YALI4YOUTH

Youth Development Workbook

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#YALI4Youth

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YALI NETWORK

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Introduction

An individual's youth is an exciting time. It's a time of possibilities and potential, where young people define who they are and the values they uphold. During this time, youth are faced with significant life events and pivotal decisions. How well they navigate this stage of life, depends on the people and influences in their life.

In today's global society, youth are the fastest growing population. This expansive group of youth are set to become the world's next generation of business owners, political leaders, innovators, and humanitarians. By investing in our youth, we're investing in the future decision makers of our communities, cultures, and countries.

So what can we do to help?

To become the most effective leaders of tomorrow, our youth need effective leaders today. They need mentors, entrepreneurs, coaches, and role models to guide them in their personal and professional development. They need you.

The YALI4Youth Youth Development Workbook will provide you with resources and exercises on some of the critical points of youth development, preparing you to be the best youth mentor you can be.

Questions to Consider

Working with youth, in any capacity, is an extremely personal and serious commitment. Before you move through this workbook, take a few minutes to answer the following questions, with your personal goals and community in mind. Reflect on your answers as you complete the following sections.

1. Why are you personally interested in working with youth?

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2. How would you like to get involved with youth? Or if you presently work with youth, how would you like to become more involved?

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3. What specific skills or experiences make you uniquely suited for helping youth?

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4. In your community or country specifically, why is youth development important? List 1-3 reasons.

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Section One: The Importance of Youth

At any stage of life, we can all benefit from positive mentoring, increased professional development, or improved conflict resolution skills. So why is youth development and mentorship so important?

As we've already discussed, youth are critical to the future of our communities, so investing in their development is important. But even more specifically, mentoring youth can have a greater impact because of their age and physical, emotional, and psychological development.

In this section, we'll take a closer look at the particular factors that impact youth and explain why they, more than any other age group, benefit from positive mentoring and development.

The Definition of Youth

To begin, it's helpful to ask, who exactly are "youth?" The United Nations classifies youth as anyone between the ages of 15 and 24. At the age of 25, one is technically considered to be an adult, for psychological reasons which we will discuss in a bit. Anyone under the age of 15 is considered to be a child. There are additional stages of childhood development that require different resources, skills, and approaches. And it is important to mention that children, of course, can also benefit and need mentorship, care, and development. However, for the purposes of this workbook, we will be focusing only on this 15 to 24 age group.

Factors that Impact Youth

All youth will have individual factors that affect their individual development and how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Before proceeding, it's important to remember that individual youths may be more or less advanced than their peers, may have traumatic experiences or circumstances that affect their development, or unique characteristics of their own. However, for the majority of youth, there are several factors that impact how they navigate through this stage of life.

1. Physical Development

During youth, an individual will inevitably experience the effects of puberty. As youths' bodies undergo puberty, they'll have to balance new hormones, changes in their bodies, and physical appearances. While this physical development is all normal and natural, it can have both physical and psychological effects. For example, during puberty, young men's voices will deepen and occasionally "crack" during the process. This could make them extremely self-conscious and perhaps unwilling to speak up in class or in social situations.

2. Cognitive Development

The adult brain and the youth brain are actually very different. This is because the human brain doesn't stop developing until the age of 25, so anyone 25 years of age or older is classified as an adult. In particular, the prefrontal cortex of the brain, the part responsible for rational thought, hasn't fully developed. So while adults think mainly with the prefrontal cortex, youth think mainly with the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for emotions. This doesn't mean that youth are less intelligent than adults; it just means that they're more connected to their emotions when making decisions.

Involving your emotions in decision-making isn't necessarily a bad thing, but with youth it can present issues. Due to this brain development stage, youth are more likely to make rash decisions, feel like their emotions are overwhelming, or act without fully thinking through the consequences of their action.

3. Emotional Development

With all of the difficulties of youth, young people tend to turn to their peers for emotional support and advice. Youth tend to seek independence as they feel older and more mature, so they may distance themselves from their parents or other adult figures. Relying on these peer friendships during a time of emotional growth means that youth will be more concerned with their friends' approval and more susceptible to peer pressure. This pressure isn't inherently bad, but if youth surround themselves with peers who have different values or priorities, it could have negative consequences.

