



**BUILD YOUR PARTNERSHIP:**  
**TOOLS TO ENHANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIP**  
**WITH BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS AND THE**  
**TEENS THEY SERVE**



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# SECTION I: WORKING WITH TEENS

## Basic Skills and Tips

Whether you are experienced in teen services or new to working with the age group, as a volunteer, it is important to cultivate these basic skills to develop effective relationships with teens.

### 1. Coaching

Teens need coaching to make important decisions. Good coaching requires:

- Establishing open communication with teens
- Encouraging teens to share insights or the results of their self-assessment
- More listening than talking
- Probing to understand the teen's values, interests, skills and needs
- Keeping the teen's needs, values and interests, not your own, top of mind

### 2. Diagnosing

Volunteers may not always be personally familiar with the teens who come to them for help. Regardless, they must be able to determine what real issues or problems a teen may have. This is called diagnosing, and it involves:

- Dealing with emotional issues and providing emotional support before addressing any real issues
- Withholding judgment of the problem until it is clearly diagnosed
- Forming a hypothesis about the problem and using appropriate questions and techniques to ensure that your assessment of the problem is accurate
- Remaining objective and not acting on personal biases

### 3. Reality Testing

As a volunteer, you can be an important source for feedback in an environment where teens feel that no one else "tells it like it is." You can also help teens evaluate the feedback, positive or negative, they have received from peers or other sources. Reality testing requires:

- Keeping in mind teen developmental issues and ensuring that your advice is dictated by the age-specific needs of the teen
- Helping teens understand how their present performance affects future opportunities
- Determining a teen's strengths and developmental needs
- Helping teens recognize the importance of their reputations
- Assessing the viability of goals and action plans
- Providing support and "prodding" as needed

### 4. Mentoring

Volunteers can act as official mentors or provide additional mentoring if teens need more guidance than is available in other places like home and school. To be successful mentors, volunteers must be respected and have greater knowledge of the community than the teens or their peers. Mentoring involves:

- Showing teens the ropes of the Club, school, workplace or community
- Recommending developmental actions
- Using organizational referral networks for teens
- Being an advocate for teens in the Club and elsewhere



## 5. Goal Setting

Volunteers can play a key role in helping teens formalize their career, educational and life goals. Most teens need help defining and writing viable goals. When teens are being asked to pursue multiple goals, or goals for development, they typically need more help. Goal-setting assistance involves:

- Helping teens define viable goals, based on preliminary assessment and planning if available (e.g through a Club program such as d2D or Career Launch)
- Helping teens write specific, measurable, positive goals
- Analyzing teen goals to determine best strategies for reaching them
- Providing reality testing when goals are unrealistic

## 6. Motivating to Action

Volunteers who have ongoing contact with teens have many opportunities to encourage and support their progress toward their goals. This may include:

- Determining developmental actions to help teens reach their goals
- Helping teens to understand the importance of a written developmental plan as a communication tool, a working document and a record of completed developmental actions
- Identifying barriers to development and ways to overcome them
- Offering encouragement and prodding to keep teens moving ahead
- Celebrating successes



# COMMUNICATING WITH TEENAGERS: ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

Throughout history, adults have grappled with how to reach the aloof, exclusive and sometimes self-absorbed teenaged population. Many adults feel they lack the ability to connect with teenagers and are intimidated by the prospect of working with them.

Drawing from their years of experience, several youth development professionals from the Boys & Girls Club Movement offer their advice on how to connect with teenage Club members.

## The Importance of Honesty and Listening

Youth development professionals at Boys & Girls Clubs throughout the country are at the forefront of developing ways to communicate effectively with teens. Lauren Stratton, Unit Director at the Rose Lane Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of Scottsdale, Ariz., advises,

“If a teen asks you a difficult question, they would much rather hear, ‘I am not comfortable talking to you about that,’ or ‘It is not appropriate for me to discuss that with you,’ than you making something up or tiptoeing around the subject. It is OK to tell them you do not know all the answers.”

