

In Their Own Words: Teens' Tips for Partnering with Youth

Created by the [Great Lakes MHTTC](#) and [Wisconsin PATCH](#) (Providers and Teens Communicating for Health) and featuring insights from PATCH Teen Educators.

How can adults best partner with and meaningfully engage with teens?

The 3 C's

"Communication, Connection, and Collaboration! These three C's are crucial when it comes to partnering with youth!"

Challenge us!

"Honestly, a lot of programs that try to engage youth treat them very childlike, which can seem like youth aren't seen as intelligent and valuable beings. Setting goals, timelines, and expectations in meaningful ways give teens the drive to be better."

Take the time to listen.

"I feel the most heard when the adult is showing genuine interest and curiosity when talking to me. It also helps when I can fully express who I am to adults without feeling scrutinized when I share. Remembering personal details, being kind, and making eye contact can help make me feel like adults are really listening and make opening up less intimidating."



How can school-based mental health teams best partner with youth in your school?

Get into classrooms.

"It's easy for kids to get distracted and not pay attention at assemblies, so having people come in and talk to individual classrooms work better."

Make your presence known.

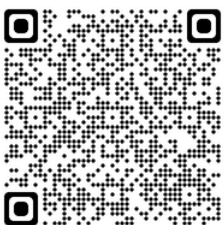
"I know that we have a mental health counselor in my school, but I've never actually seen their face before. I feel like if my peers and I knew what they looked like it would make it easier to ask them for help."

More action

"I think that the school systems need to speak less with words and more with actions. Countless youth claim that the biggest problem with their school-based mental health program is that so much is said about how teens should strive for better mental health, but then they fail to provide us the resources or adjust the curriculum in order to permit that."

Teens rate the best ways adults can use technology to meet them where they're at:

- Texting!
- Google Meet or FaceTime for groups
- Follow current social media trends and have teens run the accounts
- Ask teens their preferred methods of communication
- Keep it casual



Scan to view this resource on your mobile device!

How can adults help teens feel more comfortable when talking about hard topics (e.g., sex, drug use, mental health)?

Be honest and don't act uncomfortable.

"Don't act uncomfortable around hard topics. Make teens feel safe enough to ask questions and give them honest advice, as well as provide them with coping skills and access to products and resources."

Address Stigma

"Every family and community treats these topics differently. When adults are comfortable talking about these things, I feel more inclined to learn and discuss them. For those who've grown up in places that heavily stigmatize these topics, I suggest acknowledging that and letting them know they have a safe space."

Speak with understanding.

"Don't just ask, 'Do you sometimes feel depressed and hopeless?' Instead, for example, inform us that there are many hormone imbalances as bodies mature that might cause you to feel depressed or anxious. Then ask, 'Do you ever feel this way?' Sometimes these topics are terrifying to talk about, especially for the first time, as they're surrounded by stigma. This can make people feel like they are doing something wrong."



How would you want adults to work with you and your peers on prevention strategies?

Don't use scare tactics.

"Scare tactics don't work. Bring in real people who have had experience with these topics to have conversations with teens. This brings the topic to life and is more likely to have a long-term effect on teens."

"Guilt and scaring us into not doing things can cause kids to rebel. It's important to show the facts and express that it's a choice we are making and that we have the agency to make a positive choice. Educate and provide us with resources to come to our own conclusions rather than telling us how to feel or what to do."

Consistency & Reliability

"I think consistently being there and pushing us to work harder and be more involved is what works best. Allow teens to come up with, execute, and be the center of the campaigns, with adults there to support and assist."

Think about a person who has been really helpful to you—how did they make you feel valued and heard?

"They shared my joy and made it their own to make me feel seen and appreciated. They accepted me."

"My counselor told me the door was always open and would help offer solutions to move forward in my problems. She showed that she cared about me and told me when she was proud of me."

"They got to know me and showed me that they really care about me personally and saw me as a whole person, not just a student. They were extremely understanding and always explained things when I had questions without belittling me."

What gets youth interested in joining support groups, school clubs, or organizations like PATCH?

- Incentives like getting paid, field trips, and food
- Comfortable meeting spaces
- Advocacy, social justice, and making a difference
- Career potential and/or gaining a skill(s)
- Connection with peers

Did you know?

There are many more FREE products and resources from the [Great Lakes MHTTC](#) and [PATCH](#) available online!

Are there questions or statements adults use that are off-putting rather than helpful? What would you encourage adults to NOT do when working with you?

Don't minimize or trivialize our issues.

"Don't act like you have a better understanding about what we're going through just because you're an adult. That makes us feel invalidated and stuck. Don't minimize our issues or feelings by saying things like 'It's just hormones,' or 'Everybody your age feels like this/experiences the same thing.' You might be saying this to make us feel supported and like we're not alone, but it can sound like you're saying we shouldn't be upset or like what we're experiencing is not a big deal or not a 'real' issue to be worried about."

Be mindful of body language and non-verbal communication.

"Facial expressions and body language speak a lot. Even if you don't tell us you don't approve, lots of teens will still pick up on it. Be aware of that when working with teens, and remember that you probably made some bad decisions when you were our age, too."

Don't make assumptions.

"Adults making assumptions based on our age is frustrating. Just because I am a 'hormonal teenager' does not mean my opinions are invalid. I should be allowed to have strong opinions (even if they clash with your own) without being talked down to. We just want to be treated with respect and given credit for knowing our own minds."

Respect our individual autonomy.

"I would encourage adults not to use 'should' or 'shouldn't' statements. It's better to provide information or support without using judgemental language. I feel like any words that allude to a teen not having autonomy over their life is unhelpful."



Thank you

to all the

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