



## **Youth Worker Practice Network Members Session “Core Values of Youth Work 1 - Youth Engagement” March 2017**

### **What are core values?**

The core values are the guiding principles that dictate behavior and action. Core values can help people to know what is right from wrong; they can help youth workers to determine if they are on the right path and fulfilling their goals; and they create an unwavering and unchanging guide.

### **Where do youth workers get core values from?**

#### Internal

*Why did I become a youth worker? Why am I in my current role - what is it's purpose and why is it important to me?*

Key themes were:

- Someone helped me when I was young
- I see the value in this sort of work - it's important for the future of our society and communities
- An opportunity to contribute or give back to the community
- Young people have a lot to teach us if we are willing to learn from them
- “Breaking the cycle” and seeing positive change
- The program / organisation I work in aligns with my personal values and interests
- I get to do something I care about, it can be lots of fun
- We get to demonstrate integrity in grey areas
- It is immensely challenging at times, but very rewarding (personally/internally)
- Youth workers help young people unlock purpose in their lives as well as make positive choices

#### External

As well as our internal motivations and values, we have frameworks and systems which support what we do and help us do it well. These include:

- Youth Work Code of Ethics
- Values of our society/community
- Frameworks (eg Practice Framework, principles of social justice & equity)

## Who are Youth Workers?

What words describe a good youth worker - according to youth workers?

- Appear / Turn up when they say they will
- Ask questions / Follow up
- Curious but not intrusive
- Eye Contact - Know when to make it, when to break it
- Body Language - Need to be able to read them/where they are at
- Not just saying what the young person thinks or wants to hear
- Use stories to talk about need
- Conversation not too guarded - honest & 'real'

What words describe a good youth worker - according to young people?

- Open minded
- Patient
- Honest (even if they don't like it)
- Flexibility
- Consistent
- Approachable
- Knowledgeable
- Responsive
- Trustworthy
- Good Boundaries
- Sense of fun

What words describe a good youth worker - according to managers or policy makers?

- People don't complain about them
- Accountable
- Hard working
- Reliable
- Relatable
- Authentic

What words describe a poor/bad youth worker?

- No Boundaries
- Cynical
- No follow through
- Inconsistent
- "Can't read the room"
- Not emotionally sensitive
- Authoritarian
- Think they are the expert
- Judgemental/No mercy
- Breaches confidentiality
- In it to fix themselves

## Young Person Centred Engagement

Positive engagement with young people who access our services is key to helping them develop meaningful relationship with adults, work in issues that are affecting their lives, learn new skills, and access opportunities that can help them learn and develop in their personal lives or contribute to their communities.

Just 'being available' isn't always enough for positive engagement, therefore we need to consider what some of the barriers are to young people accessing our services or getting the support we are able to offer them.

Discussion: Why don't some young people want to engage with us/our services?

- Don't like the youth worker (personality clash)
- They have other priorities
- Ambivalence
- Denial - don't think there is a problem
- Triggers (not ready to deal with them)
- Uncertainty - don't know what's on offer, or what might be required of them
- Don't want to be a bother
- Helplessness (what is the point)
- Confidentiality concerns - don't understand or trust that support is confidential

- Happy with how things are, don't want to change
- Haven't had things work before so why bother trying again
- Stigma - from family, friends, school, work, community, self
- Family - don't support them to engage with us
- Mandated to be there but really don't want to
- Coercion - is someone else pressuring them to be there?
- Not in the mood - having a bad day and feeling angry / frustrated / sad

Discussion - So what can we do to help our engagements be positive?

With young children we can connect simply through 'seeing' them (pulling a face to get their attention). But how do we do this with young people?

- Speak to them directly. They have sought you out for a reason. Show you are available.
- Treat them as capable of making decisions
- Be honestly interested in what they have to say. Curious but not intrusive
- Understand why they are seeing you, and what they want help for.
- Be clear about what you can actually offer them. Set realistic expectations.
- Use language that they understand.
- Be yourself. You can't 'fake it till you make it' and pretend to be cool.
- Be flexible. Use humour, metaphor to engage.
- Let the conversation go where it needs to go.
- "Same Same" - what are your similarities, how can you use that to engage?
- Notice the good in them - point it out and praise them (be genuine!)
- Acknowledge their expertise, get them to teach you something

While we centre our engagement on the young person and why they are accessing our service, we need to remember that there may be a whole lot of other issues going on for that young person, and that they are dealing with those issues in a broader context - with family, friends, school, work, other systems.

Our next session will focus on some case studies where we look at how we might help a young person in a range of situations, who else might need to be involved, and how we might turn a 'negative' engagement with a young person into a positive experience.

The Youth Worker Practice Network is a Community of Practice for youth workers in the ACT & surrounding region. It is coordinated by the Youth Coalition of the ACT, and advised by a group of experienced youth work practitioners from a range of community organisations and youth programs. All youth workers are invited to join the Youth Worker Practice Network.

For more information visit <https://members.youthcoalition.net/ywpr> or contact Hannah Watts, Youth Coalition of the ACT on 02 6247 3540 or [hannah@youthcoalition.net](mailto:hannah@youthcoalition.net)