



Tips to Engage Youth in Counselling



Convey understanding and acceptance. Avoid labels and counselling jargon.

Ask open ended questions and be honest. Apologize if you make a mistake.

Be aware of young person need for independence/autonomy from family and strive to engage them as collaborators in the counselling process.

Talk about the structure and timeline of the counselling session with the young person. Help them create a “roadmap” with all the information they need to understand what is being discussed.



Give the young person space in the session to address concerns even if it does not feel appropriate. (E.g. if a youth wants to talk about having a cell phone) If it does not fit the current topic, ensure there is time at the end of the session to discuss it.

Provide clear reasoning for suggestions for change. (E.g. Why are you saying they should try to walk away, how do you think it will help?)



Help the young person and their family members create positive and negative incentives to change that are meaningful and easy to use. (E.g. family outing; phone cards; favourite meal)

Encourage young person and family members to pay attention to small changes and acknowledge them. Help them highlight positive change at the end of every session and help them by sharing what you have seen.

Follow through on all promises big or small, and encourage the young person and family members to do the same.

Provide referrals and assistance in financial, housing, education, employment and other basic living needs. (E.g. bus fare, referrals to food banks, etc.) Help them get to those appointments when possible.

Remove any perceived barriers to counselling; can you meet closer to their home, in the school, at a family member’s workplace; work hours that make you more accessible

Try to incorporate developmentally appropriate approaches in the work. Try to find a counselling tool that is activity based. Movement and art are great alternative approaches for young person who may not be eager to talk in a session.

Remind, remind, remind. Find out the best way to contact the young person (cell phone, email) and remind them of the session the day before. Do not rely on family members to do this.

Be patient. Sometimes in family counselling the conflict appears worse in the beginning. Remember that the initial session is likely the first time the young person and family have had a chance to talk about their concerns and feel heard.



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