Impacting Youth

As you can see, youth is a time of extreme changes and development. It's an exciting time, but can be extremely tumultuous. Youth are more susceptible to outside influences, external pressures, and can make impulsive decisions about their careers, their education, their relationships, and their character. As a youth mentor, you have the unique opportunity to impact someone at the most critical time in their lives. Keeping these factors of youth development in mind will help you become a more empathetic and effective mentor.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Based on what you learned here, what factors of youth development surprised you?

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2. When mentoring youth, do you keep these youth development factors in mind? How do they change how you interact with youth?

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3. If you do not currently mentor youth, how would you plan to approach these development factors?

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Section Two: Youth Mentorship

A mentor can be a powerful figure in a young person's life. Mentoring youth can provide them with encouragement, motivation, and responsibility. For many young people, a mentor serves as a positive adult role model—someone whose character, career, or life they can aspire to emulate. But this relationship can only be achieved if the mentor is a committed and caring leader.

In this section, we'll examine the qualities that support a successful mentor relationship and how you can start to build, or strengthen, these qualities as a mentor.

The Six Elements of Youth Mentorship

Youth mentorship is only effective if the mentor themselves is a strong leader. A youth mentor must be someone whom the mentee can look up to - someone who projects confidence and integrity. But mentors must also be able to build a safe and trusting environment for their mentees.

As we've already discussed, youth are extremely impressionable. They need a mentor who is committed to the mentorship and takes the time to build and nurture them, not just "fix" their behaviors. It's also important to remember that every youth is different. Some young persons may be extremely confident in their abilities, while others may struggle with their self-worth. Your mentees may have also experienced certain traumatic experiences in their life that make them less willing to trust you or your relationship. These are normal situations, but you must consider them.

While every mentorship will require different skills and approaches, they should all share certain core values. These six values are critical to a healthy and effective mentorship. As you approach a new mentorship, or continue with a current relationship, focus on building these attributes with your mentee.

1. Connection

For mentees, connection is the feeling of a positive bond with their mentor or their mentoring institution. Connection creates the feeling of safety, structure, and belonging. When connection exists in a mentorship, mentees know that they can trust and confide in their mentor.

2. Confidence

Confidence is a sense of self-worth and self-esteem. With youth, it's critical for them to have a belief in themselves and their abilities. Confident youth are more likely to believe that they have the capacity to succeed, not just in their careers, but in their personal relationships with others.

3. Character

When it comes to young persons' character, it's important to focus on taking responsibility for their actions and creating a sense of independence. As they develop their own personality, they also need to develop their sense of individuality and a connection to principles and values. A youth with a strong sense of character is less likely to be swayed by peer pressure or negative influences.

4. Caring

By building caring in youth, you're building their capacity to care for others. The ability to feel sympathy and empathy helps connect youth to the world around them and their specific communities. With a caring attitude, youth may feel a stronger commitment to moral issues, social justice, and overall compassion to other individuals.

5. Contribution

Think of contribution as active participation and leadership. Contribution is an important tool for youths to apply to school, family, and extracurricular activities. As youths' ability to contribute goes, so does the feeling that they can make a difference in the environments around them.

6. Competence

Competence is not necessarily how intelligent an individual is, but rather their ability to be effective in important situations. These can include social moments or moments at school or work. As youth develop competence, they're developing their ability to engage and achieve things in their community, culture, education, employment, and social life.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Think back on a time when you were positively mentored by someone. Why was this mentorship a positive one? What about the mentors approach helped you?

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2. Take a moment to reflect on the six elements above. Which of the values, if any, do you think are the most important? Why?

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3. Do you feel equipped to build these six elements in a mentorship? Why or why not? If not, how could you work to change that?

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4. If you are already mentoring an individual, are all of the six elements present in your mentorship? Why or why not? If not, how could you work to change that?

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Section Three: Professional Development

In order for youth to build successful careers, it's important for them to first build professional skills. With this section of the workbook, we'll discuss which skills you should emphasize and best practices to help youth develop them.

Hard Skills Versus Soft Skills

When it comes to professional development, there are two types of skills to focus on: "soft skills and "hard skills." Hard skills are objective skills that relate to specific technical knowledge, software, or training. While some hard skills are transferable across industries, most of them are very industry specific. Examples of hard skills can include: graphic design, cooking experience, data analysis, foreign language proficiency, or creative writing. An individual should research what hard skills that will best benefit their careers, before investing in building that specific skill.

Soft skills, on the other hand, are subjective skills that relate to the way people interact with each other. Since soft skills are difficult to quantify or prove, people often believe that they cannot be taught, but this is not the case! With patience and persistence, all of us can learn and improve our soft skills.

