

# ASKABLE | ADULT CAMPAIGN

Be someone they  
can talk to.

## Lesson Plan and Conversation Starter Guide





Vermont's children and youth say they want more informed, approachable adults who they can turn to for help in navigating stress and challenges on a day-to-day basis.

Bring these activities and conversations to adults in your community. Together, we can increase understanding, build skills and make personal commitments to be more askable for the young people in our lives.



To order Askable Adult postcards and stickers, email a request to [info@vtnetwork.org](mailto:info@vtnetwork.org).

Find out how you can become more askable for the youth in your life and get involved in the campaign at [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)

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**#askableadultvt #askableadultcampaign #vtnetwork**

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For electronic copies of the facilitator and participant guides with live links, go to:  
[vtnetwork.org/askableadult](http://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)



## WHO: The people

**The Participants:** This lesson plan and conversation starter guide is designed for adults who are interested in becoming more “askable” and supportive for the children and youth in their lives. It is also for youth who want to help adults learn to be more askable. It works with adult-only groups and youth/adult groups. Participants are adults seeking to enhance skills that will enable them to have strong, trusting, and affirming relationships, communicate more effectively, strengthen connections, and be a valuable resource for the young people in their lives—and also youth who want to support adults in building these skills.

**The Facilitators:** Ideally, a youth/adult team would facilitate the lesson plan, although a one or two-person adult team can also facilitate. Especially for youth/adult participant groups, it is best to have a youth/adult facilitation team. More informal conversations can be led by any adult or youth/adult team. When choosing your team, consider that youth/adult teams model the skills that participants are learning. Including youth as facilitators supports youth leadership and engages participants in a higher level of introspection and dialogue.

## WHY: The situation that calls for a lesson plan and conversation starters

In a 2017 VT Network survey of 584 Vermont Youth, Vermont children and youth ages 10 to 24 identified an array of concerns that cause them stress in their everyday lives—including drug and alcohol use; poverty; sexism and harassment; body shaming and bullying; and homophobia and transphobia. When asked what would help, young people said that the number one solution would be having more supportive and “askable” adults in their lives.

We also know that the single most common factor for children who develop resilience to stress and adversity is having at least one stable relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult (Harvard Center for the Developing Child). This is especially critical for young people working to develop a positive sense of self in a culture that often devalues them based on their identity, ability, background or status.

Children and youth asked for more informed, approachable adults who they can turn to for help navigating stress and challenges on a day-to-day basis. In a subsequent photo campaign, youth identified wanting to talk about relationships, sexuality, struggles, and everyday things like navigating employment, and school. **When asked what they talk to their “askable adults about,” youth’s number one answer was “life.”**

The goal of the VT Network’s Askable Adult Campaign is to increase, motivate, equip, and nurture more askable and supportive adults for youth by increasing awareness and offering tools for adults to increase understanding, build skills and commit to action steps. This guide provides an opportunity for any community member to bring the Askable Adult Campaign materials to a diversity of adults in a variety of settings.

## SO THAT: The change that is possible

So that youth have access to more confident skilled askable adults in their lives.

## When: The Timing

### Lesson Plan:

- 2.5 hours in total
- Can be broken into two 1.25-hour sections
- Does not include breaks

**Conversation Starters:** Flexible timing

## Where: The Places and Spaces

**Lesson Plan:** Staff meetings, teacher in-service days, conference workshops, community groups

**Conversation Starters:** Informal gatherings of friends or family, groups of parents over food and drinks, lunchtime conversations with co-workers

WHAT/Content (Skills, Knowledge & Attitudes)		WHAT FOR? Learning Objectives (What participants will have done by the end of the lesson plan)
Increase understanding of what makes an adult “askable”	LESSON PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflected on the voices of youth heard through stories and words.</li><li>• Identified qualities that make an adult askable.</li></ul>
Build skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build trusting, affirming relationships</li><li>• Commit to consistent connections</li><li>• Commit to caring communication</li><li>• Be a curious co-pilot</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explored and analyzed skill building tools to strengthen relationships, connections, communication, and conversations with children and youth.</li><li>• Practiced communication and listening skills to improve caring communication with youth.</li></ul>
Make personal commitments to be more askable for the youth in our lives		Chose a youth to talk to, a relationship building skill to work on, another skill to build, and information to learn.

## HOW: The Lesson Plan

Below is the Askable Adult Campaign Lesson Plan with activities. Participants, please follow along, write responses in this guide, and consider bringing this lesson plan to other adults in your communities.

