POETRY IN MOTION:
IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS
Lesson Plan

Objectives:
Engage participants in a structured conversation to set the tone for effective youth-adult partnerships
Get ideas out on the table and give participants a chance to be heard

Advance Preparation: Create three or four sets of the Poetry in Motion cards. Each set should have 20 cards (one word or symbol per card). Use brightly colored paper cut into shapes (i.e. circles, triangles or squares), and write the words in large, bold letters. The 20 cards are:
• a
• adult
• and
• are
• bigger
• creativity
• community
• expanding
• harnessing
• healthy
• in
• include
• of
• partnership
• talent
• the
• to
• together
• youth
• !

Materials Needed: 3-4 sets of Poetry in Motion cards
Time Needed: 45 minutes.

Background:
The building of youth-adult partnerships takes place during all phases of work, from start to finish. Some specific tools and activities can be helpful, as you embark on forming new partnerships. When most groups start talking about and forming youth-adult partnerships, they focus on exploring the basic principles and values of partnerships, which include the following ideas:
• Acknowledging that everyone has something to say and that everyone should be listened to equally.
• Adults publicly saying that they respect youth, and youth publicly saying that they respect adults.
• Understanding that there is a difference between doing something with youth and doing something for youth.

A successful youth-adult partnership, like any type of partnership or relationship, is not created overnight. Youth-adult partnerships can be especially challenging simply because they are not the traditional way in which we relate to each other.
• A few conditions must be in place for your partnership effort to succeed:
  - Adults need to be willing to share their power and responsibility.
  - Youth need to be willing to gain power and take on responsibility.
  - Both youth and adults need the skills to work successfully together.
  - Everyone needs to forget everything they have ever thought about youth and adults as separate groups and start treating them the way they would treat their peers.

Adults need to remember these principles:
1. Don’t expect more from a youth than you would from another adult. If a young person shows up for a meeting 15 minutes late, an adult might think “Aha, a slacker.” When a fellow adult shows up 15 minutes late, the same person might think, “That’s understandable. That person has deadlines and pressures.” So do young people!
2. Treat young people as individuals; don’t make one youth represent all youth. Young people understand that adults may carry negative images of youth and may generalize from the behavior of a few young people. Assure young people that you are interested in their individual opinions, and don’t expect them to embody an entire population.
3. Be careful about interruptions when young people are speaking. For the partnership to work, young people must feel that they are valued and respected. In many youth-adult partnerships, that respect is lacking. When interrupted by an adult, young people tend to stop.
talking. Both parties need to respect each other’s right to voice opinions without criticism. Remember that the adult’s role in a partnership is not to parent! Although being a parent may be the most important role an adult can play, the purpose of youth-adult partnerships is to give both parties a different way to relate to each other.

4. It’s okay to ask for help when you don’t know how to do something!

Youth need to remember these principles:
1. Criticism doesn’t necessarily equate to condescension. Sometimes when adults offer criticism to a youth, they are treating the youth the same way they would a colleague. Remember that adults are used to critiquing others’ ideas. Just because they disagree, it doesn’t mean they are dismissing you (offering constructive criticism).
2. Adults may not be aware of how capable you are. Maybe they don’t know any youth your age, so they don’t know what to expect. You can enlighten them by showing them you can handle mature situations.
3. Adults will feel responsible for the success or failure of the project. That is why it is hard for adults to share power and authority. They need reassurance that you are willing to share in the successes and failures.
4. It’s okay to ask for help when you don’t know how to do something.

**INTEREST APPROACH:** Think about a time when you were a part of a successful youth-adult partnership. Get responses to the following questions.

- What do you remember?
- How did it feel?
- What made it work?

Visualize a youth-adult partnership. What are some of the characteristics that are important to you? Note the answers on a flipchart for all participants to see.

When all ideas are captured, ask the group the following questions:

- Which ideas stand out as most important?
- Which will be hardest to achieve?
- Which ideas are you most interested in working toward?

**ACTIVITY:** Tell participants they are going to do a word scramble to help them organize the concepts they have been discussing into a statement reflecting their ideas. Divide the participants into groups of 3-5 participants, and give each group a set of the Poetry in Motion cards.

Post the following statement on the wall or on a media presentation:
“Effective youth-adult partnerships…”

Have groups arrange their word cards to complete the sentence. All cards must be used. Give each group 5-10 minutes to complete the task. When all groups are finished, ask a representative from each group to present the group’s sentence. Option: Post each group’s statement on the wall.

After the group presentations, ask the following questions:

- What common themes do you see?
- What insights have you had that you ant to be mindful of as you work in youth-adult partnerships?

**REFLECTION & DISCUSSION:** Ask the group to make a commitment: “As you move forward in building a youth-adult partnership, what are you committed to?” Gather a few statements from the group and write them on a flipchart. Seek consensus among the participants, with everyone agreeing to work on these commitments.

**REFERENCES:** This lesson was taken and adapted from “Youth-Adult Partnerships: A Training Manual” (2003) The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National Network for Youth, youth Leadership Institute.

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