

Forming Influential Relationships with Young People

When you form or extend influential relationships with young people, you take the initiative. You interact with young people you don't usually interact with, and not just in the usual places. Think of young people not as stereotypes, but as people, so that wherever you see them—in a line in the grocery, on the street, in a theater—you have an opportunity to make them feel that they matter.

In “real life,” you form relationships with people on different levels. Some people are acquaintances, others are colleagues, still others are friends, and maybe a few are family and those you love. Your relationships with young people can also vary in intensity, ranging from students you recognize in the hall to young people in your own family. Consider the following strategies as belonging to a continuum of levels. Using a young person's name or nickname is a good first level for forming a relationship, but that's all it is—a first level. Learning something about the young person is another level, and identifying and encouraging the young person's strengths and talents is a significant level further. When you actually change your routine to do something for or with the young person and then maintain contact—that's when you've probably formed a respectful, caring, genuine relationship.

Level 1, Making Connections. Use the young person's name or nickname.

Level 2, Getting to Know Young People. Learn something about the young person.

- What does the young person like to do?
- What does the young person avoid doing?
- What are the young person's strengths?
- What does the young person need?
- What's going on in the young person's life?

Level 3, Identifying and Encouraging Young People's Strengths and Talents.

Support the young person through talking, listening, and observing.

Level 4, Challenging Young People. Help the young person to set goals, follow through with affirmations, and acknowledge rules and their consequences.

Level 5, Focusing on Building Specific Assets. Do something for or with the young person outside your routine that helps promote specific assets.

- Attend an athletic event that the young person is participating in.
- Sponsor an activity that the young person is participating in.
- Meet after school to help the young person with a project.
- Learn something together with the young person.
- Eat lunch with the young person.
- E-mail the young person.

Level 6, Maintaining Relationships. Maintain contact.

- Follow up with the young person.
- Remember the young person on birthdays and holidays.