



TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Engagement is a process that builds confidence in young people and encourages participation. Engagement leads to strong, respectful relationships where contributions – big or small – are valued.

When you're just starting out with young people, relationship dynamics have yet to be established. However, young people are likely to look to you to take the lead. In some cases, young people may seem reluctant to start talking or to answer questions. There are some fundamental ideas that can encourage participation.

BE GENUINE AND RESPECTFUL

- Be yourself; speak as you normally would to anyone else.
- Use plain language, but don't dumb down.
- Don't fake or overact emotions.
- Be genuine and respectful. Don't make assumptions or discriminate based on age.
- Avoid being judgemental; and show understanding when they share their ideas.

ESTABLISH COMMON GROUND

- Check regularly that the young person has understood what you are saying.
- Provide information or clarification on ideas or concepts that may be new to them.
- Clarify what the young person wants from you, so that you work towards the same goals.
- Be flexible; tailor what you do and how you do it to the situation. Use metaphor and humour (when appropriate) to build rapport.

SET BOUNDARIES

- Be open about your own life and experiences, but don't share detailed, personal information. Your personal experiences should underscore discussions about general issues – not be the focus of conversation.
- Some young people might try to test the boundaries. Tell them that the information is personal or the topic is private. You can change the subject or ask a question that raises the issue in a more general way.
- Establish agreed goals for what you both want to work on, and be clear about the areas where you cannot help.
- Balance talking about what the young person wants with what you think might help. Keep in mind that the purpose of MyRoad is to build confidence and resilience so that the young person is able to make their own decisions.

SHOW INTEREST

- Be honestly interested in what the young person has to say. Pay attention when young people are talking, and practice reflective listening.
- If there is a group of young people, try to engage everyone in the conversation, not just the most vocal young people.
- Be aware that young people from some cultural backgrounds may regard eye contact as rude, or be silent as a mark of respect.
- It takes time to build trust – some young people may not want to talk or share their story until they've met you a few times.
- Take a curious, non-intrusive and respectful stance.

GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE LEAD

- Treat the young person as being responsible and capable of making their own decisions.
- Don't monopolise – let young people take the lead when appropriate
- Break down barriers to participation – it may be simply a matter of access to information or a chance to collect their thoughts.
- Avoid getting into a controlling, authoritarian position by explaining that you are there to work with and alongside them.
- Ask them to tell you what they already know or what skills and experience they already have. Highlight instances where they have demonstrated their skills and experience – they may not be aware of their abilities.