

# APPROACHES TO SHARING POWER



Share Power is an element of developmental relationships that can feel uncomfortable at first. And yet when people find a balance that works for them in their relationships, they often find those relationships to be more enjoyable and productive. Consider these approaches that can make sharing power a particularly rewarding part of a developmental relationship.

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## Teach What You Learn

Young people from historically marginalized communities experienced mutual respect from staff when they were treated as competent and capable in a national study of innovative career readiness and education programs. They also experienced shared power in these programs when staff asked them to take on leadership roles within their cohorts by teaching others what they had learned.

*Source: A national Search Institute study of innovative career readiness and education programs.*

- 1. Establish norms:** At the outset of your work with young people, agree together on a set of statements that describe the ways you will work together and treat each other.
- 2. Share responsibility:** Whenever it is possible and appropriate, do things alongside young people, such as cleaning up a space together or raising your voices about an issue in the community.
- 3. Practice perspective taking:** When you and a young person disagree about something, take time to understand each other's point of view. Make it clear you respect their thoughts and feelings even if you disagree. Ask questions to better understand their point of view.
- 4. Offer explanations:** Explain the rationale for your own actions, especially when giving consequences or if you are unable to include a young person in a decision that affects them. (If you think you are unable to include a young person in a decision that affects them, ask yourself why. You may discover ways that you can actually include them if you think outside the box.)
- 5. Be willing to be wrong:** Admit when you've made a mistake and apologize, including naming ways you'll do better or try to change in the future.
- 6. Encourage choice:** Give youth more than one option to choose from, such as letting them pick their own partners or groups, choose between a few different activities, decide how to spend their free time, or select topics to read about or assignments to complete.
- 7. Encourage voice:** Invite young people to share their thoughts and opinions and to provide feedback. Remind them that their voices are important within and beyond the program. Ask, "what do you think about \_\_\_\_\_?" Take in their ideas seriously.

**8. Respond to feedback:** When you solicit young people’s input, let them know how you will integrate it into your thinking, your decisions, and/or your actions. Be sure to either act on that input or explain why you have chosen or are not able to do so. Young people tell us that being asked for their ideas and never receiving a response can be discouraging and demoralizing. Also, when you act on young people’s feedback, always give them credit for their ideas.

**9. Practice democracy:** Empower young people to make decisions together, and provide ways for them to vote or come to consensus to make decisions.

**10. Build leadership skills:** Encourage young people to take on leadership roles that suit their personalities. Some like to lead “behind the scenes,” some like to be more “out front.” Take time to invite each young person you work with to be a leader in their own way.

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### Respond to Feedback

Students appreciated it when their teacher solicited feedback on a short survey about how the classroom was arranged as well as other topics. After receiving feedback from students, the teacher made changes to the schedule and physical space to accommodate their requests. This made them feel heard, appreciated, and more motivated to do their best.

*Source: A Search Institute study of teacher-student relationships and motivation.*



#### **Blend Elements: Express Care & Share Power**

Be honest about things you don’t know about. Young people often appreciate being asked about their culture or background when the questions come from a place of respect and caring. (But recognize a young person’s comfort level with sharing about the subject. Do not put the burden of educating others about a particular identity, oppression, or marginalization on a young person unless they express a desire to do so.)