Empowering Youth in Mental Health

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Define Empowerment

empowerment
[emˈpouərment] 🎧
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