

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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Search Institute's [Developmental Relationships Framework \(2016\)](#) stresses five recommendations for adults to build strong, supportive, consistent, and reciprocal relationships with youth including:

- 1. Expressing care** – showing youth that they matter
- 2. Challenging growth** – pushing youth to keep getting better
- 3. Providing support** – helping youth complete tasks and achieve goals
- 4. Sharing power** – treating youth with respect and giving them a say
- 5. Expanding possibilities** – connecting youth with people and places that broaden their perspectives

Fostering Relationships With and Among Youth

Q Why are healthy relationships important, which types of relationships are important, and how can programs promote healthy relationships?

A As young people begin to form their own identities and transition into adulthood, relationships take on a critical importance. Youth programs should seek to improve the quality of youth relationships and, ideally, expand the nature and number of positive youth relationships. The Search Institute, a leading youth research organization, has developed a *Developmental Relationship Framework* which defines a developmental relationship as a close connection between a young person and an adult or between a young person and a peer that powerfully and positively shapes the young person's identity and helps the young person develop a thriving mindset.¹ Youth can have developmental relationships with many different types of adults, including mentors, coaches, religious leaders, parents and other relatives, employers, and teachers, to name a few. While it has been proven that youth thrive best with multiple relationships, evidence confirms that when a young person has at least one caring adult that provides consistent care, s/he can more successfully transition into adulthood. Youth researchers also point to the importance of promoting strong, supportive, and caring relationships between youth peers, which contributes to a climate of inclusion and acceptance. As noted by the Search Institute, though relationships with adults can affect skills development in powerful and positive ways, so can close connections with friends, siblings, and other peers. This *Implementation Tip* describes the different types of developmental relationships that a young person may have and provides tips to ensure a healthy relationship.

¹ Search Institute, [Developmental Relationships Framework](#)

Resources

[Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework](#)

[WHO Helping Parents in Developing Countries Improve Adolescents' Health](#)

Common developmental relationships for youths

Parents: The parent-child relationship, usually a child's first relationship, can either establish a child's trust in self and others or establish lifelong patterns of insecurity and self-doubt. Research has recently placed increased focus on the role of parents in youth development. For example, a healthy relationship with a parent has been linked to delay in sexual debut and the quality of that relationship is more important than communication about sexual and reproductive health. In many countries, parents have a limited understanding of youth and how to communicate and support their children at different stages.

Tips to increase and improve parental involvement in youth development:

- Educate parents on adolescent development, parenting strategies, role-modeling, activities to build youth social and emotional skills, and the importance of giving youth more responsibility and voice in the family (understanding the family household budget, assuming responsibilities and projects at home, and participating in decision-making).
- Create parent support groups, conduct home visits, or form parent-child clubs with structured activities for parents and youth to promote inter-generational dialogue.
- Adapt off-the-shelf programs for local context and nuanced social and cultural norms around parent-youth relationships.

Source: WHO, [Helping Parents in Developing Countries Improve Adolescents' Health](#)

Peers: Most youth are socially motivated and heavily influenced by peers, making opportunities for social interaction an incentive for participation. Peer influences can be both positive and negative and youth programs should seek to foster positive peer-to-peer relationships by creating a climate of inclusion and acceptance, modeling appropriate communication, and creating structures that foster deeper connections and understanding of others. Relationships between peers allow for reciprocal learning, which occurs when students form learning partnerships to help each other reach certain goals. Peer-to-peer interactions also provide "safe spaces" for youth to show their vulnerabilities and fears, which they often hide from adults.

Tips to promote positive peer relationships:

- Create spaces to allow for positive peer-to-peer interactions (e.g., youth clubs, recreational and interest group activities, community service, etc.).
- Design activities that require youth to collaborate with their peers, such as group work or social activities outside of formal settings; use strategies to promote a sense of community among youth participants.
- Develop activities and instruction on how youth should give and receive feedback, listen actively, demonstrate respect, resolve conflict, and engage in other forms of positive social interaction and communication.
- Promote activities such as sharing circles and personal storytelling to create trust and connections among members.
- Teach youth about positive and negative impacts of peer relations and how to say “no” to negative influences.
- Help youth manage group work challenges, such as miscommunication, in productive ways.

Youth Workers: Youth workers guide and support young people in their personal, social, and educational development to help them reach their full potential in society. Youth workers support youth in different ways: they could be teachers in schools, counselors in youth-serving organizations, or social/health workers in health service facilities. Evidence has shown that learning is most effective when it occurs within the context of strong, supportive relationships that allow youth to securely engage in new activities and safely try out roles and behaviors.

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net).

The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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Tips to promote positive relationships among youth workers and youth :

- Select staff who demonstrate respectful behavior towards youth and an understanding of young people. Staff should value youth's participation and what they bring.
- Clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of youth workers in the program with a code of conduct and policies to facilitate positive staff-youth relationships; assess adherence to the code of conduct and staff-youth relationships as part of staff performance evaluations.
- Train youth workers on adolescent and youth development methodologies, techniques, and strategies to communicate with and support youth. Adults may also need training in experiential learning and pedagogical strategies to foster soft skills in specific areas of expertise, such as HIV prevention education.
- Create opportunities for program staff and participants/peers to meet on an informal basis.
- Help staff understand the importance of modelling expected behavior, setting high expectations, and providing positive reinforcement; use coaching to enhance youth mastery, self-esteem, and critical thinking.
- Try to keep low staff/volunteer-to-youth ratios to allow youth workers to be as responsive as possible.
- Allow for structured times for youth to interact with staff in a confidential way.
- Dedicate time for sharing stories and facilitating bonds among program staff and youth.

Community supports: Members of the community can also be a source of positive adult relationships and supports. Mentors, coaches, tutors, relatives, religious leaders, and others can all be sources of positive youth-adult relationships. As youth get older, these relationships with adults become increasingly important; there is strong evidence that positive and meaningful youth engagement in and connection to their schools and communities enhances young people's physical and psychological well-being overall. Exposure to adults from different backgrounds can introduce youth to new career or livelihood opportunities and open young minds to different gender roles and visions for their future.

Tips to enhance youth relationships within communities can include:

- Implementing a mentor program and training mentors and other adult volunteers on youth development.
- Inviting community residents to share a skill, hobby, or profession with youth.
- Sponsoring activities that bring young people, parents, and other adults together around cultural activities, community campaigns, etc.
- Supporting opportunities for youth to demonstrate their capacity, interests, and perspectives to adults.
- Structuring opportunities for young people to contribute to community activities.
- Engaging adult volunteers to contribute to community and school youth activities.

