

Building Trust and Rapport with Youth

Trust and rapport are critical for working with youth. The following considerations provide insight on how to effectively build rapport and trust with youth and should be adapted to fit each relationship, as one size does not fit all.

Check your bias and create space for self-reflection. Take an honest inventory of personal reactions and biases on an ongoing basis. Avoid allowing biases or personal experience to interfere with providing objective, clear and concise advice, and regularly check your ability to be neutral.¹ [The Implicit Bias Workbook](#) provides sample questions and exercises to aid in the self-reflection process.

Consider the developmental factors of the youth you serve. It is important to take into consideration the age of the youth you serve and their developmental level. Understanding the following developmental factors that can contribute to youth awareness, maturation and experiences, is essential as you work to develop rapport and trust.²



COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

(including learning and emotional abilities)



PHYSICAL HEALTH MILESTONES



GENDER

(including gender identity)



CULTURAL IDENTITY



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

(including favorite/strong subjects, learning style)



HOME ENVIRONMENT

(including personal social supports)



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



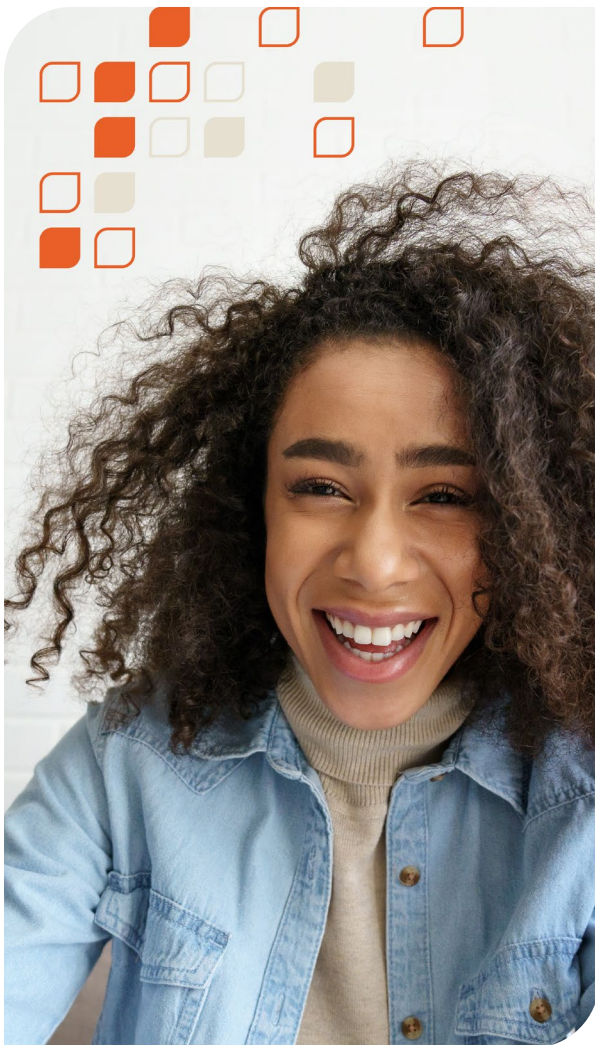
TRAUMA HISTORY

Build developmental relationships. Developmental relationships help youth discover who they are, gain the skills necessary to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.⁴ The Search Institute provides a [framework](#) for building developmental relationships with youth, grounded in establishing trust and improving the growth of the youth served.

- **EXPRESS CARE** by actively listening, being dependable, encouraging and warm.
- **CHALLENGE GROWTH** by communicating clear and high expectations, reinforcing accountability and building space for self-reflection.
- **PROVIDE SUPPORT** by empowering, advocating and providing guidance through difficult situations.
- **SHARE POWER** by creating an open and respectful environment and fostering collaboration.
- **EXPAND POSSIBILITIES** by exposing youth to new ideas and providing connections.

CREATE A **WELCOMING,** DISTRACTION-FREE AND **SAFE** ENVIRONMENT.

