ELO Expanded Learning Opportunities

Two-Minute Tips

This Week's Topic: Understanding Youth

Understanding the youth in your program means that you're actively getting to know them as individual people. Using that knowledge, you can make connections and integrate that information into programming. Build your understanding of the youth in your program and apply that knowledge by referencing it in future conversations. Alter programing to build off young participants' backgrounds and personal interests. These modifications help establish strong relationships within your program. Establishing strong relationships with youth by showing them you understand their backgrounds and interests helps create an emotionally safe environment where participants may thrive.[1]

Practice Tips

Here are a few quick tips to build your understanding of the youth in your program.[2]

Practice Active Listening

Make eye contact, nod, and keep your body oriented towards the speaker. You can paraphrase during your conversations to show young people you're truly listening.
Example: "Oh, during recess today you felt like…"

Use Open-Ended Questions

Asking open-ended questions, that require more than one-word responses, about their lives outside of program helps you get to know participants as whole, individual people.
Example: "What was that like?" or "Why was that your favorite part?"

Remember What is Shared with You

Try to remember, and then later reference, past conversations you've had with youth. You can also reference past shared experiences.
Example: "Hey Ellie, I remembered us talking about how you like to learn about airplanes. I think you'll really like our activity today, because we're going to learn how to make fast paper airplanes."

Support Their Passions and Activities[3]

Seek out times to talk with individual youth and learn about what their interests, passions, and favorite activities are. If you're looking for a time to connect, you can try to chat with a youth during snack or free play. Notice what each youth in your program does well, and what they struggle with. Tap into their interests and strengths when designing program offerings.
Example: You notice that many youth are bringing Pokémon cards to program. You also know that some youth enjoy writing stories in school. In program, you have a Pokémon story day, where all youth practice writing stories about their Pokémon adventures and then share them with the group.

Tips in Action!

Watch Drue Miller at the Robinson Center share more strategies for understanding your participants and applying that knowledge to your program offerings

Want more two-minute tips?

Check out our website. There you will find the latest tip, and an archive of past tips.

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[1]Phipps, S. (2013, August 18). *Connecting with youth—strategies for relationship building*. Richardson, TX & Drayton Valley, AB: The Mandt System. Retrieved from http://www.mandtsystem.com/blog/connecting-with-youth-strategies-for-relationship-building/

[2]Ham, H. (2015, August 18). *10 tips: Building relationships with youth*. Oakton, VA: National Afterschool Association. Retrieved from https://naaweb.org/professional-development/item/380-10-tips-for-building-relationships-with-youth

[3]Shafer, B. (n.d.) *Tips for building vip relationships with youth*. Madison, WI: FYI Extension. Retrieved from https://fyi.uwex.edu/ncrvd/files/2015/04/Tips-for-Building-Relationships-with-Youth.pdf