

## Tip Sheet

### *V.I.T.A.L. Steps Applied to Case Practice*

#### **Focus: Establishing Youth-Adult Partnerships**

**Best Practice Summary:** Youth-adult partnership involves treating young people as equals, cultivating trust, and helping them build self-confidence and self-esteem. Although youth-adult partnership is related to engagement, it is not the same as youth engagement. Strong youth-adult partnership requires sharing information, having honest conversations, respecting opinions and establishing clear expectations on roles and decision-making. While trying to make decisions in the best interests of everyone, we may unintentionally disempower families and youth if decisions are not made in consultation with the family or youth. An inherent power dynamic can exist between a child welfare agency and those who are the consumers in that system. It is important to recognize this power and how to navigate non-negotiables when trying to engage young people as partners. One goal is to establish partnerships across the full spectrum: policy formulation, system/governance, program/community, service. Transitional Specialists are skilled in building and enhancing partnerships. The following Tip Sheet outlines a few suggestions to enhance existing toolkits.

**Goals for Activity:** Help support the development of problem-solving and leadership skills needed in adulthood.

**V.I.T.A.L. Values, Essential Practice Principles or Core Practices in Action:** Strengthen and support, voice and choice, shared power.

What are some skills and conditions used when working in partnership with youth?

- Listen to young people to avoid unintentional harm
- Invite youth to participate early in the process (e.g., help craft agenda and establish priorities with youth)
- Include youth in all planning conferences and create space for participation
- Focus on strengths, and celebrate successes
- Provide honest and realistic feedback
- Co-facilitate meetings with young leaders
- Try not to assume that young adults cannot understand a process
- Pay attention to the power dynamics and boundary issues
  - Recognize that power can't always be equalized because of the nature of professional roles. At the very least, acknowledge when a differential exists and try in earnest to equalize power
- Be adaptable to changing circumstances and be and accessible to young persons
- Provide a fair stipend for youth and circle back to them about how feedback will be incorporated

- Be knowledgeable about resources
- Resist the urge to take over. Ask the young adult for ideas to consider while experiencing a challenge
- Language matters. Focus on “we” and “us”
- Provide clear and constructive feedback that notes positive behaviors as well as areas for improvement
- Prior to any task, reflect on if anything makes you nervous about sharing power with young adults
- Prior to any task, consider if the young person is willing to take on responsibilities
- In preparation for the activity, reflect upon how you will incorporate any youth feedback in a meaningful way

**Adapted from:** National Association of Social Workers, (August 2020). Integrating Adolescent Brain Development Into Child Welfare Practice With Older Youth.

**Additional References:**

Administration for Children and Families. (August 2019). Information Memorandum: Engaging, empowering, and utilizing family and youth voice in all aspects of child welfare to drive case planning and system improvement. ACYF-CB-IM-19-03, [www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/im1903.pdf/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/im1903.pdf/)

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities. (2012). Issue Brief #3: Authentic youth engagement: Youth-adult partnerships [www.aecf.org/resources/authentic-youth-engagement/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/authentic-youth-engagement/)

National Foster Youth Initiative. (2017). 51 Useful aging out of foster care statistics. [www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/](http://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/)

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). The road to adulthood: Aligning child welfare practice with adolescent brain development. [www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/](http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/)

**For Coaching and Support of Skill Development in Supervision-**

***Consider the core practices:***

*Engage & Exchange Information, Assess & Understand Strengths, Fortify & Support, Reflect & Adjust*

**Reflective prompts to supervisor/manager:**

How am I modeling these practices? Am I demonstrating how to create partnerships? Am I showing how to share power with young adults? Is there a way to leverage peer consultations or host office conversations to support best practices?

**Suggested CQI Measures:**

- [ ] Does the office offer at least one partnership activity a year to young adults?
- [ ] Are partnerships available that decrease power differentials?
- [ ] Are partnerships available for all young adults in care?

**Level of Mastery Demonstrated:** Consider the level of skill demonstrated by staff on this task.

**Foundational:** The team member is at an early stage of core practice and skill acquisition. The team member is supported in learning the skills. The team member has an opportunity to develop skills. Coaching agendas may target specific skills for development. The skills are demonstrated and actively coached by team leaders.

**Rising:** The team member occasionally applies the practices and skills independently. Coaching agendas focus on generalizing skills. The team member demonstrates increasing understanding of the practices. Skills are demonstrated and coached by team leaders.

**Secure:** The team member consistently applies skills independently to a wide range of settings and aspires to apply knowledge and understanding. There is a range of evidence that shows a deeper understanding of concepts and that skills are sustained over time.