

Engaging with Youth

The Purpose: We know that engaging with children can be hard. We've put together some guidance for engagement with children and youth that can be used immediately in your daily practice.

3 to 12 Year Olds:

Do:

- Get kids moving and outside, play a sport or simply take a walk.
- Have an array of tools to engage with young children such as games, markers, stickers, and crayons. Use arts and crafts, board games and playing cards!
- Bring pictures of loved ones that the child can keep as their own.
- Ask children to give a tour of the house or their room to begin a conversation and a way for them to take the lead.
- Play with other adults at the visit when a child is apprehensive or scared.
- Use a flower petal, house or lily pad activity to illustrate important connections in the child's life.
- Use a story book to compare or analyze a difficult topic.
- Play games virtually on a whiteboard on Zoom such as Bingo or Connect 4.
- Be consistent in letting kids know about the purpose of your time together.

Don't:

- Assume all kids like to color. Be prepared with a variety of activity options.
- Have too many people in the room. It may be difficult for children to discuss hard topics if a lot of professionals are involved.
- Discuss the parents and what they may or may not have done wrong.
- Push topics. Let the child lead the discussion. When you need to, come back to discuss things at another time.
- Forget about children who may be non-verbal or have developmental delays. Utilize a feeling chart or other methods to allow children to identify their current feelings.
- Come to visits with pen and paper ready with a checklist. Take time to build rapport, and make the visit feel less rigid.



THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE INNOVATION

Engaging with Youth

13 years old and above:

Do:

- Take a 10 thousand foot view when discussing topics. Take the focus away from the child's specific situation.
- Include them in decision making and make their voice heard.
- Make sure they are aware of their rights within the child welfare system. Many times they may be afraid or unaware of what questions to ask.
- Insist on providing support even if they may not want it right now. They may need it in the future, even if they aren't ready right now.
- Ask questions about supports in outside the box ways such as, "If you were President, who would you want on your staff?"
- Use family trees to ask about family members and relationships.
- Request to review their connections together through social media.
- Remember that video game scenarios can be used to engage youth such as being in a Zombie Apocalypse. Inquire who they would save if they were in a global disaster.

Don't:

- Push youth to tell their story. They may be exhausted from recounting it over and over.
- Make comparisons between their life and those of their mother, father, or other loved ones.
- Ask questions that you don't need to know, especially if you are only meeting them once. Know your purpose and try not to deviate.

Things to Remember with All Ages:

- Use culture as a way to engage. Find things that interest youth such as the latest movies, music or Tik Tok videos.
- Use friendly competition to keep their attention.
- Be authentic in your engagement. Don't try to be cool. Just be yourself and have fun.
- Be willing to laugh at yourself and be flexible.



THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE INNOVATION