# ASKABLE ADULT CAMPAIGN LESSON PLAN

## I. Welcome, Share the “WHY,” Facilitator Role, Learning Objectives, and Agenda

## II. What Makes an Askable Adult?

- A. **Listen** to Maru and Alexa’s story and **note** something Maru says about what makes adults askable for them. (2:30)
  - ▶ Consider **sharing** something you noticed.
- B. Individually, **look over** the handouts with three wordles. These images reflect what Vermont youth said about who their askable adults are, what their qualities are, and what they’d talk to them about.
- C. **Circle** something that surprised, inspired, or resonated for you on each wordle image.
- D. If you are willing, **share** at least one of your answers with the group.

## III. Reflecting On Our Own Experiences—If You Want To *(optional)*

- A. Get out some paper and **write or think about one or more** of these prompts:
  - ▶ Did/do you have an askable adult when you were young?
  - ▶ Who was/is your askable adult?
  - ▶ What made/make them askable for you? What did/do you talk to them about?
  - ▶ Think about a moment when an adult supported you in a way that felt good to you. What did they do? What was that like?
  - ▶ If you haven’t gotten the support you needed from adults, what would have been/ would be helpful for you? How else did/do you find support?

- B. If you are willing, **share** with a partner some of your reflections.
- C. Consider **sharing** with the large group something that came up for you during this activity.

**Deeper Dive:** To find out more about the research supporting youth/adult connections and the Vermont Youth Survey, check out blogs from February 6th, 2020 and May 18th, 2022:

[vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)

#### IV. Four Askable Adult Skill Areas:

- ◇ Building trusting, affirming relationships
- ◇ Commit to consistent connections
- ◇ Commit to caring communication
- ◇ Be a curious co-pilot/navigating tricky conversations





## V. Building Trusting and Affirming Relationships



A. **Listen** to Gabriel and his mom Natanya’s story and **note** how trust and connection were built in their relationship. (2:15)

► Consider **sharing** something you noticed.

B. **Read** over the *Building Trusting and Affirming Relationships* tool and **identify**:

1. (Adults) Something that is doable for you to increase your askability.
2. (Adults) Something that is a “stretch” for you to achieve in order to be more askable.
3. (Youth) The top 1-3 adult skills that are most important, from your perspective.

C. Consider **sharing** with the large group something you chose and why.

**Deeper Dive:** To find out more about *Building Trusting and Affirming Relationships*, explore blog posts from February 19th, 2020 and May 25th, 2022: [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)

## VI. Commit to Consistent Connections



- A. **Listen** as Thomas and Laurie talk about their unlikely connection and **note** something about “consistency.” (3:37)
  - ▶ Consider **sharing** something you noticed.
- B. **Read** over the *Commit to Consistent Connections* tool.
- C. In teams of three or four, **identify**:
  - ▶ The three connection tips you find most important.
- D. Consider **sharing** your top three tips with the large group.

**Deeper Dive:** To find out about parents and caregivers as askable adults and more about Committing to Consistent Connections, check out blogs from March 11th, 2020 and June 1st, 2022: [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)



## VII. Commit to Caring Communication



A. **Read** this twitter quote by Jada Yuan, reporter for the *Washington Post*:

““Do you want to vent or do you want advice?” Just learning now, after 40 years on earth, that this might be the most important question to ask whenever a friend or loved one is upset.”

B. Spend a few minutes **free writing** about this quote.

► **Adult prompt:** Have you ever tried this approach with youth or someone else? If so, how is it helpful? If not, why do you think it might be helpful—particularly in communicating with youth?

► **Youth prompt:** Have you ever let an adult know you didn’t want advice and just wanted to be heard? Have you communicated that verbally? Directly? Non-verbally? Indirectly? What makes it easy or hard to tell adults what you need?

► Consider **sharing** something you wrote.

C. **Read** over the *Commit to Caring Communication* tool.

D. With a partner that you haven't worked with yet, **practice** the tip: *WAIT! Why Am I Talking?*

1. Select a topic about which adults typically lecture:

- ▶ Limiting social media/screen time
- ▶ Wearing seatbelts
- ▶ Cell phone use while driving
- ▶ Something else?

2. Decide who will be the adult and who will be the young person. In youth-adult pairs, start with the youth playing the adult.

- ▶ **Adult**, you have a short time to talk with a young person about this very important topic. You have a lot of good knowledge to share about it.
- ▶ **Youth**, you don't really want to be lectured and you have strong opinions about this topic.

3. Take one: 3-minute conversation (in youth-adult pairs, youth plays adult):

- ▶ **A:** Tries to get a lot of info to youth about the topic.
- ▶ **Y:** Tries to voice their opinion

4. Take two: 3-minute conversation (in youth-adult pairs, youth plays youth):

- ▶ **Y:** Talks about the topic
- ▶ **A:** Only talks 1 minute total out of the 3 minutes. Use a cell phone stopwatch to time how long you talk.

