



Defining a Safe & Trusted Adult

1. Provide a relationship that is on the youth's terms & mutually agreed upon

- a. Establish **mutual** boundaries early on, and recognize that boundaries fluctuate and are not universal across all youth
- b. Respect boundaries whether verbalized or not
- c. Ensure boundaries cover moments of crisis
- d. Communicate what support and advice is helpful
 - *There isn't any "one size fits all approach" to interacting with youth*

2. Express care, prioritize connection, and reciprocate trust and vulnerability

- a. Provide ways to strengthen relationships in safe, comfortable settings
- b. Provide opportunities for youth to bond with their peers
- c. Treat youth as equals
 - *Treat youth equally and with respect*
 - *Don't infantilize them nor expect them to be as experienced as adults*
 - *Keep topics appropriate, respect boundaries, & follow rules of the space you're in*
- d. Build trust by connecting with youth through shared experiences
 - *Understand the difference between sympathy and empathy*

3. Empower youth, challenge them to grow, and provide community

- a. Encourage them to go after their goals **AND** help plan small actionable steps to take towards achieving the goal
- b. Holding them accountable for their actions and promises
 - *Recognize bad days and previously set boundaries from youth. Don't push youth too hard, there are often a multitude of other things going on in their lives*
 - *When youth fall short on goals/promises, forgive, help them plan to catch up, and/or make amends*
- c. Foster outside community and other connections/resources/supports
 - *Provide and encourage youth to access other supports that help "cover the gaps" of your organization*
 - *Ensure that the youth has a well-rounded support system*

4. Be inclusive: take consideration to be culturally competent & trauma-informed in their words & actions

- a. Take time to learn about how youth identify, things culturally important to them, and how their culture/identity impacts their mental health
 - *Ask youth directly!! If you don't understand a term or pronoun, ask youth to explain. This shows that you care and respect them and their identity.*



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- b. Coordinate and accept youth's wishes for alternative therapies and/or religious care. Respect all beliefs and cultural needs!
- c. Connect youth with supports/providers that look like them and/or share lived experiences
 - *Recognize your own biases, misconceptions, and areas you lack knowledge*

5. Take accountability when they make mistakes and apologize/provide support when their actions cause youth distress/harm

- a. Everyone makes mistakes, but how you respond to them determines whether the relationship will be strengthened or weakened
- b. When you make a mistake or do something that causes harm—**regardless of your intention—there will be an impact.** Making space for this, and not glossing over the hurt, will allow you to rebuild the relationship.

6. Encourage youth to lead and provide the necessary support and education to let youth effectively thrive in leadership positions/situations

- a. Youth ladder of participation
 - Routinely discuss youth concerns and ideas. Let youth rate where they feel they fall on the ladder and discuss disconnects along with steps to improve
- b. Act as positive role models through your interactions with youth, coworkers, and other adults

Extra Points

- Trusted/safe adults take care of their own mental health.
 - *You can't reliably support others if you're not supporting yourself*
 - *Have a well-rounded support system you can rely on*
 - *It goes back to management and workforce support*
- These definitions/ideas all connect together, you cannot have one without the other.
- Utilize resources (coworkers, management, other organizations, worksheets, etc).
 - Especially with youth who are part of marginalized communities or have lived experiences that you can't connect with as well
- Being trusted, safe, trauma-informed, and culturally competent is a continuous process. Continue to learn! Attend, actively engage with, and actively apply training, especially training surrounding trauma-informed and/or culturally competent care.
- Be patient with youth and yourself, developing trust and feeling safe takes time.
- **Context matters:** a formal treatment setting might be different from a relationship in a classroom, community, or faith-based setting, or with a friend, mentor, or Starbucks barista.