

What Is the Point?

In the process of learning to prioritize a young person's voice and perspective in one-on-one conversation, mistakes are inevitable. Often this is a matter of skill rather than intention. Most youth and young adult service providers would probably affirm that they want their work with young people to be "youth-driven." However, be it out of anxiety, impatience, a lack of confidence in the young person, or simply not realizing they are doing it, providers often end up emphasizing their own agenda and minimizing the perspective of the young person, sometimes in very subtle ways. They may be too rigid in attempting to keep the conversation on a certain track and fail to reflect or follow up on a young person's digressions, thereby missing the opportunity to learn more about the young person's passions or motivations, validate their feelings, and build trust or rapport. In the same vein, a provider might fail to take the time to label and highlight the youth's strengths and successes. It is also common for providers to make suggestions or give advice before allowing young people to offer their own ideas and solutions. All of these mistakes, however minor, can contribute to a gradual erosion of trust between the provider and the young person, limit the young person's ability to build vital self-determination skills, and skew the balance of power toward the provider, often despite the stated intention to center the young person's voice and ideas.

The videos included in this module were donated for training purposes by providers working to build



Screenshot from *Improvables, Part 1*



Screenshot from *Improvables, Part 2*

their skills for working one-on-one with young people, with the permission of the young people featured. They were filmed as part of a training process in which providers were first trained on youth- and young adult-driven skills, then recorded themselves practicing those skills with young people, and were then coached by trainers on what went well and what could be improved. Though it can be uncomfortable to see our own mistakes pointed out to us, this is actually an invaluable



learning tool – in practice, we don't usually get the opportunity to pinpoint where things went wrong and identify what we might have done differently. In this e-learning module, you have the opportunity to learn from someone else's mistakes, or as we call them, "improvables" – that is, things to keep in mind in order to do better the

next time. These videos were chosen because they include good examples of improvables that crop up frequently in our review of these videos. As you view this module with an eye toward the providers' instances of skilled practice as well as their areas for improvement, take the time to reflect on "improvable" moments from your own practice.

Things to Keep in Mind

- » The intention of wanting to help a young person is not sufficient to ensure that a conversation will be youth-driven, but going into a conversation with a young person with the intention to understand, as well as with an open mind, will help you prioritize their perspective.
- » Mistakes are rarely irreversible. If you notice an "improvable" in the moment, apologize to the young person and try again. Owning up to your mistakes is a great opportunity in and of itself to build trust.
- » Many times, providers have certain "improvables" they are more susceptible to than others. Being mindful of your habits can help you guard against making the mistakes of which you're most often guilty.

Possible Discussion Points

Part 1, #3
Missed opportunity to use open-ended questions and descriptive praise

The young person asks her provider about the process they have been using to prepare for her team meetings, saying "Does it work more than it doesn't work?" Why do you think the youth may have asked this question? How might you have responded to this question if you were the provider?



Possible Discussion Points

Part 1, #4
Missed opportunity
to “go with it”

The young person brings up what seems to be a very significant event in her life, but the provider misses the opportunity to reflect on and further explore it. Are there ever any instances in which the provider’s reaction would be appropriate, i.e. when a young person’s digression from the activity should be tabled for later? When would those be?

The module suggests that “the provider could have used open-ended questions, reflections or descriptive praise” in order to respond to the young person’s statement about meeting her biological siblings for the first time. If the provider were to “go with it” and explore the young person’s feelings, what techniques or strategies could they use to get the session back on track when necessary?

Part 2, #1
Missed opportunity
to use open-ended
questions

Why do you think it’s important that the provider ask an open-ended question here, rather than start by making a suggestion?

Part 2, #4
Open-ended
question

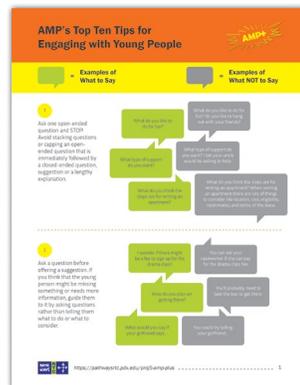
What is problematic about stacking questions here? How might the conversation have gone differently if the provider had stopped talking after asking the first question, “Who else is a support for you?”



Reflections

- » Can you think of any “improvable” moments from your own work with youth? How have these impacted your conversations? What might you do differently now?
- » Besides recording yourself working with youth and watching the video, what are some things you can do to notice and interrupt your own moments of improvable practice?
- » Think of a time when you had a conversation with a young person that went really well. Why did the conversation go the way it did? What did you do differently, or particularly well, to make that conversation work?
- » Are there certain themes or attitudes that the improvable moments shown in this module have in common? Are there certain themes or attitudes that would help prevent these kinds of mistakes?

Other Resources



- » AMP E-Module: Youth-Driven Conversation – Avoiding Some Common Mistakes: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/learning-tools#youth-driven>
- » 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>

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