

Building Strong Relationships with Youth

Video 3

Strong relationships are at the core of our work with young people. Young people thrive when they feel safe and supported. And our relationships with them have the power to transform their lives.

Research shows that positive youth-adult relationships lead to social-emotional competence, healthy behaviors, and academic success. As OST professionals, we play a key role in creating quality programs that provide youth with safe, supportive relationships built on trust and respect.

Taking care to nurture our relationships and form strong bonds among staff and youth creates a sense of belonging and supports healthy growth and future success.

So, what can you do today?

Get to know youth!

Understanding an individual's identity gives us a window into their experiences. Ethnicity, race, religion, and language all interact to create a sense of self. Gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability also influence how individuals see themselves.

- Provide opportunities for youth to share their interests, dislikes, customs, and beliefs (noting that they should only share what they are comfortable sharing).
- Remind the group (and yourself!) that it takes time, patience, and acceptance to create warm and trusting relationships.

Share who YOU are!

Show youth what makes you, you! Sharing your background, traditions, and other aspects of your identity can make you more relatable and build stronger connections.

- Share your hobbies, your favorite sport or music to play or watch, and your family traditions. You don't have to tell them every detail. Consider what you're comfortable sharing and what is most appropriate for the youth's age group.
- As they share with each other and you, help them to identify and appreciate differences and commonalities among the group.

Join the fun!

Participate in program activities alongside youth. These interactions allow youth to get to know you and see you as an individual, rather than simply in your role in your program.

- Be spontaneous!
- Let youth see you make mistakes.
- Have fun!