

HOW TO BUILD MORE AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



FROM THE MAINE RESILIENCE BUILDING NETWORK



Connectedness and a sense of mattering are some of the strongest protective factors we can offer children who need extra support.



BE YOURSELF

Young people, just like adults, are fully capable of telling the difference between sincerity and pretense. It's important to both model and live the value of being comfortable as yourself. This kind of visible self-love encourages young people to embrace their own identities and full selves too!

LET THEM MAKE DECISIONS

Young people have few opportunities to make decisions for themselves. Encourage self-determination by offering them the opportunity to pick where to go to dinner, the music playing in the car, or even what color to paint a communal space! It's important not to force them to make decisions, however, just offer them the opportunity.



MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

Accept that some young people are not interested in connecting with adults they don't know. Respect their boundaries.

Use the technology they use if that is possible. We are lucky there are so many ways for us to communicate with young people!

Be aware of generational differences. In general, young adults have different values, language, technology dependence, and expectations when compared to older adults. Consider socioeconomic differences, sexual orientation, and gender identity too!



CULTIVATE LISTENING AS A LIFE SKILL

Listening is an active and evolving skill for all of us. When communicating with young people, listening takes on an even more important role in developing trust.

Ask open ended questions and then stop to listen. What do their answers say about who they are? What are their values? What are their goals? Listen to learn!

Offer a reflection when a young person says something meaningful, important, or personal, or mentions something often if it seems appropriate. "I'm hearing you say... Is that right?"



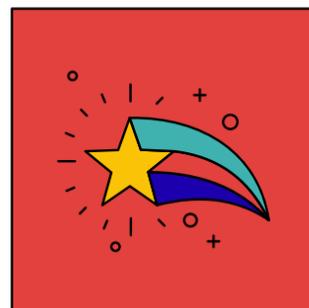
OFFER CONSISTENCY AND FLEXIBILITY

Many young people who need extra support crave consistency but often cannot meet that same requirement. Be flexible about meeting times and locations. Help with transportation if you can. Set up reminders and work on developing measurements for accountability if that is appropriate.



WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Praise effort and be descriptive! "I love the way you didn't give up when you met an obstacle. That was really inspiring!" We all need to hear validation. Sometimes a well-placed congratulations on an accomplishment (big OR small) can make all the difference in our self-esteem.



One supportive adult relationship can change the entire trajectory of a child's life.