

BUILDING TRUSTING & AFFIRMING RELATIONSHIPS



Askable Adult Campaign
Be someone they can talk to.

Trust is the assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, and integrity of another person or thing. To trust someone is to feel safe being vulnerable with them. Youth are more likely to come to you with their concerns if they trust you. Vermont's youth have said they're most likely to trust adults who are non-judgmental, respectful, reliable, fun, kind, caring, and supportive. Trusting, affirming relationships are built in small moments over time.

TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING TRUSTING, AFFIRMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE:

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Youth identify feeling respected as central to having effective relationships with adults. Adults who are askable for children and youth hold respect as a core value and work hard to maintain it. You are respecting youth when you accept them for who they are, regardless of their circumstance or behavior, and without judgment. How do you know if you're being respectful of youth? Consistently ask yourself: *Would I treat another adult this way?*

Keep confidential things confidential—or if you're not able to do that, be honest about that upfront. It is important to youth that adults don't share their information without permission. They also expect that you are honest with them about your ability to keep their information confidential. Be transparent upfront about any obligations that you have to report abuse. If you are concerned about a young person's welfare, be clear with them about your concern and let them know if you feel you need to tell someone else. For instance, say, *I'm a mandated reporter of child abuse, which means that if you share anything with me that makes me concerned for your safety, I may have to report it.*

Check your own agenda. Even well-intentioned adults can get lost in their own agendas. Check yourself to make sure that you're meeting the needs of the youth in your life and not expecting them to meet yours. Simply asking yourself periodically WHY you are in relationships with youth is a good way to check in with yourself.

Allow space. Remember that young people are in the process of developing their identities and values. Give youth the space to reach their own decisions and the information they need to do so in an educated way. Believe youth, especially queer youth, when they tell you who they are. Trusting relationships are formed when youth understand that they are not required to share your values in order to be loved and respected by you. Try silence: Silence gets you out of the way and creates a space others will fill in with themselves.

Share power. Remember that our society grants more credibility and authority to adults than to youth. This means that you have more power than they do. Be honest and clear about the power that you have as the adult—as a parent, teacher, or member of a system that you work within. Sharing your power is an important way to respect youth. You can do so in several ways:

- Support young people to make decisions about the activities you do together and what you talk about.
- Be patient and allow silence and space for them to offer ideas and to feel open to lead.
- Include children and youth in decision-making, even when you have to make the final call. When you disagree, take time to understand each other's point of view.
- When youth are challenged by something, help them think through their options by asking questions rather than solving their challenges for them.

Watch your assumptions. Pay close attention to your assumptions and how you react to what young people do or tell you. Assumptions can cause adults to react in ways that indicate judgment which can create a negative interaction. These three skills can help:

- Learn to identify your assumptions (*She needs my wisdom to fix this problem*).
- Every time you catch yourself making an assumption, make an observation instead (*She didn't ask for my advice*).
- Based on your observations, ask questions, listen carefully, and learn (*Do you just want to talk and me listen?*).

Pause, reflect and let go of judgment. It is as important to pay attention to your own reactions as it is to listen to youth. If you find yourself having a strong feeling, pause and reflect before you react or respond. Before acting on a feeling, ask yourself how you'd respond if this was another adult. Are you making an unhelpful judgment? Building trust requires letting go of judgment. If a child or youth senses that your acceptance of them is conditional, they won't feel safe bringing up sensitive topics that they fear might cost them your approval. You don't have to agree to support a child or youth. If something arises that makes you worried for the youth's safety, express that concern to them in a way that shows you care about them.

Keep your promises and do your best to show up! If you make a promise, keep it. If you can't keep promises, don't make them. And, we all know that real life can interrupt commitments. The important thing is that you do your very best to show up and, if you can't, be honest and consistent in your communication.

Don't give up! Believe you can do it! Understand that it can be challenging.

Resources:

www.searchinstitute.org; <https://cssp.org>

The Askable Adults Campaign is a project of the Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence. Find more tools and information about the campaign at vtnetwork.org

