

TIPS FOR ADULT ALLIES



Authenticity - Know WHY You're Engaging

Be genuine. It's pretty obvious to youth when adults don't care. So, make a conscious effort to make yourself available and to be engaged. Authenticity is important because if the youth think they aren't a priority for you, then they will feel unimportant and as a result they will stop trying. Don't say things like "let's get this over with" or "let's finish as soon as possible, I have other things to do." Instead, let the youth know that you are invested in helping them and they are a priority to you.

Reflect on your power and privilege. As an adult, you have power. Make sure you are aware of your power and aware of how it affects your interactions with youth. Additionally, you are privileged in the sense that community leaders will listen to your ideas more readily than they might listen to youths' ideas. Use this to your group's advantage - use your privilege to bring attention to the group of youths and then allow the youth to take over once they have people's attention. Use your individual power to help increase the power of the group.



Reaching Out to Youth

Don't rely on youth to seek you out. Students are often not exposed to social justice issues and organizations until high school. Reaching out to students is a great way to get more youth involved, to target young people who may not feel comfortable asking for help, and to show support for the group/organization.

Provide space, be easy to access, and invite conversation. Communication is extremely important when working with youth. Students can sometimes feel intimidated talking to teachers, so it is helpful when the teacher initiates the conversation. Communicating with students is



much more effective when the students feel that the teacher is on the same level as they are, rather than in an authoritative position.



Constructive Feedback - Know HOW You're Engaging

Don't shut down ideas. Shutting down ideas is silencing the voice of youth who seek to be heard. Be a resource to bounce ideas off of and give constructive feedback rather than saying, "no, that's not possible." Don't be afraid to voice your opinions, but be a voice of reason rather than the terminator of ideas. Be reasonable with what you say, and help them be reasonable with their goals over a set time period.

Be a resource rather than take the lead. Youth driven projects are supposed to be just that - driven by youth. Don't take the lead, but give your input as a member of the group, rather than as a group leader or decision maker. Give the youth resources; whether it's your adult mindset, or being a supervisor for their meetings, be there for them rather than be the leader of them.

Be a "coffee filter." A better way to think about your role in a youth group dynamic is as a filter. The same substance that goes through the filter comes out, but more refined in terms of working towards the purpose. Don't change the direction of the idea or flow of thoughts, but help in the refinement of the process towards the goal.

Don't tokenize. Youth don't often get the chance to speak and voice our opinions about the systems that decide our life path, and often when we do our voice is taken as a token; something to be praised and admired, but not taken seriously. This is not a productive way to view us. We all have powerful voices, and the best way to respond to and work with youth is the same way in which you would to a fellow adult, with trust and respect.

