

## TEN TIPS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH

*By Heidi Ham, VP of Programs and Strategy, National AfterSchool Association*

Building positive relationships with youth is an essential task and a foundational component of good instructional practice. Youth grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, and responsive interactions. A positive adult-youth relationship built on trust, understanding, and caring will foster children's cooperation and motivation and increase their positive outcomes at school (Webster-Stratton, 1999). These 10 tips will help afterschool professionals build positive relationships with youth.

**1 MEET AND GREET YOUTH DAILY BY NAME**, at the door, to make a personal connection. "Hi Amani, good to see you today. How did your math test go?" "Jordan, hello. I saw you playing outside earlier. It looked like you were having fun!"

**2 TALK WITH YOUTH AT THEIR LEVEL**, both physically and developmentally, to convey respect and establish a level playing field. For younger youth this may mean kneeling near them; for older youth, sitting next to them. A 7-year-old has much different developmental needs than a 12-year-old, and language and approach should be tailored accordingly.

**3 ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND LISTEN** to learn more about where youth are coming from, and their backgrounds, interests, and feelings. "How did that make you feel?" "What was that like?"

**4 ENCOURAGE YOUTH** by asking questions and providing specific comments to convey interest in what the youth is saying. "What happened next?" "How did you come up with your idea?"

**5 REFLECT OR PARAPHRASE DURING CONVERSATIONS** with youth to show that you are listening and that you understand. "So, you feel that ..."

**6 WATCH FOR COMMUNICATION ROADBLOCKS** such as

lecturing, judging, and preaching, to ensure that you are keeping doors open for dialogue.

**7 REMEMBER CONTEXT AND DETAILS** from past conversations and experiences with students, to show that you are paying attention and interested in their lives. "How did the baseball game go last weekend?" "I know that you had a test today. How do you think it went?" "We're having string cheese with our snack today. I remember a couple of weeks ago you told me it was your favorite."

**8 PARTICIPATE ALONGSIDE YOUTH** to show that you're interested, and to model risk-taking, planning, and reflecting. "How do you think we should prepare?" "How would you like to start?" "What did you think of that activity?" "What should we do differently next time?"

**9 SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH INPUT, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, AND LEADERSHIP** to help youth develop a positive self-efficacy and important life skills. "Your ideas on how we should approach this are important. What do you think we should do?" "How would you feel about leading the group meeting tomorrow?" "What do you think you could do to help?" "What do you think we could do to make it better?"

**10 SMILE, HAVE FUN, AND SHOW YOUTH THAT YOU ENJOY WHAT YOU DO!**

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**SEE MORE AT:** <http://naaweb.org/resources/item/380-10-tips-for-building-relationships-with-youth>

### **OPENING DISCUSSION**

Which tips seem like they'd be easy to implement?

Which tips might be more difficult or will take additional practice to implement?

What questions or other thoughts do you have about the article?

### **APPLICATION ACTIVITY**

Think about a recent day in your program:

Give an example of one of the tips in action.

Give an example of how you could have used one of the tips but didn't. How would the outcome have been different?

### **CLOSING REFLECTION**

Do a stoplight reflection think and share about the following based on information from the article and discussion:

**Red Light** – one thing to stop doing

**Yellow Light** – one thing to continue doing

**Green Light** – one thing to start doing

# **CERTIFICATE** of PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## TEN TIPS FOR BUILDING **RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH**

\_\_\_\_\_ **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HOURS, EARNED BY:**

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### **CONTENT INCLUDED:**

Meet and Greet Youth • Talk With Youth at Their Level • Ask Open-Ended Questions and Listen  
Encourage Youth • Reflect or Paraphrase • Watch for Communication Roadblocks  
Remember Context and Details • Participate Alongside Children and Youth  
Support Opportunities for Youth Input, Shared Responsibility, and Leadership

**FACILITATOR:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

- | List three ways to build relationships with youth.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
- | What are two strategies for encouraging youth?
  - a.
  - b.
  
- | What is the value of using these tips?