Providers can take the following steps to create conditions that enhance the ability to communicate with and build trust with the youth you serve.³



- **PRACTICE CULTURALLY HUMBLE CARE.** It is important to create an environment where youth feel heard and respected, free from microaggressions. By being open and inquisitive, you can learn more about a young person's culture, history and beliefs and avoid unconscious biases.
- **REDUCE VISUAL, AUDITORY AND/OR MOTION STIMULATION** that cause anxiety and distractions. If meeting in a room with a television, window or other obvious distraction, have the youth sit with their back to the distraction.
- **CONSIDER WHERE YOU PHYSICALLY SIT** in relation to the young person. Sitting beside or catty-corner shows you are side-by-side working on issues together.
- **CONSIDER THE IMPACT YOUR BODY LANGUAGE HAS** on the meeting environment and tone. Face the youth you serve, make comfortable eye contact and lean in slightly.
- **LOOK AT MATERIALS TOGETHER** to show you are supporting them.
- **USE LANGUAGE YOUTH UNDERSTAND** while being mindful of not coming across as condescending or talking down to them. Avoid jargon, acronyms, complicated language and compound or excessively long sentences.
- **TRANSLATE WRITTEN MATERIALS INTO THE YOUNG PERSON'S PRIMARY LANGUAGE.** Arrange for an interpreter if you anticipate difficulty communicating.
- **SHOW THAT YOU ARE SUPPORTIVE OF ALL BACKGROUNDS.** Incorporate items such as signage indicating inclusivity and acceptance, display community-specific resources and ask the youth's preferred pronouns.

Foster transformational relationships. The Center for the Study of Policy’s Transformational Relationships for Youth Success [framework](#) provides guidance on how to foster transformational relationship building with youth that can improve the outcomes for youth who face adversity.⁵

- **START WITH YOUTH BEING HEARD.** Allow youth to speak while you listen without judgment. You will be surprised about how much they reveal when given the space to speak openly and authentically without censorship.
- **INVOLVE PERSISTENCE OVER TIME.** Be patient, resilient and allow the relationship to develop at its own pace.
- **REQUIRE ADULT ALLIES TO BE “REAL.”** Share information about yourself, being mindful to not overshare or dominate the conversation. Allow space to find points of connection, such as a shared allegiance to a sports team or favorite musician. If applicable, convey an understanding of the youth’s background, whether from having similar experiences growing up or through relationships with other youth.
- **CHALLENGE YOUTH.** After a relationship is established, challenge youth to “do better” and encourage them to reflect on and improve their actions.
- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CRISES.** Show up when not expected, stand by youth when they’re in trouble, and help them distinguish moments of failure from being a failure.

LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES?

- [Implicit Bias Workbook: An opportunity to reflect and develop a plan to serve your clients better](#)
- [COVID-19: Building Rapport via Telehealth](#)
- [Five Out of the Box Techniques for Encouraging Teenagers to Engage in Counseling](#)
- [Developing Rapport and Therapeutic Alliance During Telemental Health Sessions with Children and Adolescents](#)
- [Cultural Humility vs. Cultural Competency: What’s the Difference?](#)
- [Relationships First: Creating Connections That Help Young People Thrive](#)
- [Transformational Relationships for Youth Success](#)

GLOSSARY

Bias: Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person or group compared with another, usually in a way that's considered to be unfair.⁶

Unconscious bias: Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.⁷

Microaggression: Verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.⁸

Developmental factors: Conditions and variables that influence emotional, intellectual, social and physical development from conception to maturity.⁹

Cognitive functioning: Mental abilities, including learning, thinking, reasoning, remembering, problem solving, decision-making and attention.¹⁰

Academic achievement: School records, such as report cards, teacher comments, honors and disciplinary problems.¹¹

Physical health milestones: Changes, growth and skill development of the body, including development of muscles and senses.¹²

Home environment: Aspects of individuals' domestic lives that contribute to their living conditions.¹³

Gender: The attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.¹⁴

Gender identity: Inherent sense of being a boy, man or male; a girl, woman or female; or an alternative gender that may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics.¹⁵

Sex: Biological status and is typically categorized as male, female or intersex.¹⁶

Sexual orientation: Component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction.¹⁷

Cultural identity: Identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, region or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture.

Trauma: Event or series of events that is experienced or witnessed by an individual and has long-lasting social, physical, spiritual or psychological effects.

Culturally humble care: Humble and respectful attitude toward people of other cultures. It involves ongoing self-exploration combined with a willingness to learn from others. It helps us recognize our cultural biases and realize that we can't know everything about a culture. To practice true cultural humility, a person must also be aware of and sensitive to historic realities, like legacies of violence and oppression against certain groups of people.

Developmental relationships: Relationships that help youth discover who they are, gain the skills necessary to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.¹⁸

Transformational relationships: Relationship framework that has the power to change the lives of youth.¹⁹

Adult allies: Adults who help youth have their voice heard through meaningful engagement. Being an ally to young people involves a combination of positive attitude, skill and awareness to help in advocating for a youth leadership and empowerment. Adult allies acknowledge and push aside any biases they may have so they enter into a partnership with an open mind, do not impose their judgments or ideas, and share power and accountability for success and failure.²⁰

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