5. Switch roles and do it again (if you have extra time).

6. Large group share:

- ▶ What came up for you?
- ▶ What was hard?
- ▶ How did it feel for the young person?
- ▶ How did it feel for the adult?
- ★ What possibilities open up when we make more space for youth to be heard?

**Deeper Dive:** To find out about being askable with children experience trauma and more about Committing to Caring Communication, explore blogs from March 25th, 2020 and June 8th, 2022: [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)

## VIII. Be a Curious Co-Pilot/Navigating Tricky Conversations



A. **Read** this quote:

*"Kids talk when we give them our full, curious attention. In order to truly hear them and discern the right-sized response in the moment, we need to tune in to their channel. Like on an old-fashioned radio dial, we have to hone in on just the right spot to tune out the static of our fears, worries, and distractions so we can get the message—are they just venting? Or asking for help developing a plan? The best way to do that is to look inside and get to know the static that comes up for us. I often think the best thing we can do to show up for our kids is tend to ourselves, seeking support from friends, colleagues or professionals, especially when we have a hard time removing the static on our own."*

*~ Julia Chafets, LICSW, Montpelier*

B. With a partner, **reflect** on these questions:

1. (Youth) What are tricky topics to discuss with adults? Why are these hard to talk about?
2. (Youth) What are the top 1-3 things that would make it easier for you to talk to adults about these topics?
3. (Adults) What are tricky topics or conversations for you to have with children/youth?
4. (Adults) **Talk** about your own "static": what fears and worries make it hard for you to fully tune in to critical conversations with the young people in your life?
5. (Adults) What support do you need to help clear your static? How can you get that support?

- C. **Youth**, if you're comfortable, **share** with the big group your top 1-3 things that would make it easier to talk to adults about tricky topics.
- D. **Read** over the *Being a Curious Co-Pilot* tool.
- ▶ (Adults) **Star** a skill or tip that you'd like to circle back to later.
  - ▶ (Youth) **Star** a skill or tip that is very important to you.
- E. **Revisit** wordle #3 or think about the youth in your life and:
- ▶ (Adults) **Identify** one topic that is important to youth that you would like to learn more about.
  - ▶ (Adults) If you can, **identify** a resource for learning more about that topic.
  - ▶ (Youth) **Identify** one topic that you wish adults would learn more about, and ideas for how and where adults could learn.
- F. (In youth-adult groups) Invite youth to **share** the topic they wish adults would learn more about, and their ideas for how and where adults could learn.
- (In adult-only groups) Consider **sharing** the topic that you'd like to learn more about and ask for resource ideas if you don't know of any.

**Deeper Dive:** To find out about being askable with for younger children, navigating tricky conversations, and more about *Being a Curious Co-pilot*, explore blogs from April 8th, 2020, June 15th, 2022 and June 22nd, 2022: [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)

## IX. Explore Possibilities and Actions

- A. **Listen** to Alex and Sarah's story and **think** about what new possibilities are open for you—to be more "askable" for the children and youth in your life, and to have more deeply connected, trusting, affirming relationships with them. (2:22)

## X. Act

- A. Find an Askable Adult postcard on page 42 of this guide. This is a place for you to record some personal commitments. On the back of an #askableadultvt postcard, write:
- ▶ I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ how I can be more askable for them.
  - ▶ One thing I'll do to build relationships with youth:

- ▶ One skill I will work on:
- ▶ One topic I will learn more about:
- ▶ I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ (another adult) to support my accountability to these commitments.

B. To close, we'll go around and hear some of the commitments you made.

C. Thank you for coming, for reflecting and sharing, and for your commitment to strengthening your relationships with youth.

On page 16 of your guide, you'll find a list of other ways you can take action.

Before you leave, please fill out our evaluation post-survey.

### Some more ways to take action:

- ▶ Take a selfie with your postcard and post with hashtags:  
**#askableadultvt #askableadultcampaign**
- ▶ If there is a young person who identifies you as "askable," show them your personal commitment card. See if they want to post a selfie of you together along with a statement. Tell your story of connection (use the hashtags). Consider these as interview questions:
  - Adult to youth: What makes me askable? How do you describe our relationship? What do you think adults need to know about being more askable and supportive for youth?
  - Youth to adult: What do you see as the benefits of being in meaningful relationships with youth? Are there any challenges you face? What would you tell other adults who want to be more "askable" for the youth in their lives?
- ▶ Put an Askable Adult sticker or postcard in your space to show youth that you want to be askable.
- ▶ Bring this *Askable Adult Campaign Lesson Plan and Conversation Starter Guide* to other adults in your community. To order postcards and stickers, email a request to: [info@vtnetwork.org](mailto:info@vtnetwork.org)
- ▶ Find more Askable Adult resources at [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult) and follow the Vermont Network on Facebook and Instagram.