This level of honesty is essential to creating meaningful interactions in which adults and teenagers can freely express themselves. Some of the most rewarding conversations with young people occur while playing pool, working on an art project, or simply sitting at your desk. Frank Reyes, Director of Teen Services at West San Gabriel Boys & Girls Clubs in Monterey Park, Calif., shares from experience,

“Many times in their life [teenagers] just want someone to listen to them. Adults do not take the time to sit down and listen, to put down the paper and stop typing on the keyboard and listen to what [teens’] needs and problems are.”

Dedicate your full attention to an adolescent who is willing to have a conversation, and you provide him or her with trust, hope and motivation. Creating opportunities for informal one-on-one time will allow you to get to know your teens as individuals. Thus, informal activities and moments in the Club become important youth development tools for teens.

## On the Edge of Adulthood

In addition to providing opportunities for honest and informal communication, John Pham, Director of Operations at Boys & Girls Clubs of Huntington Valley in Fountain Valley, Calif., offers:

“Teens operate through the lens of an adult. Adult learners tend to ask questions like: ‘How does this benefit me; allow me to contribute?’ Adults don’t like to be embarrassed and pride themselves in making independent decisions.”

While teens are still developing their critical thinking and decision-making skills, they no longer view themselves as children and do not expect to be treated as such. This is particularly important in disciplining teenagers. You will get the best response if you respect the privacy of an unruly teen, ask him or her to step away from the group, have a calm conversation and follow through with the consequences you outlined. Choosing the right place, tone of voice and moment creates the foundation for interactions that can lead teenagers to change their behaviors and strengthen their value systems.



## Building a Relationship

“Teens are young adults who are going through a major transition period in their lives. They are unsure about their financial, social and academic futures. Unlike younger children they do not do as they are told, and they enjoy challenging authority. Hence speaking to them as a friend, a confidant or counselor is all that most teens need,”

Like any relationship, the one you have with teenagers is a two-way street. Often, adults are more comfortable in the role of questioning than of sharing information about their own likes, dislikes and dreams. However, dialogue that enables both parties to feel acknowledged is a requirement for a healthy exchange of ideas even when people don't fully agree. Successful communication with teens requires adults to share of themselves – but also to know where to draw the line on self-disclosure.

## Your Own Communication Style

One of the benefits of working with teenagers is that they will constantly offer you the opportunity to test your communication skills. They will also provide you with valuable feedback that is not always available in the adult world. As a result, you will find the opportunity to constantly reflect on the ways you communicate. Think about moments when you feel comfortable, when you feel challenged, when you feel you can open up. Chances are, teens may feel the same way; use that information to create a comfortable environment for communication within the Club.

For the past century, Boys & Girls Clubs have provided space where young people find a safe physical, emotional, and intellectual environment where caring adults contribute to their growth. To engage teens successfully, volunteers must also understand the adolescent viewpoint. This is what will draw teens into a Club and into meaningful interactions with caring adults.



## WORKING WITH GROUPS OF TEENS

As a volunteer who interacts with teens, you will spend much of your time working with small groups. You will assume the role of facilitator of learning and adult mentor. Effective group leaders tend to adhere to the following principles:

### 1. Be yourself.

You are an adult, not another teen, so you should act like an adult. But remember to relax. Lecturing teens won't invite them to relax and open up to your messages.

### 2. Be sensitive to teens' feelings.

Remember that teens' fears and concerns are real, no matter how silly or inconsequential they may seem from an adult perspective.

### 3. Show that you care.

Young people need explicit signs that you are concerned and care about them as people. They are not skilled at reading subtle signs and body language.

### 4. Repeat, re-emphasize and ask for feedback.

Even older youth need to hear the point you're making and give it back in their own words to truly understand.

### 5. Give positive feedback.

It has been proven over and over that children learn more, and more quickly, if their successes are praised and their failures seen as opportunities for learning, not personal disasters.

— From the National Crime Prevention Council's "Talking with Youth about Prevention"



# ENCOURAGING POSITIVE TEEN BEHAVIORS

Volunteers who work with teenagers may encounter instances when teens are engaging in destructive behavior. As a youth development professional, it will be your responsibility to make teens aware of the potential consequences of such behavior and to help them see potential alternatives. This combined strategy increases the chances that teens will modify their destructive behaviors and make healthier choices. The following, adapted from a presentation by Dr. Robert L. Johnson of New Jersey Medical School, offers more details.

