

The People that Actually do Care: Young People's Perspectives on Trusted Adults



To support adults in building trusting relationships with young people, Action for Healthy Kids developed TrustEd, a set of training courses and educational resources, based on findings from a comprehensive needs assessment. As part of the needs assessment process, two 90-minute focus groups were held with 18 young people (ages 15–19) from Colorado who had a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. The goal of the focus groups was to understand what makes someone a “trusted adult,” what gets in the way of adult-youth connections, how to overcome challenges to building trust, and other considerations around how young people relate to adults. This report presents the findings from the focus groups and explores the two themes that emerged from the focus groups, *Characteristics of Trusted Adult-Youth Relationships* and *Characteristics of Trusted Adults*, along with their sub-themes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUSTED ADULT-YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS

- 1 Trusted Relationships Exist in Groups**
Young people assess the trustworthiness of adults by observing their words and actions in group settings. Youth rely on the opinions and connections of others they trust (friends, parents, teachers) when forming new relationships with adults.

“Your connections with the students you do have (connections) with... affect the students that you have no connection (with).”

- 2 Trusted Relationships Are Bi-Directional**
Young people view trust as a two-way street, with the actions of both adults and youth contributing to relationship-building through a mutual respect, vulnerability, and understanding. Both parties should take responsibility for maintaining boundaries and resolving conflict.

“Trust is something that you build off of each other.”



CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUSTED ADULTS

1 Available and Time-Generous

Trusted adults have time for youth and are emotionally available, indicating availability through open, relaxed body language, calm ways of speaking, and an "open door policy." They are "always there."

"A trusted adult will take their time and to talk to you, to understand your interest, to understand you as a person."

2 Communicate Genuine Care by Going Above and Beyond

Trusted adults are authentically good people who demonstrate genuine care for youth by going "above and beyond" to engage with young people in action and conversation that is more than the typical "scripted" interactions.

"My most trusted adults are the people that actually do care."

3 Listen with Non-Judgmental Curiosity, Believe, and Help

Trusted adults listen attentively without an agenda or judgment, asking curious questions to understand youths' experiences. They demonstrate that they believe and hear young people by taking action or following up.

"Just being curious or staying curious... If something's going on and you (don't understand), ...ask questions."

4 Notice and See the Individual for Who They Are

Trusted adults notice individuals and see them for who they are rather than seeing them as part of a group or making assumptions about them.

"Being noticed is a large thing of validation for people. You need the human connection."

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUSTED ADULTS

5 Willing to be Vulnerable and Uncomfortable

Trusted adults are willing to be vulnerable when appropriate, sharing their own feelings, experiences, and struggles. They are also able and willing to have uncomfortable conversations with young people.

“Trust comes with not only someone that you can share things with, but someone who shares their things back.”

6 Maintain and are Transparent about Boundaries

Trusted adults have clear boundaries around their role and topics discussed with young people. They are upfront and transparent about their boundaries, especially if they are mandated reporter.

“Something that's important to me... is confidentiality and knowing that they'll only share information if they ask you first.”

7 Educate Themselves on Differences

Trusted adults educate themselves about the experiences and identities of others. They lead with curiosity and ask questions rather than making assumptions or uninformed comments.

“Being educated in some stuff that's more prevalent now is really important.”

8 Respectful and Supports Youth Autonomy

Trusted adults treat young people with respect through how they speak and behave, by sharing power, and by supporting youth in making their own decisions. They respect boundaries, allowing youth to direct conversations and share what feels comfortable.

“Being a mentor is really placing yourself on that level of, ‘I'm gonna treat you how I expect you.’”

