Involving Youth in Education Plans
(for Providers)

YOUTH MOVE MASSACHUSETTS

Tips for Meetings

- Use name tags so youth know who they are speaking with.
- Prepare an agenda ahead of time and give the youth a copy.
- Don't assume the youth doesn't know what they're talking about.
- Start on time, and keep the meeting as short as possible.
- Ask the youth if they want a support person in the room.
- Use language that the youth will understand, as opposed to overly clinical terms.
- Focus on the positives.
- Everybody should state their role at the beginning of the meeting.
- Allow the youth to take breaks if needed.
- Make sure the youth has a voice.
- Start with an icebreaker if the youth has not met everybody in the meeting before.

Education plans are meant to support children, youth, and young adults. Many young people, especially those with emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges, don't "look" like they need help, which is why dismissive comments like "you're just lazy" are so harmful. Youth voice is crucial.

These are ideas from youth to ensure that students feel valued and like they have a voice.

"Youth voice" highlights the unique ideas and perspectives young people bring to represent themselves.

Examples of Positive Language

- Everyone learns in their own way.
- We're here to help you.
- Tomorrow is a fresh start.
- What would help you right now?
- Keep up the great effort!
- You're making progress!
- Mistakes are part of learning.
- How can we support you in the way that works best?

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More Tips

- Explain why education plans are helpful.
- Build on strengths and what the youth is good at.
- Validate that the youth is trying their best.
- Set goals with the youth.
- Explain what Special Education is.
- Ask the youth how school is going.
- Check in with the youth about what is working and what isn't.
- Ensure the youth understands that they are not "dumb" and that nobody is expected to learn the same way.
- If they ask about their diagnosis, talk about it.
- Ensure that the youth feels like they have autonomy and a voice when it comes to their care.
- Show the youth a copy of their education plan and explain it to them.
- Let the youth be involved in the process. It is their life.
- Do not assume that the youth does not want to go to college or do more after finishing K-12.
- **Ask us more than you tell us.**

These tips are for youth of all ages! There is no limit to when youth can be involved in their care plans and have their voices heard!

Reminder

Every student learns differently, and it is important to recognize that expecting all youth to succeed using a single teaching method is impractical. Struggling with a particular approach does not mean a student is lazy, unmotivated, or "faulty." Learning challenges reflect differences in how students process information, manage emotions, and engage with material, not shortcomings in the students themselves.

Providing multiple pathways, such as breaking tasks into smaller steps, offering choices in assignments, or presenting material in different formats, helps students demonstrate their abilities and build confidence. A "one-size-fits-all" approach can unintentionally leave capable students behind and make them feel undervalued.

Supporting diverse learning styles is essential. When we recognize and accommodate these differences, we create a more equitable and effective learning environment where all students can thrive.

Resources

- ppal.net
- youthmovenational.org
- pacer.org
- wrightslaw.com
- https://www.ffcmh.org/

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.
www.ppal.net

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