Why Trust Matters: How Confidence in Leaders Transforms What Adolescents Gain From Youth Programs


SUMMARY: Youth who trust their program leaders may be confident and motivated as they participate in their youth program. To better understand youth’s trust in their program leaders, the study examined how trust with program leaders influenced the experience of youth (ages 12-19). One hundred eighty youth participants were interviewed on their perspective of trust and program benefits, and findings indicated that there are five ways in which trust benefits these programs for youth.

KEY FINDINGS:
- Trust made participants feel more confident and willing to follow suggestions of their leaders. Participants' trust had a positive impact on their learning and participation in projects.
- Trust in the leaders made participants feel like they could talk about personal matters. Participants reported that leaders acted as mentors and resources and were always there for the youth.
- Program leaders acted as a model for the youth’s other adult relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:
Military professionals could:
- Collaborate with youth programs to address the importance of building trusting relationships with youth and develop strategies as to how trust in youth programs can be achieved
- Facilitate groups for military parents to examine ways that they may better obtain trusting relationships with their youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Offer workshops for military parents on how to improve trust with their youth and how to maintain trust long-term
- Provide information for families on how trust impacts youth and their current and future adult relationships, and how these relationships may impact their levels of confidence

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Continue to support programs where youth have the opportunity to build trusting relationships with youth program leaders
- Recommend training for youth program leaders on how to gain trust from the youth and strengthen youth-adult relationships

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METHODS

- One hundred eight youth participants (53 male, 55 female) were selected from 13 youth programs. Youth ranged from 12-19 years of age and included 46 Latinos, 36 Blacks, 21 Whites, and five youth of other ethnicities.
- Participants were interviewed four times throughout the course of the program. Fifty-four of the participants were part of the "prospective" subsample and responded to questions at Time 2. The other 54 participants were part of the "retrospective" subsample and responded to questions at Time 4.
- Participants were selected randomly according to a fixed characteristic or quota. This included equal numbers by gender, and was representative of ethnicity and program experience.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included one hundred eight youth (53 male, 55 female) from 13 youth programs, 46 Latinos, 36 Blacks, 21 Whites, and five of other ethnicities. Youth ranged from 12 to 19 years and were chosen nonrandomly according to a specific characteristic or quota.
- Twelve youth were selected from each of the central Illinois sites and eight youth were selected from each urban program.
- Youth attended the program for an average of 1.5 years at the time the study began.

LIMITATIONS

- The perspective of program leaders is needed as trust is generally a two-way process; only having the youth's perspective about youth-adult relationships limits the ability to understand trusting relationships.
- The study does not mention the program's overall setting, peer dynamics, culture, etc.; these factors can affect trust and the relationship between youth and program leaders.
- The youth's need for trust can vary depending on age, socioeconomic status, mental health, etc. These were not discussed in the study; therefore, it is unclear how these factors might have affected levels of trust.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Collect data from the perspective of youth program leaders as well as the youth
- Gather data about the programs, such as culture, peer dynamics, relationships between staff members, etc. to better understand how these factors impact trust
- Examine differences in personal characteristics among youth participants as this may affect their need for or perception of trust

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Appropriate Research Plan and Sample

Methods

Excellent Measurement and Analysis

Limitations

Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works