



Resource: **Tips for Working With Youth**

Developed by the Advocates for Youth's Teen Council
& the Young Women's Project, Washington, DC

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- ★ **Be open to and nonjudgmental when it comes to young people's insights and suggestions. Let them know that their involvement is important.**
- ★ **Take advantage of the expertise that youth offer. Young people know about, and should be encouraged to share the needs of their community. Affirm this input.**
- ★ **Make sure youth will participate in meaningful ways. Young people should be involved in making decisions from the beginning of the project. Actively ask for their opinions.**
- ★ **Be honest about expectations for the project, what you want the youth to contribute, and how you hope to benefit from youth participation. Don't expect more from a young person than you would from an adult. Keep expectations realistic and hold young people to those expectations. Do not patronize youth by lowering expectations.**
- ★ **Integrate young people into group and coalition efforts. Schedule meetings when youth can attend and in a location accessible to them. Like everyone else, keep young people informed about plans and meeting times.**
- ★ **Treat youth as individuals. Don't assume one young person represents the views of many youth. Assure the young person that you are interested in her/his individual opinion and don't expect him/her to speak for an entire population.**

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- ★ **Be prepared ahead of time to offer help. Think about the kinds of support (financial, logistical, training, emotional, etc.) it will take to involve youth in the project, and who will be responsible for providing this support.**
- ★ **Make the work interactive, fun, and valuable. Like adults, youth are more likely to get involved and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling.**
- ★ **Many young people feel intimidated by adults and are not used to participating in discussions with adults. Some may feel they have nothing to contribute. It will require time and commitment to get the input of these youth. Be aware of this factor and work to overcome it.**
- ★ **Don't make assumptions about what individual young people are like.**
- ★ **Don't move too fast. Remember that it takes time to develop trust and rapport with youth because some youth are unsure about adults' intentions. Take the time and make the effort to develop a good relationship with them before expecting much. Remember, too, that this work is often new to youth; take the time to explain why actions are being taken. Youth may interpret adults' being abrupt and hurried as a sign of disinterest in youth's participation; so go slow and explain what's going on.**
- ★ **Remember that there are times when youth need to say "No." They have many competing interests and responsibilities in their lives. Their education is important. Their relationships, families and communities are important. Having fun is important. They need time and energy for these interests and responsibilities, too.**