive development.<sup>36</sup>



Some examples of relational strategies include the following:

<b>Minimize Relational Distance</b>	Relational distance is the perceived distance between two people. Youth may feel disconnected from staff and other youth. Staff can minimize this distance by having a fun outward behavior and initiating conversations. Youth program staff will need to learn how to balance this strategy with the need to maintain adult authority. <sup>36</sup>
<b>Active Inclusion</b>	Active inclusion is intentionally inviting youth who are not involved to become part of the group.
<b>Attention to Proximal Relationships</b>	For youth in the program, their proximal relationships are with their family members, other youth in school and the program, teachers, coaches, and the youth program staff. By asking about these relationships, staff provide practical and emotional support to youth, often helping youth to understand other points of view, helping make connections with peers and family members, and ultimately helping to resolve conflicts.
<b>Practice Mutual Respect</b>	Many adults expect youth to value their experience and authority. Mutual respect requires staff to value youth’s experience and authority as well. <sup>39</sup> To model this behavior, staff should be sincere, show gratitude, do what they say they will do, compliment achievements, offer to help, and respect different opinions and abilities. When developing programs and activities, staff should ask for youth input and ideas, listen to youth when they share ideas, and value youth and adult points of view equally. An effective way to model respect is by being polite. Using words like “please” and “thank you” begins to set the tone for this strategy.
<b>Find Commonality</b>	<p>A strategy for building rapport or feelings of connection between two people is to find topics that are interesting to both parties.<sup>36</sup> These may be topics of discussion like music, food, sports, or shared experiences such as living in a particular community or having younger siblings.</p> <p>These links become the launch pad for the relationship and clear the way for future conversations and interactions.</p>
<b>Be Available</b>	<p>Program staff should be available to youth while ensuring clear and appropriate boundaries are in place.<sup>39</sup></p> <p>Being available means interactions with youth are part of the program staff’s job, and staff who work with youth make themselves appear to have time for interactions. It sounds simple, but it is not because this strategy involves both the adult’s and the young person’s points of view.</p>



	<p>The program staff may understand interacting with the youth is part of their job, but their body language, tone, and other duties may send signals to youth that they are too busy or unavailable.</p> <p>To be effective using this relational strategy, program staff should practice these techniques to indicate they are open to interactions with youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopt an open posture – keep your head up and shoulders square and you will appear to be paying attention to whatever or whoever is in front of you.</li><li>• Smile – genuine smiles make you seem more approachable and inviting.</li><li>• Eliminate barriers – barriers can include crossed arms, countertops, sunglasses, and distractions like phones. Get out from behind the counter and put away your device to seem more available to youth.</li></ul>
<b>Recognize Individuals</b>	<p>Recognize youth for the things that make them individuals. Remembering birthdays and asking about a competition or other big event that happened since the last time you saw them are other ways to build rapport.<sup>38</sup></p>
<b>Use Active Listening</b>	<p>Make an intentional effort to see things from the young person’s perspective when youth want to discuss something, particularly if it is something that might upset them or make them feel uncomfortable.<sup>39, 24, 38</sup></p> <p>If you use active listening techniques with youth, you encourage them to open up. Ask questions that require more than a simple yes or no response. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>How did that happen?</i></li><li>• <i>What did you do to help your friend?</i></li><li>• <i>How would you respond to someone if they had this same experience?</i></li><li>• <i>Why do you think this is the case?</i></li><li>• <i>What does that mean?</i></li><li>• <i>What are your options for solving the problem?</i></li><li>• <i>What do you care most about in this situation?</i></li><li>• <i>What are your concerns?</i></li></ul> <p>These kinds of questions can help clarify the topic for you and for the youth and help build rapport. However, be careful you are not firing questions; this kind of approach may make them feel interrogated or attacked.</p> <p>Make sure your verbal and nonverbal signs are neutral or supportive when asking such questions. This type of questioning is useful in uncovering details that may have initially been overlooked or thought irrelevant.</p>