**Deeper Dive:** To find out about finding support for yourself and taking action, check out the blog from April 22nd, 2020: [vtnetwork.org/askableadult](https://vtnetwork.org/askableadult)



## HOW: Conversation Starters

Below are conversation prompts (stories, tools, quotes) along with discussion questions to stimulate informal adult conversations about askable adults. Participants can follow along and consider bringing these conversations to other adults in your communities. Note these conversation starters are designed for adults. For youth-adult groups, we recommend using the full lesson plan.

### ASKABLE ADULT CAMPAIGN CONVERSATION STARTERS

#### I. Welcome, Share the “WHY,” Facilitator Role, Handouts

#### II. What Makes an Adult Askable and Reflecting On Our Own Experiences

A. Conversation prompts to consider:

- ▶ **Listen** to Maru and Alexa’s story and **note** something Maru says about what makes adults askable for them. (2:30)
- ▶ **Find** and **look over** the handout with three wordles.

B. Discussion questions to consider:

- ▶ Talk about the story. What did you notice?
- ▶ Who are askable adults for youth?
- ▶ What qualities do askable adults have?
- ▶ What do youth want to talk about? What else have you heard?
- ▶ Did you have an askable adult when you were young? Who was your askable adult? What made them askable for you? What did you talk to them about?
- ▶ If you didn’t have an askable adult, what would have been helpful for you? How else did you find support?

#### III. Building Trusting, Affirming Relationships

A. Conversation prompts to consider:

- ▶ **Look over** the *Building Trusting and Affirming Relationships* tool in the *Askable Adult Skill Building Toolkit*.
- ▶ **Listen** to Gabriel and his mom Natanya’s story and **note** how trust and connection were built in their relationship. (2:15)



B. Discussion questions to consider:

- ▶ Talk about their story. What did you notice?
- ▶ Pick a tip that is doable for you and talk about it.
- ▶ Pick a tip that is a stretch and talk about why.
- ▶ What does this bring up for you?
- ▶ Talk about youth that you have or are building relationships with. What has been easy? What has been hard?

#### IV. Commit to Consistent Connections

A. Conversation prompts to consider:

- ▶ **Listen** as Thomas and Laurie talk about their unlikely connection and **note** something about “consistency.” (3:37)
- ▶ **Read over** the *Commit to Consistent Connections* tool.

B. Discussion questions to consider:

- ▶ Talk about the story. What did you notice?
- ▶ Talk about a time that you felt connected to a young person and used one of these tools in that process.
- ▶ Talk about a time that you struggled to connect with a young person and what tool might have been helpful.
- ▶ What are the three most important connection tips on this tool?
- ▶ What complicates having consistent connections for you as parents/caregivers, teachers, family members, friends? Barriers?
- ▶ What does this bring up for you?
- ▶ Talk about something you discovered by exploring this tool.

#### V. Commit to Caring Communication

A. **Read** this twitter quote by Jada Yuan, reporter for the *Washington Post*:

“‘Do you want to vent or do you want advice?’ Just learning now, after 40 years on earth, that this might be the most important question to ask whenever a friend or loved one is upset.”

- ▶ **Read over** the *Commit to Caring Communication* tool.

B. Discussion questions to consider:

- ▶ Talk about the quote. Have you ever tried this approach with youth or someone else? If so, how is it helpful? If not, why do you think it might be helpful—particularly in communicating with youth?
- ▶ Pick a tip that is doable for you and talk about it.
- ▶ Pick a tip that is a stretch and talk about why.
- ▶ What does this bring up for you?
- ▶ Consider roleplaying the *WAIT! Why Am I Talking?* tip with tricky topics where one person is the adult and one is the child or youth.
- ▶ What complicates caring communication for you as parents/caregivers, teachers, family members, friends?

## VI. Be a Curious Co-Pilot/Navigating Tricky Conversations

A. Conversation prompts to consider:

- ▶ **Listen** to Connor and Hannah talk about a crucial moment in their relationship and **note** something that Hannah did to support Connor. (3:14)
- ▶ **Read** the quote on page 11 of the participant guide.
- ▶ **Read over** the *Being a Curious Co-Pilot* tool.
- ▶ **Explore** wordle #3.

B. Discussion questions to consider:

- ▶ Talk about the story. What did you notice?
- ▶ From the quote, talk about your own “static”: what fears and worries make it hard for you to fully tune in to critical conversations with the young people in your life? What support do you need to help clear your static? How can you get that support?
- ▶ From the tool, what is doable for you? What is a stretch?
- ▶ From the wordle or issues coming up for children and youth in your life, identify one topic that you would like to learn more about.
- ▶ Talk about resources to learn more about the topics you identified.

