

## 6I: Tips for Student Engagement

# Children and Youth In Care } TIPS for Student Engagement

As a part of the day-to-day activities in school as well as during school-based planning, decisions are made that directly affect children and youth in care. Children and youth in care should be supported to engage meaningfully in planning process that have an impact on their lives, and their wider school context, and empowered to speak up and express their perceptions, preferences, concerns, and opinions. A trusting relationship with adults is needed to support students during these conversations and to advocate on the student's behalf.

Usually children and youth in care have the most complete knowledge of their own history, including their successes, worries, concerns, hopes and aspirations. For that reason, including student input leads to better plans and decisions. In addition, when a child or youth in care is involved in planning and decision-making, they are more likely to support the final decision, increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes. Furthermore, involving the student enhances their maturity and development by giving them structured, supported occasions to participate in and practice responsible planning and decision-making.



### Help child or youth in care build relationships, competencies and school connections

**Build a relationship based on trust**, showing the child or youth that they are important, cared for and valued, even when they may test the boundaries. Be a good listener, respect their opinions and make them feel comfortable to continue talking without fear of getting in trouble or being rejected.

**Build a strong, trusting relationship** with the child or youth in care. Inquire regularly about their strengths, interests, and passions and ensure confidentiality when talking to them about their challenges and needs.

Demonstrate that **all students, including those in care, have rights and are worthy of love, dignity and respect, and that they have a voice** in decisions affecting them.

**Support the child or youth in care in articulating their thoughts, feelings, and needs.** Encourage them to talk to you in confidence or organize their thoughts in writing.

**Ensure the child or youth in care is involved in identifying their strengths and in developing their short-term and long-term learning goals.** Help them identify and record their strengths and goals, and guide their learning to help reach their goals.

**Encourage the child or youth to take leadership roles** in the classroom, the school, and the community based on their interests and according to their age and ability.

**Encourage and support the child or youth to develop lasting and authentic friendships** in the classroom and the school. For instance, you may want to establish a “buddy” program in your class or school. Encourage them to “be the kind of friend that you want to have.”

**Encourage the child or youth to engage with their culture and community**, participating in community events and activities, and connecting with community leaders, including their community elders, if appropriate.

**Work together with the child or youth to identify supports**, such as opportunities for participation in school or community activities, and to identify people in their lives who can provide additional support.



## Engaging child or youth in care in planning and decision-making processes

**Advise and support the child or youth to participate in in the planning and decision-making process** of the school-based team. Explain that although they may not be authorized to make final decisions, they have a right and responsibility to participate in and influence the process.

**Give the child or youth the clear message that you support them**, and that they have the right to be heard.

**Ask the child or youth if there is a support person** they would like to invite to planning meetings or other decision-making forums.

**Give the child or youth space to express** their feelings and desires in a way they feel comfortable with, rather than making assumptions about what they feel or want or how they want to express it.

Help the child or youth understand that sometimes **the adults may not fully understand how they feel or be able to fulfill every request**. Coach the child to provide clear reasons for their requests, as well as conditions under which they are able to compromise or accept temporary arrangements.

**Do not publicly undermine or discount the child or youth's views, wishes or desires.** Take time to privately and respectfully discuss with the child or youth if you disagree with their input, making them feel that their voice is heard and valued and their opinion matters. Offer rationale behind decisions and how they relate to ensuring the child's wellbeing and success. Try to understand the child's point of view and speak with them respectfully in private if you feel it is imperative that they reconsider their views.

**Model and coach these strategies with other adults who work with young people**, helping them empower children and youth in care to engage in planning and decision-making processes.

### WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

"Please make decisions with me when you can; that is MY life in that file folder. I might not always like the decisions you make, even when they are for my safety, but the more involved I am and the more control I have, the better I will feel."

"I see myself as a productive member of society not someone who is growing up to be productive. I am productive now. I hold views. I have lots to contribute now."

"No mystery to youth engagement, you ask them and you do something about it."