By empowering teens and explaining to them that they are responsible for their behavior, youth development professionals place them on the path of becoming responsible. Teens need to understand that peer pressure is not an acceptable solution for their problems. The issue is for them to understand the world impacts them, i.e., that they are not invincible to adverse consequences of their actions. These are three specific ways that [youth development professionals] can help teens become responsible for their actions and understand the world around them. Youth development professionals can help teens:

## 1. Be aware:

- that the behavior or problem exists
- of the consequences of the behavior
- of how the consequences can be avoided

Teens have to first realize and be motivated to understand that a problem behavior exists and that there are adverse consequences to this problem. For example, having sex is a problem because you can get pregnant or impregnate someone or get some form of STD.

## 2. Believe:

- in personal susceptibility to the consequences
- that consequences are severe
- that the power and skills to avoid consequences are within their reach

Teens have to believe that this behavior can affect them, that the consequences are severe and that they have the skills and ability to overcome these problems.

## 3. Perceive:

- that there are few barriers to change
- the benefits of new behavior
- the support of family, friends, teachers, etc.
- the availability of alternatives

Help them to understand that there are few barriers to change and that there is a benefit to changing their behavior. The support for this change and new behavior should come from peers, teachers and friends.





# BUILDING GOOD CHARACTER: IMPORTANT TEEN VIRTUES

Building good character is an important goal of all Boys & Girls Clubs programs and services. While BGCA offers several Character and Leadership Development programs (such as Keystone), volunteers should look for ways to encourage the following virtues as a part of overall programming and via everyday interactions with teens.

## 1. Courage

The ability to hang in there when the going gets tough. Teens must have enough faith in themselves to know they can make it. Too many teens fall apart when stress really builds. In extreme cases, some even commit suicide as a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

## 2. Responsibility

Knowing they can learn from their mistakes and that they can try again. Often parents or Club staff assume responsibility for teens' mistakes by punishing them without giving them the chance to learn and make adjustments. When children stay out late, for example, many parents say, "You made a mistake. Now you're grounded for the next six months!" Instead, they should say, "You made a mistake. Let's figure out what we can learn from this and what we can do differently next time," so that teens can take responsibility and turn errors into learning experiences.

## 3. Cooperation

The ability to get along with others. Without realizing it, adults cut off opportunities for learning how to get along with others when they insist that young people adhere to adult rules governing which children and which activities are acceptable, rather than helping teens assess individuals and activities themselves. For example, parents should avoid mandates such as, "No, you cannot go out with that person," or "I don't want you wasting so much time on the phone talking to your friends." (In this case, a parent would limit an activity – talking on the phone – that actually provides developmentally appropriate opportunities for teens to learn how to get along with others.)

## 4. Self-esteem

To know, accept and value their own thoughts and feelings. Teens should respect and value differences in themselves and others instead of seeing these competitively or judgmentally. To take care of themselves, including how they treat their bodies.

## 5. Respect for self and others

Having a high level of social interest, which means wanting to contribute to society and knowing that they can be significant in a positive way.

## 6. Success

Being happy, contributing members of society by doing what they enjoy in life while benefiting, or at least not hurting, others.

## 7. Sense of humor

Not taking themselves or others too seriously.

# ACTIVITY: DO YOU KNOW YOUR TEENS?

If you're truly "tuned in" to your teen members, you should be able to answer the following questions. For any questions you can't answer, talk to the teens in your Club.

*List five groups or bands to which teens currently listen.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*List five female vocalists to whom teens currently listen.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*List the five components of "Hip Hop."*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*Name a current popular dance:*

*List five male vocalists to whom teens currently listen.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*What are the top five current television shows for teens?*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*List five things teens at your Club are concerned about.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*List five slang terms teens use and define them.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*List five programs or activities in which your Club teens are interested.*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*What is one of the most important things you can do for the teens in your Club?*



## SECTION II: BUILD YOUR PARTNERSHIP PRESENTATION TIPS

Use this information to prepare your team for a great meeting or presentation at or with your Boys & Girls Club. These tips outline five key areas that will ensure that you conduct a successful session. Use these tips and the checklist to make your session well planned, well executed, productive and motivational!