## VII. Explore Possibilities and Actions (*always include this question*)

A. Conversation prompt to consider:

- ▶ **Listen** to Alex and Sarah's story and **think about** what is possible. (2:22)

B. After having some of the conversations above, ask:

- ▶ What new possibilities are open for you to be more "askable" for the children and youth in your life? For you to have more deeply connected, trusting, affirming, relationships with them?

C. Make a personal commitment by filling writing on the back of an #askableadultvt postcard (find one on page 42):

- ▶ I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ how I can be more askable for them.
- ▶ One thing I'll do to build relationships with youth:
- ▶ One skill I will work on:
- ▶ One topic I will learn more about:
- ▶ I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ (another adult) to support my accountability to these commitments.

D. Check out page 13 for more ways to take action and become involved.



## HANDOUTS

### Askable Adult Lesson Plan Agenda

- Welcome
- What makes an askable adult?
- Reflecting on our own experiences
- Four askable adult skills to build
- Building trusting, affirming relationships
- Commit to consistent connections
- Commit to caring communication
- Be a curious co-pilot/navigating tricky conversations
- Explore possibilities and actions
- Act
- Evaluation





## Story Transcripts

### MARU AND ALEXA

Hi, I'm Alexa. Hi, I'm Maru.

**Alexa:** So, what would you tell other adults? What do they need to know about how to help you feel comfortable?

**Maru:** That maybe listen to the people who are talking to them. And just like being understanding and ask questions. Because, I know that, for myself, when people ask questions to me it helps me understand like where they're at. Because, like, sometimes adults will just like say 'umhum' when they don't actually understand you. And then you keep going and then they can't follow you. So just like asking questions is important. When you were growing up, were there any askable adults in your community that you felt you could turn to?

**Alexa:** That's a good question. I don't know that I really feel like, when I was 9 years old, I had as many people that I could trust as you can. I think, as I got older, there were like some of my counselors at summer camp and then um...I don't know. I think that it makes me feel like I want to cry a little bit. Part of what I really love about the way that your parents have chosen to raise you is that I think you really understand your feelings a lot. And it's easy for you to be able to name what you're feeling and like talk about it and even just like know that you're feeling really frustrated with your brother and like be able to ask for help and all that. I think it's really an incredible gift and it's part of why I like spending time with you because you like DO know how to talk about your feelings. And I think it's such an important skill to have because knowing how we're feeling actually helps us like have healthy ways of dealing with that as opposed to ways of dealing with our feelings that might hurt other folks or hurt ourselves. It just feels really important to me. Whew!!

I think I feel glad to be a person like that in your life and glad that you, special being who I love, feels like you have a lot of support from folks really see and love you. And everybody deserves that!

**Maru:** Yeah!

### GABRIEL AND NATANYA

**Gabriel:** I'm Gabriel.

**Natanya:** And I'm Natanya, and I am Gabriel's mom.

**Natanya:** Can you talk about a time when you felt like I was there for you?

**Gabriel:** I was at a friend's house. It was the first time I had a sleepover there. We were having a great time until we had to, like, mellow down and go to sleep. The sleeping arrangement was just much different than what I was used to. I really wasn't feeling comfortable and so I went upstairs and contacted you.

**Natanya:** So, it was pretty late at night when you called me?

**Gabriel:** It was like two in the morning, it was really late. You didn't really ask me any questions and you came over and picked me up without any judgment.

**Natanya:** So, is there something that I've said to you over time at any point that made you feel like you knew that you could call me at that time and asked me to pick you up?

I think I feel glad to be a person like that in your life and glad that you, special being who I love, feels like you have a lot of support from folks really see and love you. And everybody deserves that!

**Gabriel:** There would never be any judgment if I ever needed really anything from you that you could do. You would come do it, especially like that. I feel like you've proved it over time and that was one of the reasons that I called you and it just try and go through it.

**Natanya:** How, then, would you describe our relationship?

**Gabriel:** I feel like there is a strong like bond almost where we trust each other a lot but there's sometimes when it's a bit shaky and we can get angry at each other. And we just ... but every time we ... we get the relationship back and we can trust each other a lot more.