<b>Recognize Social Identities</b>	Social identities are a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership. These identities are carried with them throughout their life. People can belong to multiple groups at the same time, and youth in the program likely belong to a family, school, and neighborhood group. Other groups they may belong to include subgroups in school such as band and sports teams or outside of school, in the community, such as churches or even gangs. Social identities might influence relationships and youth program staff should know to what other groups youth belong. <sup>20</sup>
<b>Respect Confidentiality</b>	Youth sometimes tell staff things in confidence, sharing personal problems, stories, successes, etc. that they do not want shared with other adults or youth. By respecting their wishes to keep what they have shared private, program staff become caring adults whom youth can trust. Youth and the staff who work with them should be clear about where the limits to this strategy lie, specifically if youth indicate they may hurt themselves or someone else. <sup>24</sup>
<b>Build Trust</b>	Building trust takes time. Program staff earn and build the trust of youth over time through consistent use of the other relationship strategies. <sup>18, 38</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do staff try to see issues from the young person’s point of view?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Then youth will trust program staff to be good listeners and advocates for fairness.</li></ul></li><li>• Are staff polite, sincere, and consistent in their language to youth in the program?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Then youth will trust future interactions with program staff will follow the same pattern.</li></ul></li><li>• Do youth program staff keep conversations confidential?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Then youth will trust the staff who work with them in the future.<sup>37, 38</sup></li></ul></li></ul>

**Objectives:**

- Recognize how youth program staff can impact youth through being a role model
- Identify and recognize active listening skills to encourage adult-youth relationships
- Build positive and trusting relationships with youth

**Introduction (5-7 minutes):**

- Introduce the concept of relational strategies and how they are used to establish supportive adult-youth relationships by briefly highlighting some of the relational strategies mentioned in the knowledge portion of this workshop guide.



- What to say: “Today we are going to talk about how to establish supportive adult-youth relationships through relational strategies. Every adult-youth relationship develops differently, but implementing these relational strategies allows the growth of positive, trusting relationships with youth. Ultimately this workshop will strive to answer the question ‘How can these relational strategies be properly implemented to form lasting relationships with youth?’”

### **Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):**

- Ask the staff how they would go about building trust with youth. You can also ask what things staff think they should not do when trying to build trust. Write staff responses on a large sheet of paper or whiteboard.
- Follow-up by asking staff how they would go about finding commonality with youth, actively listening to youth, and making sure youth feel included. Again, record staff responses. Note: these can be broad strategy responses. Questions that you can ask may include:
  - “What are some ice-breaker questions you could ask youth to try to get to know them better? An example may be what do you like to do in your free time? Do you play sports or are you interested in any clubs?”
  - What might you say to youth who are on the outskirts of an activity and doesn’t seem to want to participate?
  - What are some non-verbal cues you should use when talking to and interacting with youth that shows you are listening and interested in what youth are saying?
- Ask the staff if there’s anything they would like to know regarding using relational strategies to establish adult-youth relationships. Record responses.

### **Activities:**

#### **Activity: *Commonalities Game* (10 minutes)**

- Describe the *Commonalities Game* activity:
  - What to say, “We are going to start with a game. The purpose of this game is to get to know each other a little better.”
- Lead the *Commonalities Game* activity:
  - Divide the staff into separate teams, ideally of about five people. Groups may be smaller or larger depending on staff size.
    - Try to make the teams of people who aren’t already close with one another.
  - Instruct each team to talk amongst themselves to find out at least six things that every group member has in common with the other members.
  - The first team to discover six commonalities is the winner.



- When the game is over, emphasize that while this served as an icebreaker game for this workshop, the same principles can be applied to finding commonalities between staff and youth.

