



TAKE-HOME SKILL: TEENS AND ADULTS COLLABORATING TO UPLIFT THE COMMUNITY

"We must believe that we can do this, because we can. When we humans come together and decide to fulfill something, we can achieve almost anything."

-Greta Thunberg

OVERVIEW

Parents/caregivers and their teens reflect on tips to collaborate across generations to overcome community challenges.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School
- College

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help your teen practice how to bridge differences across generations.
- To help your teen prepare to collaborate with other members of the community on a shared goal that matters to people across generations.

TIME REQUIRED

- Multiple sessions

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Youth will:

- Learn the key ingredients for bridging generational differences to promote community change.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Empathy
- Humility

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on some of your experiences, if any, partnering with adults on a shared goal when you were a teen.

- What made those partnerships work best?
- What elements of these teen-adult relationships made you feel like you belonged, that your voice was heard and valued, and that led you to feel empowered?
- In contrast, what were aspects of these teen-adult interactions that led you to feel a lack of respect and doubt in your capacity to contribute?
- What would you do differently based on your own teen experiences to bridge differences between teens and adults to work on a common aim?

If you didn't have such experiences, what kinds do you wish you had? Is there something you did with a teacher, a coach, or someone else that could count as working together on something important to you?

INSTRUCTIONS

Overview: Bridging differences with people of different ages to work on a shared goal can help teens feel connected and supported in their communities, which in turn, can create important opportunities for them to take action to pursue justice for a community cause that matters to them. Teens who see that their communities are places where younger and older people collaborate respectfully on solving community challenges can nurture a strong commitment to social responsibility in teens early on.

Activity:

Find, create, and/or actively participate in activities in your community that bring together teens and adults across generations as partners to solve community challenges. Help your teen explore opportunities to become involved in building or participating in community intergenerational partnerships.

- For example, you and your teen could participate in activities like cleaning up trash in a neighborhood, pitching an afterschool activity that involves retirees, volunteering in a soup kitchen, or planning a party to celebrate a community member.
- You can also help your teen to explore more longer-term [opportunities](#) within your community, like in youth advisory committees or councils within your [city](#), [county](#) or [state](#).
- Help your teen be aware of other ways to participate in collaborations across generations within interagency advisory boards, prevention councils, nonprofit boards, school boards, and community foundations.

Talk with your teen about these five important ways that intergenerational partnerships work best.

1. Encourage your teen to **engage with several adults**.
 - Help your teen to initially explore opportunities that go beyond a traditional model of only one adult mentor working with one teen as an “apprentice.”
 - Explore with your teen how they can benefit from nurturing a variety of relationships with several adults—some of which will be closer than others.
 - Talk with your teen about staying open to a mentorship developing organically based on their and another adult’s choice rather than being pre-assigned a mentor.
2. Talk with your teen about being assertive—actively participating, speaking up from their point of view, taking initiative—rather than passive because **everyone involved will be expected to take part**.
 - Teach your teen to “roll up their sleeves” because they and other teens as well as adults will be expected to take on roles in the group not based on their ages, but based on individual strengths, skills, and interests.
 - Discuss with your teen how teen-adult partnerships work best when all voices are heard and leadership roles are shared so that decisions are made together.
 - Help your teen to expect that adults will delegate and share the power of decision-making.
3. Encourage your teen to **keep their commitment** to the partnership **ongoing over time**.
 - Discuss with your teen how they will gain most from partnerships that involve regular touchpoints and ideally extend beyond a one-off semester or time-limited project.
 - Explore with your teen how staying active in groups over time can help them to gain confidence, empowerment, and develop leadership skills.
4. Support your teen to **work “shoulder-to-shoulder” with adults** so that they are a part of all aspects of the partnership.

- Talk with your teen about how a shared purpose is built by sharing the work of carefully thinking, planning, acting, and reflecting together, which can happen when teens and adults share power and responsibility throughout the entire process.
 - Encourage your teen to advocate for learning and creating together across generations where both teens and adults are sharing information and interrogating assumptions.
5. Help your teen to **move from intention to action** to address a community issue that is important to them with adults who also care about the same issue.
- Talk with your teen about what types of challenges—mental health, environment, healthcare, for example—mean a lot to them and what kind of [opportunity](#) they are looking for to help create positive change with other teens and adults.
 - Encourage your teen to have a mindset that goes beyond exclusively learning about a shared community challenge to collaborating to collectively solve it.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What types of community settings is your teen interested in working in that can permit these intergenerational partnerships to exist? What strengths does your teen bring to these partnerships? What are some areas of growth that you can provide support? Who are some other adults your teen can seek support from to grow in these areas?
- Would you be interested in engaging in intergenerational partnerships? If so, what community settings could you explore? What strengths do you bring that will help you to bridge differences with teens in this collaborative community work? What are some challenges that you need support with? Who can you reach out to nurture these areas that are challenging for you?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Research](#) finds that youth-adult partnerships can nurture healthy development, civic engagement, and positive changes in communities. Studies have found that these partnerships are defined by multiple relationships between teens and adults, a democratic approach to group deliberation and action, an ongoing time period, and shared work. What’s more, researchers explain authentic decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocal activity, and community connectedness are essential characteristics in these partnerships.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As teens are growing in their sense of independence, being active members in their communities to promote positive changes can help them identify their sense of purpose in life. Teens want their voices heard and to contribute to something bigger than themselves. They can be uplifted by collaborating with adults who help them look to the future and connect them to the broader community.

[Researchers](#) have questioned an approach in our society that has aimed to “protect” teens, but has led to young people being cut off from opportunities to make decisions and take collective action

within their communities. “The cost of not doing so [involving young people in shared decision-making] will likely come back to haunt us as a civil society and a golden opportunity to move toward a fuller and more inclusive wisdom will have been missed,” [explained](#) Mary McAlesse, president of UNESCO.

Youth-adult partnerships can be an [effective tool](#) in preventing teens from being excluded from being important contributing members of society. Nurturing these types of intergenerational relationships can give teens opportunities to grow their social connections, promote civic development and engagement, and learn important community-building and problem-solving skills.

REFERENCES

Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51, 385-397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9558-y>

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