**Natanya:** And do you feel like it's gotten better over time?

**Gabriel:** I feel like over time ... it was a bit shaky and now it's a good ... it's getting stronger, yeah!

**Natanya:** Awesome, I'm glad to hear that. Love you.

**Gabriel:** Yeah, love you too!

## **THOMAS AND LAURIE**

**Laurie:** My name is Laurie. Thomas comes to our house and he works with the horses and he walks our dog, Sky. There was something very different about him. We just kind of started talking to each other. Yeah, just randomly we would be doing something around the house, or the horses or Thomas would be working with the horses, and we would just start talking to each other and I, at least, felt that it was just this kind of instant connection.

Watching him with the horses has been incredible, incredible, they watch for him. My dog, who is this really quirky character, adores Thomas. And they have a connection, too. Sky just thinks ... he's like, you're one of them. He's like ... "Here comes my buddy!" They walk at the same pace.

**Thomas:** He's my best friend. I prefer animals over people too!

**Laurie:** You can see that with him with the horses. They so accept him, and they trust him which is very unusual. They are not trusting by nature.

If there was something that was really troubling you, would you feel comfortable coming to me and asking me if we could talk about it?

**Thomas:** Yeah.

**Laurie:** Why do you think? I mean ...

**Thomas:** I don't know, I just feel really comfortable talking to you. You know, it's like a safe space.

**Laurie:** I feel that way about you, too. It's sort of like I think that what's really essential in our friendship is that there is no judgment. And, I think that one of the things that we connected with is we both like working with wood. So, when Thomas fell out of the sky, I was doing some projects on outbuildings. When he came to work with the horses, he would check in to see what I was doing and he always had these suggestions that totally blew me away. Because I think ... ah ... I know what I'm doing! And then one time I had smashed my finger with a hammer because the nail wouldn't go in the wall and he said, "You know, if you a drill pilot hole first, that won't happen." I find myself ... I'm learning stuff from him too and he's got ... he has a really creative mind and he comes up with these ideas that are like, really?

**Thomas:** I don't hear many good compliments about myself. It's nice to hear some good.

**Laurie:** Do you believe it?

**Thomas:** I do.

**Laurie:** I hope you do because I mean it. I really do. I think you are incredibly special. It was like he just came into my life unexpectedly and I feel that he's helped me broaden the way I look at things and it's been a real joy to watch him growing and changing. Do you feel you've changed since you started coming to the little farm?

**Thomas:** I have, I have a lot. I can control my anger better.

**Laurie:** Yeah, I've noticed that about you. And you smile a lot more.

**Thomas:** Yup!

**Laurie:** Yeah!

## **CONNOR AND HANNAH** (included in conversation starters)

**Hannah:** My name's Hannah.

**Connor:** My name's Connor.

**Hannah:** I'm Connor's cousin and legal guardian.

**Connor:** Yes!

**Hannah:** Connor, how would you describe our relationship?

**Connor:** It's really weird and, like, pretty complicated.

**Hannah:** What went into our relationship changing so drastically?

**Connor:** I think a lot of that was like really tough conversations and some like shared experiences over the course of the time I've been living with you. I feel like opening up to you like the first few times really like helped define our relationship by some new terms and that were more about like me talking to you about difficult topics and you listening. You listened in a way that made me feel comfortable continuing the conversation. And I feel like that's a lot of what helped define our relationship later on. Kind of like having all those difficult conversations and being able to build our relationship up from them and like bond through them and learn about each other through them. So like, for example, when I would come to you about my mental health and how I really felt like I needed help, you didn't react like some other people had before and like treat me different or like share a lot of difficult information about your own mental health without prompting—which people had before in those kind of roles in my life. You listened and I talked about it with you and then you helped me to find solutions to solve the problem and you are very quick in response time. When I was transitioning between antidepressants, I was feeling really horrible and I told you and you called my psychiatrist and we got the problem solved. That took a very short amount of time in between when I told you.

So it really felt like you took me seriously and you really like valued how I felt and validated how I felt and then came to me with like serious solutions instead of kind of brushing aside how I felt or being like "Oh well, the people prescribing you this medication or this dosage of medication know what they're talking about so there's no way you could be feeling this way so just deal with it, it will get better." It was more like, "Well this obviously isn't working for you so let's find a solution" and I found that that was really valuable and I need to look at you in a more like someone I could talk to you about those kind of things and I could come to you if I had problems.

## ALEX AND SARAH

**Sarah:** I'm Sarah.

**Alex:** I'm Alex and Sarah is my teacher.

**Sarah:** So, what do you think adults need to know about being more askable and supportive to youth?

**Alex:** I think knowing that our brains are not fully developed. It sometimes feels like you're all alone, and like it's just like you and the other people in your high school and like kind of no one else, especially in Vermont. Having adults there who say like "Hey, I know what you're doing, I know what you're going through, like, I know how you feel." And, having people who've like gotten through it and who are like adults now say like, "You know, it's ok, it goes on and it happens to all of us." It seems like something kind of silly because like obviously all teenagers grow into adults, but it is nice to know sometimes. I had a question for you. And that would be like what would you tell other adults that want to be more askable?

