

Tips for Connecting with Young Leaders

Connecting and talking with youth can feel daunting. Here are some ideas about how to start and keep the connection and conversation going.

REACHING OUT

- Drop the rock and drop it again. Keep reaching out to your YL even if they don't respond right away or at all.
- Try communicating in different ways: text, phone, email, posts on social media or video chat.
- Send photos, memes, quotes or links that you like. Don't try to guess what they will like. Just be your authentic self.
- Start random conversations about current events or areas of interest. Some examples might be outer space, fashion trends, celebrity gossip or pets. If you don't know what to ask, google "conversation-starters with teens".
- Pay attention to their attempts for connection. If they do reach out, respond as soon as you can.

QUESTIONS

- It's ok to ask questions, just not too many questions.
- Keep the questions light and not too personal. Let your YL deepen the conversation if and when they decide they are ready.
- Ask as many open-ended questions rather than questions they can answer with a yes or a no. For example "If you could travel anywhere in the world right now, where would you go and why?"
- Through conversation you may ask if they need any help or support and let them know you are there to a comfortable degree.



IN THE
LEAD

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LISTENING AND RESPONDING

- Listen to what they are saying in an open, curious and present way. Don't focus on the right thing to say.
- Identify their strengths and interests and let them know you see them.
- Validate their feelings and experiences. For example "yes, that sounds hard" or "wow that sounds like lots of fun".
- Try paraphrasing what they said to you back to them to show you are listening. For example "so, you were worried about your math test but you feel like you did ok".
- Appropriate and mindful self disclosure is good for building connection. It's ok to tell your YL about your life but avoid talking about high-stress topics (like financial or relationship problems).
- Resist the urge to "fix" by giving advice. Listening empathically is even more powerful than giving them suggestions ...unless they specifically ask you for advice.
- Your YL might say something that surprises, shocks or concerns you. Try to stay calm (on the outside) and continue the conversation. Please reach out to us if you need to debrief the conversation.

GET SUPPORT

- Let us know if you your YL says anything that makes you think they may not be safe. Some examples are verbal or physical abuse in close relationships, substance use, self-harm, depression or suicidal thoughts.
- If you feel like the threat is imminent and they are in danger, call 9-1-1.
- We are always here to support you, so don't hesitate to reach out and ask for help.

