

EXAMINING A YOUNG PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW

Purpose: To have participants remember what it was like when they were young. To have participants use their feelings of being young to understand what it is like to be young today and to understand their role as an adult with a young person. To explore how adultism can hurt young people. To introduce additional techniques for participants to use when working with young people.

Materials: Handout titled "Implications for Our Work with Young People"

Time: 20 minutes

Procedure:

(Taken from Helping Teens Stop Violence by Allen Creighton and Paul Kivel-Hunter House 1991)

Begin by asking people to relax. Invite people to close their eyes if it is easier for them to go back to their teenage years. Very slowly have them think back to their younger days by having them imagine a few things.

"Remember the high school you went to.... remember what it looked like. How did you get to school? Did you ride your bike, walk, drive, take a bus? Who were your best friends at school? Can you remember your locker? Did you have one? What was it like when you were at your locker? How about during lunch? What did you do? Can you imagine your teachers? How did you get along with them? How was it as you sat in your classroom? Can you imagine going home from school? What did you do after school hours? Who were you with? What did you feel like when you were with your classmates? Can you imagine your evenings?"

Leader's Notes

It is important to speak very slowly as you do this so people really have time to go back to what it felt like to be a teenager.

How about Friday nights? What did you do? Were you with friends? Did you have a boyfriend or girlfriend? Where might you go on the weekends? Did you participate in after-school activities?"

"Please try to hold on to these memories of being a teenager. Think about this period in your life as I say the following statements to you. Imagine that you are a young person and I am one of the adults in your life. You can keep your eyes closed if it helps you stay in that young place."

Read about ten items from the things we say to young people. Say them directly to individuals.

- Not now. I don't have time.
- You're too young to understand.
- We'll talk about it later.
- Go to your room.
- I work my fingers to the bone for you.
- When I was your age, I had it a lot harder.
- Do what I say. It will be good for you.
- Because I said so.
- Don't talk back to me. You have to do this whether you like it or not.
- You're just a kid.
- Pay attention when I am talking to you.
- You show me some respect.
- How many times do I have to tell you?

Leader's Notes

Say these statements directly to individuals. Say them forcefully when appropriate, speaking as if you are exerting your power over another individual.

“Now take a moment or two and slowly come back to the training room. Please try and hold onto how it felt to be this age again and let’s discuss what this is all about.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What were some of the strongest images that came to mind for you as a teenager?
2. How did it feel to have those things said to you?
3. Did you have some memories of your own when you were young that you’d be willing to share that were triggered by these statements?
4. Which of these statements do you think a young person might hear today? Who might use these statements with young people? Why?
5. How do you think that makes them feel?
6. What does this have to do with the work we do with young people?
7. What is our most important role with young people?
8. How might we use what we’ve talked about and thought about today?
9. What is our responsibility to change some of these social behaviors/norms as people who work with youth?

“This activity is taken from a book called Helping Youth Stop Violence. It is a curriculum designed to be led by young people with other young people in schools. This piece is on adultism and helps us identify that like other ‘isms’ the way we treat young people and were treated is accepted in this society. This activity raises a lot of feelings for a lot of people and I am sorry if you are in pain right now because of your memories. I hope these memories act as a catalyst for changing how we treat young people today and in our youth programs.”

Leader’s Notes

Be silent for just a moment so people will be able to emotionally come back to the present.

You don’t need to use all of the questions. Choose which ones you think will be best for the group and use those—probably only 4 or 5. One suggestion is using 1,2,6, and 8.

“In the handout by John Bell, he gives some specifics about how to break these patterns. Take the next couple of moments to glance through this handout and write down one thing that you might use in your work with young people. I hope that you will read this more thoroughly as you continue your work and use some of these techniques as you move forward with your own partnerships with young people.”

Leader’s Notes

Pass out John Bell handout found on next two pages.

Implications for Our Work with Young People



A few general guidelines might be helpful as we proceed:

- Listen to young people. Really listen. In particular, listen to their thinking and to their experiences and feelings of what it has been like being young.
- Ask questions. Ask what they think about everything.
- Lay back. Curb your inclination to take over. Support the initiatives of young people.
- Validate their thinking. Welcome their ideas. This is where major invalidation has hurt them.
- Be willing for them to make mistakes. Putting their ideas into practice will bring mixed results. They will learn. We need to learn to support the process of their taking leadership.
- Reverse the power relationships when appropriate. When, for example, can we refrain from using our authority, from making the final decision, from being the “real power” behind the youth leadership?
- At the same time, do not thrust young people into decision-making and leadership positions without training and practice and understanding their responsibilities. Otherwise, we set them up for frustration, confusion, possible failure and humiliation.
- Always respect all young people, no matter the age, and expect them to respect each other, at all ages. This is the starting point for reversing the internalized oppression.
- Have high expectations to their potentials, and a real assessment of their current abilities. Never sell them short and always be prepared to lend a hand with a difficulty.
- Do not dump our distress about them on them. They get this from adults all the time. It only adds more hurt. We need to take care of our upsets about them some other way with other adults.
- Give young people real information about the way the world works, about our experiences, about relationships and sex, about the contribution of young people to humankind, etc. Never lie to them.

Workshop: *Adult*

- Be patient with ourselves when we unknowingly slip into our old adultist habits. It will take time to undo them. Always appreciate how well we are doing. No blaming ourselves or others.



Good Policy

Of course, we want to avoid the ditch on the one side of adultist authority running the show, and the ditch on the other side of the permissive attitude that says “anything the young people want is OK.”

The oppression of young people has left them, to varying degrees, with irrational feelings, tendencies to act out their hurts, and wrong or distorted information. Without clear guidelines, these distresses can wreck any human effort.

A sound policy for behavior in our work together includes expecting all people, despite age, to treat each other with nothing less than complete respect.

- To think and not just react.
- To do the thing that will improve the situation.
- To be trustworthy, honest, and reliable in relations with each other.
- To put the interest of the group ahead of one’s own.
- To care about each other.
- To struggle against everything which keeps us in conflict among ourselves.

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