**Sarah:** One thing that's really important that I think about every day is how ... that I do not know ... there's so much in this life I just do not know. And, so like being humble and not being ... pretending that, just because I'm a teacher or an adult. that I have all the answers, I don't. And as a matter of fact, I learn every day from students—new things. So, the irony is that you teach me, you know? And I've learned a lot from you personally and all the things that you've done in school. And being open to that and like really just realizing this is like a give and take. We're learning from each other, we're going through this life and being in the same space every day, and you know, it's a connection. So, I just would encourage like adults to keep that in mind: be humble and realize we don't have all the answers, but we can be good listeners and help when we can.



**ASKABLE | ADULT  
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## Words from Vermont Youth

These three images reflect the words of Vermont youth voiced through a photo campaign that followed a 2017 Youth Survey. This is what youth said about who their askable adults were, what their qualities were, and what they'd talk to them about.

### VT YOUTH SAID THEIR ASKABLE ADULT IS:



#

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## VT YOUTH DESCRIBE THEIR ASKABLE ADULT AS:

keep it between us know well willing to help  
has experience knows stuff **non-judgmental**  
good listener **loyal** approachable  
not a snitch understand believe feel ok **confidential**  
**funny** **won't tell** count on not mean  
open minded good person keep secrets **fun**  
reverent understands **caring**  
listen closely light hearted considerate friendly able to give advice  
**helpful** truthful **trustworthy** eye contact  
I know trustable **trust** serious listenable  
respects privacy trusts me know you  
help solve problems **supportive** **listens**  
comfortable asking good **honest** trust you relaxed  
**nice** educated  
**kind** sharing a problem **respectful**  
cares doesn't press you  
**understanding** not gonna bust you

#

**ASKABLE ADULT  
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## YOUTH SAY THEY'D TALK TO AN ASKABLE ADULT ABOUT:

relationships family problems  
legal issues  
something wrong at home very big issues  
sex health what actually happens  
friend problems drugs harrasment  
real first love questions topics with no judgment how I'm feeling  
emotions money problems choices everything  
problems at school personal problems  
problems sexuality mad boy problems tea sad anything  
sports transgender  
whatever life personal things  
nothing school when I'm in trouble  
bullying dogs gender dysphoria fighting don't know  
problems outside of school small issues  
sex/healthy something wrong with me  
abuse hitting being divorced  
life skills things I'm uncomfortable with  
depression college alcohol  
advice  
struggles car advice

#

ASKABLE ADULT  
CAMPAIGN





## Askable Adult Campaign

# SKILL BUILDING TOOLKIT

Be someone they  
can talk to.

Vermont's children and youth say they want more informed, approachable adults they can turn to for help in navigating stress and challenges on a day-to-day basis. In this toolkit, learn how to become an askable, trusted adult for the youth in your life by:

- Establishing trust
- Staying connected
- Communicating effectively
- Being a resource



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*This project was funded by the Vermont Department of Health through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Rape Prevention and Education Program.*



**#askableadultvt • #askableadultcampaign • #vtnetwork**



# 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](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)





# 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.



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**[vtnetwork.org](https://vtnetwork.org)**

**Resources:**  
[www.searchinstitute.org](https://www.searchinstitute.org); <https://cssp.org>

# COMMIT TO CARING COMMUNICATION



**Askable Adult Campaign**  
Be someone they can talk to.

Effective communication between adults and youth is critical to building connections. Both how adults communicate with youth and what they communicate about are important. You can become more askable by communicating in a way that sends the message that you are approachable, willing to do the work, and that you care.

## TIPS FOR ENGAGING IN CARING COMMUNICATION WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE:

**Put away judgment.** It's the number one concern for youth in their relationships with adults.

**Ask what they need then listen deeply.** Youth most often just want to be listened to and heard. Adults most often jump right into problem-solving. When a young person comes to you to talk, ask if they just want to vent and be listened to or if they want feedback and to problem solve. If you make this your good habit, youth will feel heard and you will know what they need.

**WAIT! Why Am I Talking?** Ask yourself this a lot. Sometimes adults dominate conversations with children and youth because we feel we need to always be teaching them what we know. Youth often want useful advice, but not always—sometimes they just want to be listened to. Balance talking with listening. Try a 1:3 ratio where children and youth drive the conversation: For every 15 minutes, are you talking more than 5?

