



REMEMBER

- Relationships are not a means to an end - they are a sacred place where God meets young people. If relationships are seen as a tool, they can be dropped when the anticipated results aren't happening and that doesn't reflect the heart of God. Good youth work doesn't "use" relationships - it grows out of them.
- Belonging involves a process that starts with feeling noticed, then feeling named, and finally feeling known. We need to acknowledge young people each time we see them, remember the things that are important to them, and let them know when we recognize evidence of God's image in them.
- God says, "I have called you by name and you are mine." (Is. 43:1) There's power and healing when we experience that truth. For many youth, experiencing belonging with Jesus grows out of knowing they have a place of belonging in our lives.



RECOGNIZE

- Relationships are the path to belonging and "Where do I belong?" is one of 3 big questions we need to help teens explore, along with "Who am I?" (identity) and "What difference do I make?" (purpose).
- Levels of loneliness reported by Gen Z distinguish this generation as the loneliest on the planet. The presence of just one trusted adult in the life of a young person cuts the sense of severe isolation in half.
- Attendance or participation is not the same as belonging and doesn't protect against loneliness. 36% of youth who are part of a religious group say they have no one to talk to; 43% say they feel like no one knows them. Relationship not participation is key to the experience of belonging.
- Relationships with adults that provide a space for youth to discover who they are, explore their abilities, and engage with/contribute to the world are called developmental relationships. Research shows that a relationship with you is good but connecting youth to multiple supportive relationships is even better.



RESPOND

A sense of belonging depends on perception and that is something we can't control. But we can create an environment where belonging has a chance to take root through developmental relationships. The following 5 research-based actions can turn your good intentions into fertile ground:

- **Express care.** Offer warm invitations, encouragement, dependability, and active listening. Let them know you enjoy being around them and tell them why. Don't forget to check back with them when they have shared a difficulty or hope to let them know that what matters to them matters to you.
- **Challenge growth.** Invite them to try hard things. Let them know that discomfort is a normal part of development and not something to avoid. Expect that they take responsibility for their actions. Remind them that mistakes are a part of life and won't push you away.
- **Provide support.** Recognize and offer the kind of support they need based on their skills, resources and situation. Guide them with good questions and offer information they are lacking to help them to recognize they have choices. Don't do for them what they can do for themselves and encourage their effort not just their achievement.
- **Share power.** Create opportunities for them to be part of idea sharing, decision making and problem solving especially around building community and serving others. Welcome them into your life in appropriate ways by asking them to pray for you or to offer their "advice".
- **Expand possibilities.** Introduce them to new experiences and new ways of seeing themselves, the world around them, and God. Ask curious questions, try new things together and model being a learner by sharing what you are discovering on your journey.



RESOURCES

naaweb.org/professional-development - Search the article "10 Tips for Building Relationships with Youth" for simple everyday practices to grow relationships.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4BsyZOdNXc - Building relationships of trust with vulnerable teens.

info.searchinstitute.org/developmental-relationships-help-young-people-thrive - An excellent research-based framework from the Search Institute, highlighting 5 elements that make relationships powerful in young people's lives.