

HeartWood

Centre for Community Youth Development

"Youth Friendly" Meetings

Suggestions to help create "youth friendly" meetings

{Note: these suggestions came from several gatherings in 2000 of mentors involved with Youth Action Teams}

Meeting Preparation

- Do a thorough call around to get people there
- At some point, get youth to take responsibility for organizing meetings; e.g., teach phone tree skills, but be sure to monitor first efforts
- Tap into local resources
- Make sure people bring ideas and what to expect
- Routines are helpful: regular locations, regular times (*e.g., every second Tuesday evening*)
- Provide food
- It's good to have a relaxed physical space; i.e., comfortable with couches

What to do – and not do at Meetings

Start of meeting

- Start with play; e.g., ice breakers to get people warmed up
- If there is nothing to be "meeting" about then don't → stick to play

Using agendas

- It's good to have an agenda
- It's even better to be able to let go of agenda and be creative
- Best of all: youth set the agenda
- Timing: have a set amount for business and stick to it (*don't go over*); e.g., one hour for business and remainder for games, craft, open discussion, theatre
- Being issue focused can help build momentum

Planning

- Have youth research speakers on topics of interest to group and then make the arrangements to bring them in
- Plan special events - skiing, swimming

- Take home discussion to family or friends to be shared the following week
- Keep contact with adults/family - build an activity day where the family members are involved; also, give responsibility to parents
- Try to plan a schedule for a month or two ahead so everyone knows what is coming up
- Give responsibility for planning and follow up to youth
- Visiting other groups (e.g., *other YATs*) for skill swaps, play games, and to take action

Do's → things that work most of the time

- Mix up meeting time (*decisions, planning, problem-solving*) and play time
- Having fun; e.g., games, laughing lots, spontaneity
- Keep group journal
- Give youth opportunity to lead; e.g., ask if anyone wants to lead a game
- Meet group where they are at!!
- Give them ownership of ideas
- Consensus (*most of the time*), or agreeing on “common ground” (*avoid majority rule*)
- An active component to meeting, such as painting the room, preparing posters for the children’s fun day, etc. Or, have meetings as part of an activity, e.g., while shoveling gravel
- There is “safety” in routine; e.g., we always play, then talk, do some stuff, play some more
- Provide opportunity for people to tell their stories
- Theme based meetings are fun (*use costumes*)
- Acknowledging that members will come and go

Don'ts → usually not a good idea

- Being inconsistent
- Disorganization in planning and setting up a meeting
- Squelching momentum
- Formal “Rogers Rules” style of meeting
- Not using consensus in smaller business type gatherings
- Using consensus in large group (*i.e., instead, use principle of “common ground”*)

Facilitating discussion

- If group is having difficulty listening ask yourself why?? i.e., are they bored? Is the topic pertinent?? Is the space hot or stuffy?? Are there other distractions?
- Use of talking stick or.... as a focus point for speaking and listening
- Check in to be sure all voices are being heard
- Youth facilitate the meetings
- Check in to find out how people are doing (*right now in the meeting and/or with life in general*)
- Opportunities to model different styles of facilitation and follow through
- Being aware of and appreciating what members’ abilities are
- Sharing responsibility
- Learn effective communication
- Respect
- Listening
- Asking “good” questions

End of meeting

- Before end of meeting identify something that will be happening at the one coming up so there is something to look forward to
- Identify with group what was accomplished at gathering
- NOTE: reflection does not always need to be structured
- Finish with play