

## 10 Ways for Adults to Create Healthy Youth-Adult Partnerships

**G**LSSEN encourages adults involved in safe schools organizing at the local, state or national level to create and maintain healthy and positive youth-adult partnerships. A major part of that is recognizing that *adulthood—the oppression of, prejudice toward or discrimination against young people because of their age—is alive and well in this society. Being aware of adultist assumptions and behaviors—as well as adult privilege—as you engage with youth as partners in this work will create healthy and effective youth-adult partnerships. Youth or students, as defined by GLSEN, includes anyone in middle school or high school, although most of these tips could also be applied to work with all people, regardless of age. Please read below for some great ideas on how to effectively include youth in your organizing efforts!*

### 1. Involve young people from the start

It's important that when you begin working with students you provide them with significant leadership roles. Have them involved in your planning from the start, and take their suggestions seriously, just as you would with other adults. Not only is it important that you listen to young peoples' voices, but also provide them with the opportunity to create change and be an active member of the team.

### 2. Listen

Provide students with a space where they are comfortable, safe and supported. It's important to listen carefully and try to understand their perspectives. Allow them to realize the strength of their voices and opinions, by not only listening, but also involving them in decision-making opportunities.



### 3. Remember—everyone has potential

Because of adultism, many young people tend to be ignored and not given the opportunity to express their ideas. Always remember that you can learn something from each person you work with, regardless of their age! Allow students to find their own answers and make mistakes. Provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths while supporting and nurturing their challenges.

### 4. Be a role model

As the old saying goes, "Practice what you preach!" Be consistent in your actions and in what you say. Always remember, even when you think they are not watching, students may be observing your every move and learning from you. As a trusted adult, you must remain appropriate and know your limits when working with young people. Remember, you are not their friend nor their peer – but someone they can learn from and model after.

### 5. Share your wisdom and experiences

When working with young people, it's important for everyone involved to share relevant experiences and wisdom. Provide students with a sense of why you do the work you do and what keeps you going, and ask that they share the same with you! Remember, you don't always need to have all the answers; you are allowed to make mistakes. Students will appreciate your honesty and the fact that the partnership is a constant learning experience for all those involved.



## **6. Don't be afraid to say "I Don't Know"**

As you continue to build relationships with young people, many will begin to trust you. At times, they will share situations that might surprise you or leave you speechless. When asked for advice, don't be afraid to say "I don't know what to say right now, but I will try to help you find the resources you need." As a trusted adult, you should seek resources that will help the student with whatever they are facing. This student is putting their trust in you, so get back to them as soon as possible with any suggestions or referrals you offer. For those acting as representatives of GLSEN, remember, we are not a direct

service organization, but we can certainly refer people—be they youth or adults—to organizations that provide that direct support.

## **7. Develop the 3 G's: guidelines, goals and growth**

It is important to set GUIDELINES. Remember to make sure the work that you do, what you speak of, and how you interact with youth is age-appropriate. These guidelines need to be set to make the safest environment possible for all students involved. Set GOALS. Remember, don't aim too high, or failure might be inevitable; don't aim too low, or it's proof that you are not trusting the student's potential. Create these goals together, as a partnership. Encourage GROWTH. This process will be a growing experience for everyone involved. Allow the space to make mistakes, share achievements and develop your skills. Create a system where you can hold every team member accountable and provide assistance if things are not going as planned.

## **8. Be a resource**

As a member of a safe schools campaign or local/national organization, you may have access to resources that young people might not have (although the opposite may also be true!). Whether it's connecting them with a local community organization, or providing them with the resources necessary for them to complete their tasks, encourage students' success by providing them the necessary support.

## **9. Provide an opportunity for reflection**

Some of the work you regularly engage in might be new to many young people, and new experiences can be intense for people of any age. Remember to take the opportunity to process and reflect on the work you are doing. Don't allow the students to become overwhelmed or feel unsupported. As an adult in a leadership role, it is your responsibility to create a forum where they can share their experiences and re-energize for the work to come. Create journals, write about your experiences and share your challenges and achievements. And remember, these opportunities for reflection can be useful for everyone involved in safe schools work, not just young people!

## **10. Finally, have fun!**

ALWAYS, remember to have fun! The work that we do is not easy, so make sure you make it as fun as possible. Once you are done with your project or you sense spirit is down, celebrate your successes and all your hard work by having a pizza party, a bowling trip, or something that is fun and demonstrates your appreciation of the students'—and adults'—hard work! Avoid burn out and create a fun, productive and working atmosphere!

