


Empowering Youth in Mental Health

Joy Lotus MA

Define Empowerment

em·pow·er·ment

[əm'pouərmənt] 

NOUN

authority or power given to someone to do something.

"individuals are given empowerment to create their own dwellings"

- the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.

"political steps for the empowerment of women" · [\[more\]](#)

Activity

- ▶ Write about a time when you were empowered.
 - ▶ How did you feel?
 - ▶ What did you do?
 - ▶ How did you act?
 - ▶ How did others respond to you?



Why Does Empowerment Matter?

*though I prefer a word that means, 'remind them of their power' - we can't give what they already have.

- ▶ Empowered youth:
 - ▶ Advocate for themselves and others
 - ▶ Know their community values their worth
 - ▶ Seek help for themselves and others
 - ▶ Find their path and follow it
 - ▶ Bounce back from rough days
 - ▶ Empower other youth with their example



What obstructs Empowerment?

- ▶ Systems run for and by adults
 - ▶ Ex. Local hospitals have no emergency psych for youth, they are often in our emergency room next to adults with severe BH issues.
- ▶ Crisis and a need to get things done quickly
 - ▶ Fear for safety of all involved
- ▶ There is a power imbalance between adults and youth
 - ▶ Use it wisely
 - ▶ In the populations we serve this imbalance can create trauma for the youth that few ever learn the extent of in that youth's life.



Activity

- ▶ Share with one word how you felt/acted when you felt you lacked empowerment.



Limits to youth voice

- ▶ **Mandatory Reporting**
 - ▶ Laws are important for safety, can change relationship with youth/family
- ▶ **Parental rights**
- ▶ **OHP**
 - ▶ Medical Necessity
- ▶ **The Legal Systems**
 - ▶ DHS, JDH
 - ▶ Safe placement overrides youth decision making
- ▶ **Ethical boundaries**
 - ▶ Ultimately ethics protect safe relationships with youth
 - ▶ Respect the position held



How can we support youth voice?

- ▶ Build trust with transparency and reminders about mandatory reporting and other legalities
 - ▶ Ex. As a therapist, I had rapport with the School Resource Officer, when a youth reported sexual assault, I stayed in the room as support for the youth.
- ▶ When there is a question for the youth, ask the youth, not the caregivers.
 - ▶ When the question is about abuse in the home, ask out of hearing of the caregivers.
 - ▶ Yes, this is common sense, but a true life example with a provider from a member of our YAC.



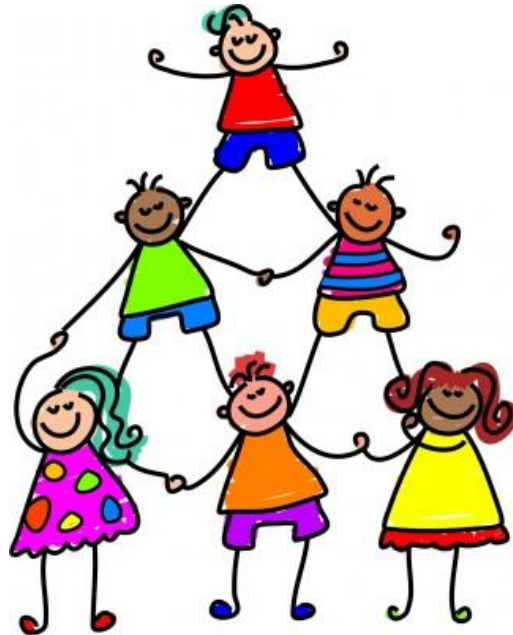
Support continued...

- ▶ Ask, what does 'the youth' want in team meetings where the youth is not present
- ▶ Let the youth write a letter or communicate in a way that feels safest
- ▶ Don't force a youth to share
 - ▶ Safety and trust are more important



Trust Takes Time

- ▶ Empowerment begins with safe relationship
- ▶ Building rapport through music or games: can create the safety needed for a youth to open up.
- ▶ Letter writing, art, favorite songs: ways to get to a youth's true feelings.
- ▶ Respect is a two-way street.
- ▶ Be honest about legalities of your profession so youth know what to expect when sharing.



Trust continued...

- ▶ Responsibility is a good thing, as is accountability
 - ▶ Again, a two-way street.
 - ▶ Youth often know when they are being lied to
 - ▶ If youth endured trauma, there can be testing with any new relationship
 - ▶ They are asking in their own way, if the adult can be trusted



Skill Building



- ▶ Leadership skills can be learned
 - ▶ Asking youth what they think, when they are not used to being asked, takes some coaching to get to their skills.
- ▶ Expectations are good
 - ▶ Believing in youth means trusting them to follow through - with help at times.
- ▶ Buy in matters
 - ▶ All the cut red tape in the world won't clear the way if the youth refuses the appt.
 - ▶ Get to the youth's dream, goal, desired life path, and work with them to get there.

Activity

▶ Brain Trust

- ▶ Share a specific/work situation (w/o identifying details) where engaging youth voice is a challenge
- ▶ Group discuss ways to support youth voice in that situation

