

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## How to Support Me in Connected Learning: Youth Perspectives on Adult Supportive Behavior and Its Benefits

Vaclavik, D., Sánchez, B., Buehler, K., Gray, T., & Rodriguez, E. (2017). How to support me in connected learning: Youth perspectives on adult supportive behavior and its benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology, 45*, 906-921.  
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**SUMMARY:** Youth programs are designed to support youth development; however, not much is known about youth's own perspectives of what adult behaviors are most supportive. This study interviewed 26 youth from out-of-school time programs on their perspectives of adult-youth relationships; the interviews were in the form of focus groups. Results revealed what characteristics of adult behaviors were most supportive from youth's perspectives, and also reported the benefits of such behaviors.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth identified four supportive behaviors of adults: fostering mutual respect, encouraging ongoing communication and friendship, demonstrating genuine interest, and going above and beyond.
- According to the youth, program staff could provide support in six methods: guidance and motivation, role modeling, emotional support, skill-based support, connecting, and cultivating youth voice.
- Youth benefited from adult support by having increased social capital, a sense of empowerment, and a sense of acceptance and validation.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with youth program staff to create a supportive environment for youth of Service members
- Attend training about youth development to enhance their ability to provide support to youth

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for youth whose parents are Service members so that they can discuss issues and concerns related to aspects of military life that impact them the most
- Provide workshops for Service members and spouses on effective ways to build positive relationships with their youth

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of best practice guidelines for youth program staff who work with youth of Service members
- Recommend professional development of professionals who work with youth of Service members on how to build positive adult-youth relationships

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from five out-of-school time programs in Chicago by advertisements.
- Data were collected by focus group discussions on adult-youth relationships; each focus group lasted from 90 to 120 minutes, and the number of participants in each focus group was not reported.
- Data were coded and analyzed to examine ways adults can support youth in out-of-school time programs.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 26 adolescents (15 females and 11 males).
- The average age of participants was 17.35 years (SD = 1.72, age range = 15-21 years).
- The majority of participants were Black (50%), followed by Latino (35%), Asian American (12%), Native American (8%), and White (8%) (participants could report more than one race/ethnicity).

## LIMITATIONS

- The study was conducted in one city; therefore, caution must be taken to generalize the results to other geographical areas.
- It was unclear how many participants were in each focus group, which may potentially affect the outcome of the study.
- Youth who chose to participate in the study may have different perspectives than youth who chose not to participate; therefore, caution should be taken to apply the findings to the general youth population.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit participants from different geographical areas to increase the generalizability of the study
- Examine the effect of youth's gender and age on their perspectives of good adult-youth relationships
- Investigate the long-term benefit of good adult-youth relationships on youth development

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