

# E-Module: Youth-Driven Conversation: Avoiding Some Common Mistakes

## Study Guide

### What Is the Point?

It takes skill to facilitate a conversation that prioritizes another person's perspectives and priorities. This can be particularly true of conversations that are intended to be youth- or young adult-driven. Even providers who value youth-driven practice can unintentionally insert their own perspectives into conversations with young people. This can be very subtle, and in some cases might even look like youth-driven practice to a novice or outside observer, but the impact can still be significant.

When supporting young people to identify their goals, make a plan, or set an agenda, it is easy for providers to fall into a few common traps that take the conversation away from being youth-driven. These include leading the conversation too much, making suggestions, offering advice, favoring one of the young person's ideas over another, and asking leading questions. Though all of these likely come with the intention of helping or supporting the young person, they are ultimately detrimental to the relationship between the young person and the provider and limit the young person's opportunities to build skills and confidence in the long term.

Regardless of a provider's intentions, young people will pick up on the subtle messages behind leading questions, suggestions, or advice from providers. When a provider makes a suggestion instead of giving a young person the space to develop their own ideas, the young person may get the impression that their voice is not valued or that the provider sees them as incapable of formulating their own solutions.



Screenshot from e-module

Furthermore, the provider is sending the message that they have more knowledge or expertise than the young person, and the young person may feel slighted. If the provider makes a suggestion without taking the time to explore the situation with the young person, the young person may lose respect for the provider when the suggestion seems unrealistic or out of touch. Suggestions from a provider can also serve to undermine previous statements they may have made to the young person – for instance, that their voice and choice is valued, or that “this process is all about you.” All of this contributes to an erosion of trust between the provider and the young person, and a sense in the young person that their opinions do not matter or that they are being manipulated.

It is important for providers to be mindful of the “Goldilocks effect” – that is, the importance of

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helping the young person identify the amount of support that is “just right” for them. It is very common for a well-intentioned provider to offer too much support to a young person, which in addition to damaging the relationship, limits the opportunities for the young person to build skills. For example, by stepping in and offering to complete a task for a young person, the provider is robbing them of the opportunity to build and practice self-determination skills like planning and decision making, identifying the appropriate support, and/or taking a healthy risk in completing the task. Conversely, by asking open-ended questions about how the young person would

like to move forward in completing a task, or how the provider can best support them, the provider is empowering the young person and helping them build skills for self-determination.

The key to staying youth- and young-adult driven is to maintain a sense of open-mindedness and curiosity. By taking the time to explore the situation from the young person’s perspective, and asking open-ended questions to get their ideas about who and what will help, you are supporting them to build skills and connections that will be there after you are no longer in the picture.

## Things to Keep in Mind

- » Stay curious.
- » Remember the foundational techniques of open-ended questions and reflections.
- » If you make a mistake and insert your own perspective, own up to it. It is okay to apologize and start again.
- » Young people are experts in their own lives, and are much more likely to follow through on plans and goals they make themselves.

## Possible Discussion Points

Slide 1

I’m hearing that you’re stressed out. Why do you think that is?

What do you think about this reflection and question? How do you think it might make Gerald feel?

## Possible Discussion Points

Slide 2

How about if we go on the website together and take another look. I bet I could help you figure it out.

What about making an appointment with your advisor? Advisors really know about all this stuff.

What are some possible unintended messages Gerald could take away from these responses? How do these responses move the conversation away from being youth-driven?

Slide 3

That's true. You met with your advisor at the beginning of the year, if I remember right. You mentioned not having a great experience with that person, right?

Notice that the provider responds with a closed-ended question. Why does a closed-ended question work in this situation?

Slide 4

I could definitely come along with you when you meet him.

How could this offer of support be unhelpful in the long term?

Slide 5

Sounds like you have a plan! Anything else you want to do to prepare to meet with your advisor?

What self-determination skills is the provider encouraging Gerald to build by framing the question like this?

## Reflections

- » Why do you think providers are prone to offering suggestions and inserting their own perspective when helping youth plan for the future?
- » Are there times when inserting your own perspective or making suggestions is appropriate? When?
- » Do these techniques and principles shift during more urgent situations? If so, when, and how? If not, why not?

## Other Resources



- » Achieve My Plan's (AMP) Top 10 Tips for Engaging young People:  
<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj-5-AMP-top-ten-tips-for-engaging-young-people.pdf>
- » AMP training:  
<https://achieveyourplan.pdx.edu>

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<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/learning-tools>



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