

Youth-Friendly North Shore

RESOURCE:
Reducing Barriers for Youth



About This Resource

Youth face many barriers to accessing community services and support. Regularly reviewing organizational practices with staff, volunteers, and participants can reduce these barriers and improve service access for youth from diverse backgrounds.

This resource comes from the Youth-Friendly North Shore Community of Practice activities held on June 6, 2024. It aims to help any organization serving youth increase awareness of these access barriers. Practitioners can use this resource to improve their work with young people.

Reference Resources

Review the resources below to support additional learning in this area:

- [Tamarack Institute - Improving Youth Service Navigation: A Guide For Community Organizations](#)
- [MCFD, 2013 - Youth Engagement Toolkit - Resource Guide](#)
- [Search Institute, 2017 - Relationships First: Creating Connections That Help Young People Thrive](#)

Background Information

Strategies to Reduce Barriers to Access

When thinking about access to services, consider the 5 A's of Accessible Services:

1. **Approachability:** Do youth know about your services and where they can access them?
2. **Acceptability:** Are services socially and culturally acceptable to the youth who need them?
3. **Availability and Accommodation:** Are services available at the times and locations needed by youth?
4. **Affordability:** Are there any direct or indirect costs associated with youth services, such as transportation expenses?
5. **Appropriateness:** Are services meeting the needs of young people and tailored to their preferences?

Some common ways to improve accessibility include:

- Co-locate services and create online hubs to improve accommodation.
- Reduce waitlists and simplify referral processes.
- Provide integrated youth services and coordinated care.
- Support youth through service navigators and peer connectors.
- Enhance service experiences by providing a comprehensive list of youth services and actively promoting them.
- Invite youth participants to share their experiences and suggest ways to make your organization more accessible for their peers.

For more information, click [here](#).

Adolescent Development and Adult Connection

Adolescence is a critical period marked by significant physical, sexual, emotional, and brain growth, essential for the moral and identity development of youth. Understanding these physiological changes is crucial for adults to support youth during this transformative time.

Some characteristics of adolescence include:

- Low impulse control
- High sensation-seeking
- Changes in social-emotional development
- High peer acceptance
- Development of the brain's prefrontal cortex, with reinforcement of well-used pathways

Communication Approaches

During this period of change, youth thrive and seek support when they feel respected, seen, and affirmed rather than judged. Our empathetic and understanding approach, rather than one based on fear or control, creates a safe space for their growth.

Positive adult-youth relationships directly impact development, helping youth self-regulate through calming connections. To enhance these relationships, consider the following communication approaches:

- **Have a listening agenda:** Set an intention to actively listen to their perspectives, concerns, and experiences.
- **Ask open questions:** Use questions like “What?” and “How?” instead of “Why?”
- **Reflective listening:** Consider whether your reactions are based on adult perceptions and fears or if you’re truly understanding the youth’s feelings and experiences.
- **Engage in short, ongoing conversations:** Regularly check in briefly about their day. Initiate conversations from your side. Consistent engagement helps them feel more connected and willing to open up.
- **Seek common ground:** Understand their current capabilities, interests, and needs rather than expecting them to conform to adult expectations or standards.
- **Share power:** Let young people make decisions about activities you do together and what you talk about. Give them choices to promote decision-making.

For more information on youth engagement, building positive relationships and promoting youth resilience, refer to the following resources:

- [Government of BC - Youth Engagement Toolkit - Resource Guide](#)
- [Search Institute, 2017 - Relationships First: Creating Connections That Help Young People Thrive](#)

Learning Activity

Instructions on Using this Guide

Facilitation Guidelines

Before starting, assign a facilitator for the discussion. The facilitator must create psychologically and professionally safe conditions and support the learning needs of all participants. Bringing in an external facilitator can help team members focus on the learning activity.

Form a Group

Form small groups of 4 to 10 people, including your youth team members specifically or members from different teams in your organization.