### 1. Understand the Objectives of the Session

Understanding the purpose of the session and the “key” messages you need to communicate is the first step to a successful session.

#### **Review all of the session materials**

Reviewing the materials takes time. You will need to schedule at least one hour to carefully review the material to ensure you understand the session content and the tools/resources you have available i.e. leader’s guide, activity resources, posters, and all questions and activity instructions. Read the leader’s guide for the “key” messages.

As a presenter, it’s important that you understand and can articulate the key messages for the session.

**Communicate the “key” messages to your team and audience.**

#### **Stay focused on the objectives.**

It’s important that you stay focused on the session objectives (usually found in the leader guide). This will ensure you deliver the “key” message to your team. Don’t dilute the message or create redundancy by adding information or eliminating sections or activities.

#### **Stick to the leader’s guide.**

The session materials are designed to help you communicate the “key” messages and information your team will need to lead the session. You should make sure you understand the key messages and follow the leader’s guide to keep your team on track.

#### **Always conduct the activities.**

The activities are critical to the success you will see with the youth of your community partner. They are designed to be fun and interactive. As the presenter you need to be prepared and understand how the activities should be facilitated. This gives your team an opportunity to show their stuff and have some fun in the session.

### 2. Plan your Session

**Preparation is key to conducting a well-executed, productive and motivational session.**

#### **Schedule the session.**

Plan to conduct your session in conjunction with your partners’ schedule for the program. The sooner you can schedule your sessions with your partner, the more excitement you can generate about the partnership.

#### **Assign a project lead to organize the session.**

With any session it’s critical to assign a project leader. Your project lead should be someone on your management team. They should follow up with all the presenters and make sure everyone is well prepared to facilitate their portion of the session.



### **Communicate roles and responsibilities clearly.**

It's critical to communicate who will be responsible for what portions of the session. Assigning portions of the session to each team member will determine the quality of your session.

### **Use the Preparation Checklist.**

The Preparation Checklist is designed to help reduce workload and streamline the process for preparing for your session.

### **Start on time and end on time.**

Once you schedule the session and have it confirmed with your partner, you should arrive, and begin and end on time. Beginning sessions on time sets the standard for your team and the youth. Just as you would expect your employees to start their shift on time, you should begin your sessions on time. If you begin on time, are well prepared and follow the agenda you will have a great session and end on time!

## **3. Presenting & Facilitating the Session**

**Use these tips to deliver a great presentation:**

### **Know your "stuff!"**

Do "dry run" practice, practice, practice! This is your one opportunity to have your entire team's complete attention.

### **Assign training roles to qualified presenters.**

Just as your team has strengths in other areas some will be strong in presentations skills and other will need direction and support to be successful.

### **Use your visual aids.**

Refer to posters, activity cards, worksheet, teen guides, etc ... to keep the youth audience engaged during the session.

### **Always conduct the activities.**

The activities are critical to the key learning in the session and keeping the youth engaged.

### **Ask questions and listen to your participant's responses.**

Keep the youth involved during the session. Ask questions and allow them time to respond and share their thoughts and ideas.

### **Acknowledge the experience in the audience.**

Encourage participation during the session. Allow youth and your team members to share "best practices" and their expertise during the session.

## **4. Motivate your Team**

**Knowledge and enthusiasm is the key to generating excitement about Career Launch.**

### **Assign enthusiastic presenters.**

If you are excited and enthusiastic your energy will be contagious! It's your job to motivate your team and get them ready for a great Career Launch session.

## **5. Evaluate the Success of your Session**

**Ask your employees, your partner, and the youth for feedback.**



## FOLLOW UP CHECKLIST

**Use this checklist to make sure you are prepared to conduct a successful Career Launch session.**

- ☐ Schedule time to review all the session materials and handouts.
- ☐ Identify the project lead for the session.
- ☐ Schedule the session with your community partner.
- ☐ Clearly define roles and responsibilities for the session.
- ☐ Encourage your team to practice their presentations.
- ☐ Complete the preparation Checklist leader's guide.
- ☐ Stick to the session content to clearly communicate "key" messages.
- ☐ Review your feedback from previous sessions as a management team. This will help you in future sessions.
- ☐ Have Fun with the youth!