

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Engaging Youth in Research Planning, Design, and Execution: Practical Recommendations for Researchers

“Youth-adult partnerships in research provide many reciprocal benefits, such as skill development, empowerment and social engagement for the youth, as well as an increase in the feasibility, youth-friendliness and ecological validity of the research” (p. 1).

1. What is the research about?

Although youth engagement is often recognized as critical in research, there are few practical guidelines on how to best engage young people in research projects. Youth are often involved in research as participants, rather than as full partners. However, evidence suggests that youth-adult partnerships have many benefits: they can **enhance skill development, social engagement, and empowerment among youth**, as well as increase a study’s **feasibility** (viability given real-world constraints) and **ecological validity** (relevance to real-world settings). This article provides researchers with a set of practicable strategies that can inform the planning, design, and execution of youth engagement in research.

2. Where did the research take place?

This study was conducted by researchers at The Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth and Family Mental Health at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about integrating youth into teams of practiced academic researchers.

4. How was the research done?

In order to identify effective youth engagement practices, the authors drew from their own experience, discussions with youth members of their team, and consultations with their youth advisory group, as well as literature on youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships. This study was also informed by the McCain Model of Youth Engagement, which outlines five main tenets of youth engagement: **transparency, reciprocity, co-learning, flexibility, and recognition**.

5. What are the key findings?

The article identifies 10 “dos” and five “don’ts” of youth engagement.

The “dos”

- i) Authentically value youth experience.
- ii) Recognize diversity among youth.
- iii) Formally recognize contributions.
- iv) Create meaningful opportunities and active participation.
- v) Clearly define roles.
- vi) Be transparent and genuine.
- vii) Create youth-friendly spaces.
- viii) Explain research concepts in jargon-free terms.
- ix) Hold meetings, pre-briefs, and de-briefs.
- x) If engaging both youth and caregivers, actively ensure the youth’s voices can still be heard.

The “don’ts”

- i) Don’t tokenize or patronize.
- ii) Don’t ask for feedback and disregard it.
- iii) Don’t steer youth towards the response you want.
- iv) Don’t privilege one form of knowledge over another.
- v) Don’t be closed to new ideas and unwilling to adapt.

These recommendations can increase the capacity of researchers to engage youth in academic research projects because they are founded on **authentic respect**.



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6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This study provides a set of best practices for engaging youth in research and evaluation. Organizations should create a welcoming space in which young people’s contributions are **respected and valued**. It is important to recognize that youth are the **experts in their own lives**, and that there is a diversity of perspectives among youth. Foster a youth-friendly environment by addressing power imbalances and defining research concepts in jargon-free terms.

Researchers who work with youth should make research objectives, goals, expectations, and constraints **transparent and genuine**. Expectations should be clearly defined in order to avoid ambiguity and effectively prepare young people for roles in research.

Youth participants should be seen as **active team members**, and meaningfully engaged in research, e.g., by being consulted on research materials and interview tools, leading focus groups, or training research staff who work with youth. Consider recognizing young people’s contributions with wages, honoraria, academic or professional references, or co-authorship.