Set Ground Rules

Establish ground rules to ensure all participants feel safe sharing their thoughts and beliefs. Here are some suggested guidelines as a starting point:

- Be curious, not judgmental.
- Listen to learn, not to debate.
- Engage respectfully, even when you disagree.
- Agree to maintain confidentiality.
- No reporting or evaluation connected to your participation.

Set an Objective

Treat this as a learning exercise for yourself, your team, and/or your organization. The common goal is to work together to reduce barriers to access for youth in your community.

Assign a Note-taker

Each small group should choose a note-taker to capture key discussion points and takeaways, especially any recommended changes in practice.

Discuss

Start by reviewing one scenario together as a group, either by reading it aloud or silently reading individually:

- Spend 15–30 minutes discussing the reflection questions for the scenario. If necessary, refer to relevant resources for ideas and strategies to overcome barriers.
- If reviewing multiple scenarios, discuss and capture reflections from one scenario before moving on to the next.

Action Steps

Ask each member to share one thing they will do differently moving forward. If the group identifies changes needed as a team or organization, agree on next steps to implement these changes.

Scenario 1: Overcoming the Awareness Barrier

On a windy Saturday afternoon, Anita is stuck at home, feeling bored. Her friends invited her to go shopping, but she's short on cash. With nobody home, she longs for somewhere else to hang out besides the mall.

She vaguely remembers a friend mentioning a school project about improving a youth drop-in space nearby. After a fruitless TikTok search, a Google search reveals a youth drop-in center at the mall, offering Saturday evening movies. She messages a friend working at the mall to find out more, but her friend has no clue about it.

Discussion Questions

- What are the barriers to access in this situation?
- Discuss some strategies/solutions for overcoming the barriers
- What difference will these strategies make to invite youth to engage?

notes

Scenario 2: Policy Enforcement that Challenges Youth

On the bus ride home, Pankaj expresses frustration about feeling closely watched, prompting a discussion with Olivia and Noah about increased scrutiny from library staff, including warnings for minor disturbances.

Olivia, Pankaj, and Noah, friends from the same neighborhood, cherish their after-school routine. Olivia heads to the library because her parents work from home until late, leaving her with limited space and internet access. She relies on the school lunch program and snacks provided by the school to tide her over until dinner.

Meanwhile, Pankaj and Noah spend their afternoons shooting hoops at the basketball court, enjoying the fresh air and freedom it offers. However, their home lives present challenges; Noah's stepfather's smoking and Pankaj's brother's increased weed use create distractions.

Pankaj and Noah typically join Olivia at the library later in the evening after their basketball game. Olivia notices the smell on their clothes but it doesn't bother her.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing that policies generally exist for the safety of all space users, discuss the following:

- How is this public space protecting these youth? How would the loss of this space affect youth?
- What are the barriers/challenges for youth in this situation?
 - Consider the points of youth-adult friction. How do the adults feel? How do the youth feel?
- Discuss some strategies for adaptations or approaches that lower the points of friction.
- What do we want you to feel about our shared community spaces?

notes

Scenario 3: Affordability and Accommodation Barriers

Zeke is hesitant to go home after school due to the loud and messy atmosphere in the evenings. Instead, he considers going to Alex's basement to play video games, but he's uncomfortable around Alex's older siblings and their friends who sometimes drink there.

Alternatively, he contemplates going to either the park by the elementary school or the community centre, both a 10-minute walk from home. However, he worries about being unnoticed in the park for an extended period, especially with the cold setting in and the proximity to nearby houses. At the community centre, he recalls being charged \$2 for video games last time he visited and realizes he has no cash on hand.

Zeke weighs his options, wary of potential confrontations with his parents or nosy neighbors.

Discussion Questions

- What are the barriers for this youth?
- What can the adults in these public spaces do to reduce barriers for youth like Zeke who need a safe space? Is there a role other youth can play in this?
- As staff, how might you support this youth?

notes