**Lean in. Be interested and learn.** Be interested and curious about what matters the most right now to the children and youth in your life. Ask questions! Ask them how they are doing, what excites



them, what their hobbies are, and how their relationships are going. Ask about and validate their concerns and worries. Work to understand young people's points of view when they share ideas or opinions. Learn from young people—and show it. Youth have a lot to teach adults. Let them know when you've learned something from them that you're excited about.

**Talk about your boundaries and limits.** All adults have limits and boundaries in their relationships with youth whether you're a parent, teacher, youth worker, family member or friend. Young people appreciate knowing what limitations exist for you. Telling them upfront models honesty, dependability, predictability, and integrity and helps youth talk about their own boundaries and succeed in their communication with you. For example, let youth know your limits about connecting on social media and what your boundaries are around time of day and best ways to communicate (texts, email, phone calls, etc.).

**Support their processes and remember yours.** Emphasize mistakes as necessary parts of learning. Praise youth for hard work, whether they succeed or fail. If it is helpful, ask if they'd like you to share how you managed relevant situations when you were their age. Remember careful boundaries when deciding what personal information to share; you don't have to tell them everything to show meaningful support.

**Be a source of appraisal and honesty.** Children and youth appreciate positive and honest feedback (*Your hard work really paid off! or I see that you're struggling here*), affirmation (*You have really grown since solving that problem!*), and constructive feedback (*Do you want feedback? Another way to approach this might be...*).

**Understand what's happening in their lives.** Use what is happening in pop culture, the news, and daily life as conversation starters. Take a shot at listening to music and watching media that is important to the youth in your life. Or, ask them what they're listening to/watching these days. Then, let them lead the conversations.

**Revisit difficult conversations in small doses.** This will show that you care and are able to give conversations room to grow and evolve as you each become more comfortable.

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# BE A CURIOUS CO-PILOT



## Askable Adult Campaign

Be someone they can talk to.

*You've been asked: NOW WHAT?* Youth don't expect adults to know everything—but they do appreciate honest responses and helpful information. Your willingness to be honest, ask good questions, think out of the box, share your own experiences, and collaborate to find information will make you more askable to the children and youth in your life.

## TIPS FOR BECOMING A USEFUL RESOURCE:

**Be honest and direct.** Although it might be a challenge, answer questions as honestly and directly as you can.

**It's ok if you don't know the answer to something or know just what to say.** Be willing to explore! You might be “askable” but you don't know everything! If you don't know the answer to a question, collaborate with children and youth to find helpful information. Be comfortable with silent spaces—just listening and asking questions might be perfect. Many of the topics young people want guidance about are personal—and therefore difficult to talk about. It helps to take questions at face value without reading too much between the lines or making assumptions or judgments.

**Break it down.** When youth are trying to solve a problem, help youth break it down into smaller, more digestible pieces. Help them find their own solutions by asking curious questions (*So, what could you do differently to tackle this problem?*), rather than telling them what you would do. You can help by acting as a sounding board and asking questions to encourage self-discovery.

**Ask helpful questions; youth probably have the answer themselves.** When young people are challenged by something, help them think through their options by asking questions rather than solving it for them. Try these questions: *What have you already tried? Have you ever had a similar problem; what worked? Do you need more information? Can I support you in getting what you need or want?*

**Think outside of the box!** Offer information and practical help to solve a practical problem, loan something they may need, offer to connect them to other adults or resources, give them a ride, help them find a job or work on their college essay, throw a baseball, or turn music pages for them.

**Broaden the web of relationships.** Connect young people to others who share their interests or can expand their world. Ask about and encourage their development of meaningful relationships with other adults. Support youth to explore what relationships in their lives bring them comfort, including those with peers and pets.

**Look up local and other resources together.** Work with youth to find helpful resources and information. Model by sharing about times that you have asked for help.

**Youth want meaningful conversations and practical information about their concerns. It's ok to google it!**

- For ideas on how to talk with young people about drugs and alcohol, check out [parentupvt.org](http://parentupvt.org)
- What about sexuality and sex ed? Try [lets-talk.how](http://lets-talk.how) and [advocatesforyouth.org](http://advocatesforyouth.org)
- Check out *Relationship Status* on the [vtnetwork.org](http://vtnetwork.org) site to talk together about navigating dating and romantic relationships: <https://vtnetwork.org/relationship-status-booklet>
- For ways to support children and youth in managing stress at home, school, and in their everyday lives:
  - ▶ Look for youth mindfulness activities on [positivepsychology.com/category/mindfulness](http://positivepsychology.com/category/mindfulness)
  - ▶ Find guidance for parents at [bradleyhospital.org](http://bradleyhospital.org) by searching for "managing stress in teens"
  - ▶ And search for the *Teen Stress Management Plan* on [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org)

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## Askable Adult Postcard

**#askableadultvt**



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