

Nothing about me without meⁱ

Increasing Meaningful Participation in Planning and Decision Making

Young people will not be participating meaningfully in the planning process unless they are present when decisions are made and their input is invited.

Before the meeting - helping the young person to prepare

- 1. In consultation with the young person formulate an agenda before the meeting.**
 - A young person will be more comfortable and willing to participate if s/he can trust that the meeting will not be a public discussion of uncomfortable topics.
 - The young person should have an opportunity to review agenda items before the meeting. If there are topics that s/he feels should not be discussed in front of everyone work with her/him to figure out how to manage sensitive topics outside the meeting
- 2. Provide adequate preparation so that young people have a real opportunity to think about what and how they want to contribute to the topics on the agenda.**
 - Young people should have the opportunity to prepare for the meeting with a 'coach' who reviews with them the meeting structure and the items on the agenda.
 - During this preparation the young person should be supported to decide what points s/he wants to make.
- 3. Help the young person think about times during the meeting when s/he might need some kind of support and who the best person would be to offer that support. A support person is someone that in the youth's eyes**
 - Can be trusted
 - Believes in the young person's capacity to make decisions and set goals
 - Understands what meetings are and can interact well with others at meetings
 - Can help the young person communicate productively during the meeting
- 4. Help the young person plan to contribute to the meeting in whatever manner feels comfortable.**
 - With preparation many young people will feel comfortable speaking during the meeting. Some may prefer notes, reading prepared comments or having someone speak for them. Some may feel more comfortable if they know there is a back-up plan if things become too difficult.
- 5. Make sure the young person has the opportunity to formulate goals that will be part of the plan.**
 - It's essential for young people to learn about setting and reaching their own goals. The young person is more likely to feel ownership and buy in for the plan when it includes activities and goals that s/he finds personally meaningful.
 - Part of the preparation should include an opportunity for the young to be coached through a process of thinking about goals for the future and how activities consistent with the goals can become part of the plan
- 6. Help the young person think about things that may come up at the meeting to help them stay calm or focused**
 - Young people will be able to participate more effectively in the meeting if they feel comfortable using strategies to manage their attention, emotions, and or behaviour. For example doodling, standing, walking round and should be supported to use these during the meeting

During the meeting – helping the young person participate

1. Ground rules should be established for meetings and the facilitator/chairperson of the meeting should see that these are followed

- All participants in the meeting to treat each other respectfully and the young no less than others by talking talk directly to the young person
- The meeting should remain strengths based and solution focussed;
 - focus on strengths, problem solving and building opportunities that help the young person respond in ways that the whole team can support;
 - communicate a belief that the young person can set new directions for themselves and that participants in the meeting want to help with this
- Stick to the agenda that the young person has helped create
- Make sure everyone can understand what is going on
- Talk in ways that don't alienate or distress the young person. Explain that discussion of problems is often required in order to arrange services but the most important purpose of the meeting is to recognise the youth's strengths and provide support in moving to a more positive future

2. Structure discussions in ways that provide multiple opportunities for the young person to express ideas or comments

- Ensure what the young person says has an impact on discussions and decisions and incorporate the young person's interests into the plan

3. Structure decision making in ways that support collaboration

- Don't decide the solution before you have a chance to think what the goal, 'problem' or need really is. (A person who defines a problem gets to define the solution and there is no chance for the young person or others to have an input) A more collaborative way (and often more effective way) to think about a problem is to work as a group and think about deeper needs
- Consider several different strategies to solve the problem or meet a need before picking one to use. (If only one strategy is considered then this is often not very creative) Everyone is empowered when the team considers options before making decisions

4. Ensure that the young person's strengths, assets, talents and achievements are a focus of the meeting and a part of the plan

- young people report that what they do well is rarely discussed at meetings. What they achieve week to week is overlooked by talk about problems and deficits
- goals that are written into plans often focus on remedies for problems rather than developing skills talents and assets. A strengths focus helps to counteract these tendencies by engaging young people and other participants in recognising, reinforcing and building on a youth's positive actions and capacities.
- Meetings should be structured and facilitated in ways that support a strengths focus specific portions of the meeting and steps in the planning process should be explicitly structured to bring in a strengths focus for example at each meeting a discussion of what's going well. Also initial steps in planning should include a strengths inventory and this should be used when the team is deciding how best to reach goals or meet needs.

5. Be sure that everyone including the young person understands the decisions made and next steps to be taken after the meeting.

- If a young person is working to a goal, ensure that their support needs are identified.

Measure participation and empowerment

- It is important to get feedback from young people to assess whether they feel involved in planning and confident about their ability to make decisions about services

ⁱ Based on research from the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health at Portland State University