

SOLVING THE CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Purpose: To have youth and adults work together on coining up with strategies for overcoming the challenges of working in an equitable partnership.

Materials: Challenges and benefits that the groups have generated or ones that other groups have created.

Time: 60 minutes

Procedure:

Explain that each group, youth and adults, came up with these challenges and benefits separately. Give participants an opportunity to read through them all and think about them. Explain that for now you want to focus on the challenges.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you notice about the challenges?
2. What are the similarities or differences between the two groups?
3. What might you do with this information?

“What we would like to do is to give you a little time to work with groups of youth and adults to come up with possible solutions to some of these challenges. Each group will contain youth and adults and each group will be given one challenge taken from this list.”

“There are reasons that we interact with young people the way we do. Often, if we are going to work in true partnership with young people, we need to work differently than many adults worked with us in our lives.”

Leader's Notes

Take the challenges that were created by the youth and adults workshops or from the leader resources. Have the challenges and benefits posted on the walls that the youth and adult groups had come up with previously from their workshops.

This list refers to the challenges posted on the wall. Prepare one challenge to a page. Give one challenge to each group to work on.

“We need to look at where our approach came from, and think about how that may need to change or stay the same. Lofquist (1989) has developed and popularized what he calls a ‘Spectrum of Attitudes’ that covers three different attitudes adults can hold toward young people. Often the attitudes that adults hold toward young people determine the degree to which they involve them as significant partners in decision-making.”

“Let’s look at each one:”

“The first one is Youth as Objects.”

“If we work this way with youth, ‘adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which they allow them to be involved.’ In this approach the attitude is that young people have little to contribute. Adults may work to keep young people in a relatively powerless position. Adults with such opinions have no intention of allowing youth participation. Adults may truly believe that they need to protect young people from ‘suffering’ from mistakes. However, we know that involvement in meaningful roles is essential to positive growth and the development of successful young adults.”

“In the second - Youth as Recipients - adults allow young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be ‘good for them.’ This has a real focus on young people learning from ‘adult society,’ and that young people need to be guided through their participation in adult society. This attitude is characterized by adults allowing young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be ‘good for them’ and an excellent opportunity to practice for when they become ‘real people.’ Consequently, responsibilities and tasks often delegated to young people are either trivial (it won’t matter if they mess up) or those which adults find distasteful (roadside cleanup campaigns). Adults with such viewpoints on youth involvement often control the terms and conditions of involvement. For example, adults invite two youth representatives to participate on a board or committee composed mainly of adults. Such participation still leaves youth in a relatively powerless position. They realize that their role remains trivial and that adults are

Leader’s Notes

retaining the position of authority and much of the responsibility.”

“The third piece at the other end of the spectrum represents attitudes where the contributions of young people are welcomed and valued: ‘Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer now and youth are encouraged to become involved.’ Adults feel that young people are critical to the success of a program or, in this case, an organization focused on youth needs and issues. When adults hold such opinions, youth are seen as equal partners in decision-making. Adults who view young people as partners are comfortable working with groups which have equal numbers of youth and adults. Youth are asked a series of questions such as: How do they want to be involved? What kind of training do they need? What would they like to learn? What do they think their role is? What would they like their role to be? As a result of these relationships, programs and organizations are more effective while young people meet real developmental needs.”

“In moving to full partners, we are moving to an attitude of *youth as partners*. This is to say that both youth and adults bring strengths to the table and work in an equitable relationship.”

Leader’s Notes

- “Any comments on what you’ve heard here?”
- Can you give examples of how this works in your area?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge to having an attitude that a young person is a partner in his/her own development?”

Break participants into small groups that have equal numbers of youth and adults. Give each group one challenge that had been generated previously.

Each group is to use the following technique for coming up with a strategy for the challenge:

- ✓ Define the problem
- ✓ Brainstorm strategies
- ✓ Discuss pros and cons of each strategy
- ✓ Come up with a strategy

Have the groups come back together. Have each group introduce the challenge they were given and what they propose as a solution.

Leader’s Notes

Make sure you go over these steps before you break them into groups. Put the steps on newsprint so everyone can see.

Let the groups work for 20 to 30 minutes. Walk around just to make sure that they are clear about the instructions and are keeping on task. Let them know when they have 10 minutes left and when they have 5 minutes left. Remind them that they are to come back with one strategy and a person who will present that strategy.

Have the challenges printed on the walls and put the solution next to each one so everyone can see.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was it like to do this process with youth and adults?
2. Did you notice if either group seemed to have more influence or spoke up more?
3. How many strategies did you come up with for each challenge?
4. What was one thing you learned during this session?
5. What about this whole process will you use when trying to work in partnership?

Leader's Notes

Someone needs to be responsible for typing up all the strategies and making sure participants receive a copy.

Leader Resource

Note: If you haven't had an opportunity to have separate youth and adult groups, you can use these that were generated in a workshop.

What is the greatest challenge a young person brings in their ability to effectively work in partnership with adults?

Adult List about Youth:

- Information overload
- Black and white thinking
- Conflicting adult expectation
- "Economics"
- Shifting societal values
- Lack of experience
- Peer pressure
- Patience for planning
- Enthusiasm squelching
- Confusion about identity
- Lack of focus and commitment
- Dealing with adult bias
- Priorities
- Fighting traditions
- Being heard and accepted
- Time
- Relevance
- Follow through
- Dropping the ball
- Strong desire for independence
- Youth as partners

What is the greatest challenge an adult person brings in their ability to effectively work in partnership with youth?

Youth List about Adults:

- Selfish
- Won't admit that they are wrong
- Power
- My way
- Do it by themselves, "steamroll," no youth needed
- Want opinion and shun ideas
- Think age makes more able to have power
- Expectations
- Can't handle youth growing up
- Rules are rules
- Stress on winning too much
- In it for themselves "my way"
- Won't apologize
- Too involved with adults not kids
- Don't remember how they were

Youth as Objects

Adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which they allow them to be involved.

Youth as Recipients

Adults allow young people to take part in decision-making because they think the experience will be “good for them.”

Youth as Partners

Adults respect young people as having something significant to offer now, and youth are encouraged to become involved.