Developing Hard Skills

Hard skills are traditionally gained through workplace experience or formal training from accredited courses or formal education. You should only coach youth in hard skills if you are already an expert in that particular skill. If not, talk with them and determine how they can gain those skills. What skills would most benefit their career? What type of company or specific company would they like to work for? Does that company have any existing skills requirements? How long does it take to become proficient in this skill?

By laying out the hard skills youth need and how they can acquire those skills, you'll be equipping them with both a plan and positive outlook on how to accomplish their overall objectives.

Developing Soft Skills

There are hundreds of soft skills that any individual can develop, such as: organization, critical thinking, flexibility, time management, or problem solving. Which soft skills you choose to help youth develop is up to you and the needs of each individual. But for now, let's take a look at a few critical soft skills for everyone.

1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Strong emotional intelligence can be a useful tool as an employee, a manager, or an entrepreneur. An emotionally intelligent employee is a teamplayer who understands how to adapt, communicate, and get along with coworkers. An emotionally intelligent leader knows the strengths of team members and how to motivate, coach, and guide them efficiently.

Next Steps: To help a young person advance emotional intelligence, spend time together watching the YALI Network Video Vignette Series, "Emotional Intelligence."

2. Integrity

Integrity means doing the right thing in a reliable way. It's the practice of being honest and showing a commitment to strong moral principles, even when no one is watching. We admire individuals of integrity because we feel that we can trust and depend on them in any situation.

Integrity is the foundation for a successful career because it promotes a positive professional culture. When employees have integrity, their managers can trust them to carry out tasks, deal with sensitive situations, and respect their fellow workers. When managers or entrepreneurs possess integrity, employees can trust that they will be treated fairly and respectfully in their workplace. As a result, people are typically more productive, motivated, and committed to their work.

To develop integrity, one can work on several related attributes such as: graciousness, respectfulness, responsibility, or patience. But above all else, one has to develop a personal code of ethics to live by.

Next Steps: If you're interested in helping youth live with integrity, start by helping them develop their own code of ethics using Lesson Two of the YALI Network Online Course, "Strategies for Personal Growth and Development."

If you're coaching a young person who is interested in becoming, or already is, an entrepreneur, have them watch the YALI Network Online Course, "Fundamentals of Responsible Leadership for Entrepreneurs" to discover how to lead with business ethics.

3. Communication

Communication is critical to a healthy, efficient workplace. Communication takes time and practice to build, and can continually be refined. We can all practice our communication skills at any time.

There are four main types of communication that you can encourage youth to focus on: Verbal, nonverbal, written, and visual. Each type of communication has its time and place in conveying thoughts and emotions. However, all of these types of communication combine in one of the most important types of workplace communication: public speaking.

Public speaking is a scary prospect for many people, but it's one of the most valuable workplace skills. The art of public speaking comes into play for the delivery of speeches, public talks, group training, presentations, and motivational chats. When done well, public speaking can motivate, empower, and educate groups of teammates or employees.

Next Steps: To help youth refine their public speaking skills, review Lesson Three of the YALI Network Online Course, "Strategies for Personal Growth and Development."

4. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of other people. In the workplace, empathy can demonstrate respect and compassion for coworkers and create strong bonds among teams. Empathic leaders can make their employees feel like a part of a supportive team and increase their productivity, morale, and loyalty.

Next Steps: To guide youth in becoming empathetic, encourage them to start by working on their listening skills. You can also review the YALI Network Online Course, "Servant Leadership - The Deciding Difference" with them to discover how to become an empathetic leader.

5. Leadership

It's true that many skills go into becoming an effective leader, but leadership in and of itself is an important skill. Leadership is important not just for heads of companies or managers, but for employees of every level and industry. Leadership includes strategic thinking, innovation, self-development, and team development.

Next Steps: Leaders need to address and solve multiple problems every day. Start working with youth on their leadership skills by viewing Lesson One of the YALI Network Online Course, "Management Strategies for People and Resources," together. When you're finished, take time to discuss what you each think leadership is, and how leaders can be effective.

Setting Professional Goals

Looking at developing all of these skills can be overwhelming for youth, but it's important for them to remember that they don't need to master every skill right away. Instead, they should focus on creating a plan to achieve these skills over time.

