

Implications for Our Work with Young People



A few general guidelines might be helpful as we proceed:

- Listen to young people. Really listen. In particular, listen to their thinking and to their experiences and feelings of what it has been like being young.
- Ask questions. Ask what they think about everything.
- Lay back. Curb your inclination to take over. Support the initiatives of young people.
- Validate their thinking. Welcome their ideas. This is where major invalidation has hurt them.
- Be willing for them to make mistakes. Putting their ideas into practice will bring mixed results. They will learn. We need to learn to support the process of their taking leadership.
- Reverse the power relationships when appropriate. When, for example, can we refrain from using our authority, from making the final decision, from being the “real power” behind the youth leadership?
- At the same time, do not thrust young people into decision-making and leadership positions without training and practice and understanding their responsibilities. Otherwise, we set them up for frustration, confusion, possible failure and humiliation.
- Always respect all young people, no matter the age, and expect them to respect each other, at all ages. This is the starting point for reversing the internalized oppression.
- Have high expectations to their potentials, and a real assessment of their current abilities. Never sell them short and always be prepared to lend a hand with a difficulty.
- Do not dump our distress about them on them. They get this from adults all the time. It only adds more hurt. We need to take care of our upsets about them some other way with other adults.
- Give young people real information about the way the world works, about our experiences, about relationships and sex, about the contribution of young people to humankind, etc. Never lie to them.

- Be patient with ourselves when we unknowingly slip into our old adultist habits. It will take time to undo them. Always appreciate how well we are doing. No blaming ourselves or others.



Good Policy

Of course, we want to avoid the ditch on the one side of adultist authority running the show, and the ditch on the other side of the permissive attitude that says “anything the young people want is OK.”

The oppression of young people has left them, to varying degrees, with irrational feelings, tendencies to act out their hurts, and wrong or distorted information. Without clear guidelines, these distresses can wreck any human effort.

A sound policy for behavior in our work together includes expecting all people, despite age, to treat each other with nothing less than complete respect.

- To think and not just react.
- To do the thing that will improve the situation.
- To be trustworthy, honest, and reliable in relations with each other.
- To put the interest of the group ahead of one’s own.
- To care about each other.
- To struggle against everything which keeps us in conflict among ourselves.

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