

Ways to Promote Youth Empowerment



WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

Empowerment is a process that increases young people's opportunities to engage in decision-making and to act on issues that affect their lives.¹ This process requires the development of personal capacities (such as knowledge, attitudes, and skills) as well as a supportive environment (including access to rights and resources).¹ **This factsheet outlines eight evidence-informed strategies to promote youth empowerment.**



PROVIDE A WELCOMING, SUPPORTIVE, AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

To fully engage, youth need a safe space where they can rise to challenges, express their creativity, and try out new skills and roles — all while having fun!^{2,3,4}



RECOGNIZE STRENGTHS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Youth need confidence to believe they can impact change. Foster confidence by setting and celebrating goals, normalizing mistakes as integral to the learning process, and recognizing strengths and accomplishments.^{5,6}



INCLUDE AN EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT.

Youth need knowledge to participate in decision-making and social justice initiatives that lead to empowerment.⁷ An educational component in programming may include learning about the community, skill development, and/or learning life skills.^{1,4,8,9}



CREATE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.

Shared power is critical for youth to feel that their participation is meaningful and that their voice is valued.^{2,3} Youth leadership roles facilitate opportunities to exert influence, and enable youth to explore new ideas, make mistakes, and work together.^{1,4,6}



PROVIDE POSITIVE ADULT ROLE MODELS AND INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND MENTORSHIP.

Youth need adult support to move into empowered leadership roles.⁶ Relationships should be built on mutual trust and prepare youth to work with adults as equals;⁴ likewise, mentors must take a strength-based approach.¹⁰ Support youth in identifying and prioritizing issues, and in developing problem-solving approaches.^{2,3}



FOSTER CRITICAL REFLECTION.

Intentional discussions around issues of power and around discussions of problematization can raise critical consciousness⁹ – “the ability to perceive and interrogate the various forms of oppression that shape one’s life.”¹¹ When youth are critically aware, they are able to strategize ways of influencing change.¹²



FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION THAT CAN LEAD TO CHANGE.

Strengthening the best attitudes, skills, and competencies for empowerment involves learning by doing.¹ Support youth in understanding how actions and/or responsibilities fit into the goals of the project/organization,⁵ and provide opportunities for youth to impact individual, organizational, and community change.^{1,2,4,6}



BUILD CONNECTIONS TO LARGER NETWORKS AND TO THE COMMUNITY.

Connections can motivate youth to continue their social change efforts.⁹ Provide opportunities for youth to develop teamwork skills, and to work with others (especially peers!) towards social action.^{2,3}

ENDNOTES

1. Maso, P. S., Bernet, J. T., Jiménez-Morales, M., & Martínez, X. Ú. (2017). The construction of a pedagogical model of youth empowerment: Spaces, moments and processes. *Pedagogia Social, 30*, 19-32.
2. Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Messias, D. K. H., & McLoughlin, K. (2006). Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice, 14*, 31-55.
3. Pearrow, M. M. (2008). A critical examination of an urban-based youth empowerment strategy: The teen empowerment program. *Journal of Community Practice, 16*(4), 509-525.
4. Zimmerman, M. A., Stewart, S. E., Morrel-Samuels, S., Franzen, S., & Reischl, T. M. (2011). Youth empowerment solutions for peaceful communities: Combining theory and practice in a community-level violence prevention curriculum. *Health Promotion Practice, 12*(3), 425-439.
5. Anderson, K., & Sandmann, L. (2009). Toward a model of empowering practices in youth adult partnerships. *Journal of Extension, 49*(2).
6. Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., & Thomas, D. (2010). *Engaging and empowering Aboriginal youth: A toolkit for service providers*. <https://youthrex.com/toolkit/engaging-and-empowering-aboriginal-youth-a-toolkit-for-service-providers/>
7. Russell, S. T., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A., & Laub, C. (2009). Youth empowerment and high school gay-straight alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(7), 891-903.
8. British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2013). *Youth engagement toolkit resource guide*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/information-for-service-providers/youth-engagement-toolkit>
9. Mohajer, N., & Earnest, J. (2009). Youth empowerment for the most vulnerable. *Health Education, 109*(5), 424-438.
10. Albright, J. N., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2017). Applying a social justice lens to youth mentoring: A review of the literature and recommendations for practice. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 59*, 363-381.
11. Lavie-Ajayi, M., & Krumer-Nevo, M. (2013). In a different mindset: Critical youth work with marginalized youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*, 1698-1704.
12. King Ledford, M., Lucas, B., Dairaghi, J., & Ravelli, P. (2013). *Youth empowerment: The theory and its implementation*. Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!).