

# COMMIT TO CONSISTENT CONNECTIONS



Askable Adult Campaign  
Be someone they can talk to.

Children and youth who have consistent and strong connections to adults in their families and communities are more likely to have a solid sense of belonging and security. Connection fosters wellbeing across racial, ethnic, cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic characteristics. Your strong commitment to maintaining consistent, predictable, dependable, and safe relationships with the youth in your life will make you a more askable adult for them.

## TIPS FOR STAYING CONNECTED WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE:

**You matter to me is the message that all children and youth in your life should get from you.** No matter your relationship to them—parent, teacher, youth worker, neighbor, family member—this message should guide all of your interactions with the young people in your life. Tell them that they matter to you and show up for them over and over again.

**Be consistent, predictable, dependable, and safe.** Relationships have predictable stages:

- **Checking it out for safety:** Children and youth, especially those who've experienced high levels of stress and trauma, often expect disappointment, abandonment, lack of genuineness and negative outcomes. Help ensure physical and emotional safety by offering comfortable, accepting environments that honor individual differences and encourage youth to ask for what they need. Do youth have decision-making ability when they are with you? Are there symbols in your space that indicate you value diversity and difference?

- **Testing limits:** Expect some limit testing as youth seek to learn about your role in their lives and ensure that you accept them for who they are. Be forgiving of a youth's desire for reassurance and retesting to explore how consistent, predictable and dependable you are. For youth who've experienced trauma, this may take longer than you might expect. Respond to youth with unconditional positive regard—the idea that you will not change your attitude or actions toward them based on something they say or do. Remember, you are in it for the long haul.
- **Genuineness:** People who are attached tend to be more comfortable with each other. When trust is built in small moments over time, creating predictable, dependable connections, the trust deepens; anxiety decreases; communication is smoother; and feedback and modeling have more meaning.

**Pay attention.** Focus on children and youth when they are talking about things that matter to them. Put away your cell phone, make eye contact if it is comfortable for them, listen hard and believe what they say.

**Follow up.** Maintain contact with young people when you know they are going through something challenging rather than waiting for them to bring it up again. Send a quick text or emoji to remind them that you are present.

**Make time for lightness.** Bring humor, fun, and laughter when appropriate.

**Help youth navigate stress.** Children and youth experience stress at home, school, and in their communities. Sometimes this stress is normal and manageable and sometimes it is complex and toxic. You can help youth learn how to manage stress. This can be by simply encouraging them to do things that they love like sports, writing, music, or art. It can also be sharing tools for mindfulness that help focus in on the sights, sounds, and other physical sensations in their immediate environment like meditation, yoga, relaxation, and breathing.

**Find satisfaction in doing things for and with them.** You may find yourself sitting on cold bleachers or in hard seats at a three-hour band concert, but youth will notice your effort and feel more connected with you because you have shown up for them. It's important for youth to believe that we value spending time with them.

**Shift levels of support.** Give more support when young people are struggling, and less when they are coasting. Tides can turn quickly for them and they will most likely reach out to you again soon.

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

**Resources:**  
[www.searchinstitute.org](http://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](http://vtnetwork.org)