You can support youth in creating their own leadership plan and corresponding plan to build these professional skills with Lesson One of the YALI Network Online Course, "Workforce Collaboration and Development." This lesson looks at the importance of setting clear goals and the basic steps of proper goal-setting. Together, you and an individual or group of youths can walk through this lesson and use it as a jumping off point to set specific professional goals.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. What professional skill(s) do you value the most for yourself? For your coworkers? For your employees? Why are those the skills you value?

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2. Do you have a personal code of ethics? If so, what ethics does that code include? If not, use the space below to brainstorm a few ethics that are important to you.

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3. Based on what you've learned in this section, what skill(s) are you most equipped to help youth with? How do you plan to accomplish this?

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4. Of the skills discussed in this section, which do you think you could improve in yourself? How do you plan to accomplish this?

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Section Four: Conflict Resolution

The idea of conflict can make anyone a little anxious or nervous. When you think about conflict, what comes to mind? Two people yelling at each other? Perhaps even fighting physically? No matter what you might think or feel about conflict, the fact of the matter is, at some point we will all face it. While conflict is inevitable, we don't have to think about it in a formidable way. In fact, conflict allows us to grow and learn more about ourselves and others. Learning how to manage and effectively resolve conflict is an important skill for all of us to develop.

However, for youth, strong conflict resolution skills are even more crucial. Throughout youth, young people are faced with a lot of conflict, and in some cases, they're faced with their very first conflicts. How youth react to these conflicts can have lasting effects on how they perceive themselves and the world around them. So how can you guide youth to navigate these conflicts in a healthy way?

In this section, we'll take a look at the different types of conflicts that we all face and strategies to manage them.

Types of Conflict

There are three main types of conflict: Conflict with others, conflict with the environment, and conflict with self.

1. Conflict with others

Conflict with others is the type of conflict we think of most commonly, but it occurs in many different forms. To be in conflict with others doesn't mean two people have to be yelling at each other. Conflict with others can mean a minor disagreement, a miscommunication, a passing comment that hurt someone's feelings, or even a physical altercation.

This type of conflict can be tricky for youth to manage because they are usually still discovering how to communicate. During youth, emotions can be a bit tumultuous. Youth may be more sensitive to other's comments, take criticism more seriously, or struggle with expressing their own feelings. You can help youth navigate conflict with others, by working with them to improve their communication skills and overall emotional intelligence. You can also share about a time when you experienced a conflict with others, and how you resolved it.

2. Conflict with the environment

Conflict with the environment does not refer to a physical landscape, but rather the socio-economic environment we all have to traverse. This type of conflict can encompass a variety of things: home life, financial situations, cultural rules, or economic situations.

Conflict with the environment and society can be one of the most frustrating types of conflict. How we were raised or what types of jobs are available are factors that are out of our control. For youth especially, realizing that these conflicts exist can be extremely frustrating. It's important to teach youth that, while they may not be able to resolve these conflicts specifically, they can resolve how they react to them.

To mentor youth in this type of conflict, focus on creating a sense of persistence, confidence, and resiliency, to prevent them from ever feeling helpless or defeated about circumstances that are out of their control.

3. Conflict with self

This type of conflict can be the most difficult to resolve because it can be the most difficult to recognize. All individuals will have different conflicts with themselves and these conflicts may change over time. For example, youth may not believe that they are smart or talented. Mentally, they may spend a great deal of time convincing themselves that they could never obtain a specific job or accomplish a certain goal and therefore, never even try.

Mentoring youth in this type of conflict will be difficult, since they may not even know the conflict is happening. To encourage youth to resolve a conflict with themselves, work on building their confidence and sense of self-worth.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Think of a recent time you encountered conflict. What type of conflict was it? What was the result? Was it resolved positively or negatively?

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2. Before this section, how did you perceive conflict? Has anything about your viewpoint changed over time?

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3. Let's imagine that a youth you mentor is struggling with not having enough money to attend school or college. What type of conflict is this? What would you say to the youth? What actions would you encourage the youth to take?

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Conclusion

Congratulations! You've completed the YALI4Youth Workbook! Youth development and mentorship is a complicated subject, and you've made great progress. For more information and resources on how you can empower the next generation of leaders, visit yali.state.gov/youth.

Additional Resources

- YALI Network Online Course
  "Developing, Mentoring and Supporting Youth Leadership."
- Lesson Four of the YALI Network Online Course
  "Creating and Maintaining Social Enterprises."