AMP’s Top Ten Tips for Engaging with Young People

Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University
AMP’s Top Ten Tips for Engaging with Young People

1. **Ask one open-ended question and STOP!**
   Avoid stacking questions or capping an open-ended question that is immediately followed by a closed-ended question, suggestion or a lengthy explanation.

   - **Examples of What to Say**
     - What do you like to do for fun?
     - What type of support do you want?
     - What do you think the steps are for renting an apartment?

   - **Examples of What NOT to Say**
     - What do you like to do for fun? Do you like to hang out with your friends?
     - What type of support do you want? I bet your uncle would be willing to help.
     - What do you think the steps are for renting an apartment? When renting an apartment there are lots of things to consider like location, cost, eligibility, roommates, and terms of the lease.

2. **Ask a question before offering a suggestion.** If you think that the young person might be missing something or needs more information, guide them to it by asking questions rather than telling them what to do or what to consider.

   - **Examples of What to Say**
     - I wonder if there might be a fee to sign up for the drama class?
     - How do you plan on getting there?
     - What would you say if your girlfriend says...

   - **Examples of What NOT to Say**
     - You can ask your caseworker if she can pay for the drama class fee.
     - You’ll probably need to take the bus to get there.
     - You could try telling your girlfriend...

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Follow up with a question or reflection any time a young person says something that seems particularly important, meaningful, or personal; or takes a risk, or mentions something more than once.

Keep it conversational. When you are doing a worksheet or a structured piece of curriculum with a young person try to make it more conversational by using reflections; follow up questions; and positive body language, like nodding your head, to show that you are genuinely interested in what they are talking about. Sometimes it’s okay to “just go with it” if you and the youth get off track; this can build rapport. You can always gently redirect them by using a reflection or open-ended question.

Make sure the praise is purposeful when you give the young person praise or highlight one of their strengths. Try to avoid only giving one word responses like “awesome,” “nice,” or “cool.”
Congratulate the young person every step of the way to achieving their goals. The smaller steps are just as important, so make sure to acknowledge and celebrate those, too.

Highlight all of the goals, ideas, strengths, and activities that the young person comes up with. Avoid showing preference for the things that you agree with or feel like the young person should be working towards.

Prompt the young person to think about the support they might want to do something. This is especially important when the young person is planning on doing a difficult task or trying something new. Make sure that the young person is the one deciding on who they want to support them and how they would like to be supported.
Check to see if the young person has any other ideas to add before prompting the young person to move on to a new topic. This is especially important when the young person is brainstorming.

Ask the young person if they would like to do the writing if you are making some kind of take-away document or notes. If you are writing for the young person make sure that you are using words they choose. Avoid paraphrasing or summarizing their ideas for them. Instead encourage the young person to think about exactly how they want things to be recorded.

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