### **Activity: *Your Role as a Youth Worker* (20 minutes)**

- Describe the *Your Role as a Youth Worker* activity:
  - Introduce this portion of the workshop by saying, “Your role as youth program staff allows you to form relationships with youth that are unique from the other adults in their lives. That being said, we are going to take a minute to reflect on what exactly your role is and what you can offer to youth.”
- Lead the *Your Role as a Youth Worker* activity:
  - Hand out a copy of the *Your Role as a Youth Worker Worksheet* and a pen to each staff member. Have them fill out the worksheet individually.
  - Allocate 10 minutes for staff to fill out their worksheets.
  - Come back together and ask for volunteers to share their answers for each of the questions on the worksheet. Only discuss one question at a time until you feel the responses for that particular question have been exhausted.

### **Activity: *Building Trust* (20-25 minutes)**

- Describe the *Building Trust* activity:
  - Consider introducing this activity by saying, “For this portion of the workshop, you are going to explore important features that make up successful adult-youth relationships. Some qualities that have been identified as important features include the following:
    - Be a friend
    - Have realistic goals and expectations
    - Have fun together
    - Give youth a voice and choice in deciding activities
    - Be positive
    - Let youth have much of the control over what the two of you talk about and how you talk about it
    - Listen
    - Respect the trust the youth places in you
    - Remember that your relationship is with the youth not with their parent(s)
    - Remember that you are responsible for building the relationship”
- Lead the *Building Trust* activity:
  - Break staff participants into smaller groups of two to three individuals.
  - Assign each group at least one of the features listed above (you can also write them on a whiteboard or in a place that everyone can see). Depending on how many groups there are, some may have several features.



- Have each group brainstorm what they think their bullet point(s) look(s) like. For example, for the first bullet point “Be a Friend,” one could say that you
  - Shouldn’t act like a parent
  - Shouldn’t preach about values
  - Should focus on establishing a bond
- Allow approximately 10 to 15 minutes for the groups to come up with their answers.
- Come back together as a larger group to discuss what each group proposed their adult-youth relationship feature looked like.
- *Instructional Aid:* If groups struggled with this activity or did not come up with as many ideas as you may have liked, you can use the resource for this workshop listed under Sources to aid in facilitating the conversation.

### **Activity: Mutual Respect Collage (15 minutes)**

- Describe the *Practicing and Modeling Mutual Respect* activity:
  - What to say, “The next activity focuses on practicing and modeling mutual respect, a quality important for working with youth. For this activity, we are going to remain in the same groups.
- Lead the *Mutual Respect Collage* activity:
  - Pass out a couple pairs of scissors per group, one piece of construction paper, one glue stick, and a pile of newspapers and magazines.
  - Instruct each group to comb through the supplied newspapers and magazines to create a collage depicting mutual respect.
  - *Instructional Aid:* For example, you could cut out the words, “please” and “thank you” or a picture of two individuals shaking hands pleasantly.
  - Give the groups 15 minutes to create their collages.
  - When the groups are finished, place the collages at the front of the room or somewhere everyone can see them.
  - Discuss as a large group what the different collages have in common. Write down a list of staff responses. Ask the staff how mutual respect is important when interacting with youth.

### **Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):**

- Return to the staff’s responses. Ask staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?”



### Resources:

Worksheet: *Your Role as a Youth Worker*

### Sources:

Footnotes in this document can be found as references within the Youth Inclusion Implementation Guide at [http://reach.umn.edu/inclusion/pdf/Youth\\_Inclusion\\_Implementation\\_Manual.pdf](http://reach.umn.edu/inclusion/pdf/Youth_Inclusion_Implementation_Manual.pdf)

The *Your Role as a Youth Worker* activity was adapted from page 36 of the Community Network for Youth Development Relationship Building Training Materials. Retrieved from <http://www.temescalassoc.com/db/lias/files/2015/05/CNYD-Relationship-Building-Module.pdf>

The *Building Trust* activity was created based on the information presented in the following source:

Garringer, M. & Jucovy, L. (2008). Effective strategies for providing quality youth mentoring in schools and communities: Building relationships: A guide for new mentors. The Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence & The National Mentoring Center at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved from [https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/building\\_relationships.pdf](https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/building_relationships.pdf).



