

■ Building Relationships

Take Your Time: Remember that genuine relationships and healing take time. Young people who have experienced early trauma or high stress environments often avoid relationships as a protective measure. Demonstrating that you are willing to make a connection and following through by being available and open can make a big difference.

Safety: In the beginning, relationships are all about safety. When young people feel physically and emotionally safe being with you it is a significant accomplishment. Talking about safety and the things you are doing to increase safety for the young person can be helpful. Be sure to reveal any boundaries that exist for you as a mandated reporter.

Walk The Walk – Talk The Talk: Remember that young people are judging you not only by your behavior toward them, but by how you treat everyone else also. They are looking for consistency, predictability, and dependability.

Relationships Go Through Predictable Stages: Testing in a relationship to determine if you are trustworthy, dependable, consistent, fair, and reasonable is a necessary step. This is how young people learn to regulate connections, negotiate, make their needs known, ask for and give support...it is a rich and necessary experience. Be forgiving of the need for reassurance and retesting to explore how consistent and dependable you are.

Take Time To Explore Your Own Experience: Explore traumatic events and any past traumatic events you may have experienced. Your own trauma history and your feelings about it will influence how you react to others.

We all have certain types of individuals we connect with more easily and others who are harder to form relationships with (e.g., aggressive, depressed, active, passive, fearful, sad, young people). Who are the youth you relate to more easily? Who are the ones that are more challenging for you? Self-awareness and insight into this process can be very helpful in expanding the range of relationships you are open to forming.

Young People Are Not Responsible For What Has Happened To Them: Youth often blame themselves for events, even those completely out of their control. Offering reassurance and understanding can make a big difference.

Encourage Young People To Define Relationships For Themselves: Take the time to understand relationships through the eyes of the young person: What does closeness mean? What do they want? What is expected of them in a relationship? What do they

have to offer? Help them explore their ideas about what they want from others and what is reasonable for others to expect in return.

Celebrate 'Specialness' And Small Successes: Get to know what special events like birthdays, holidays (Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc.), and anniversaries mean to the young person. Take the time to acknowledge and celebrate them.